



theirs by right of conquest. More recently, the Chinese were just as anxious to avoid being depicted as the conquerors of Tibet. Conversely, the British colonists in Australia felt keenly the absence of historic battles when they came to federate their colonies in 1901 as they feared this deprived them of an exemplary history. Now the attitude there is very different.

Day's trilogy of stages is charted profitably across a wide range of examples and processes, including claiming by naming, and deploying appropriate foundation stories, for example depicting the indigenous people as barbarians. Conquest, slaughter, settlement and agriculture are all within Day's scope, and each is ably discussed. Thus, in North America, the fencing and clearing of land also invested a person with its ownership. The role of agriculture in Australia

and in Japanese expansion in Hokkaido is also discussed.

It might seem greedy to ask for more, but there does need to be a thorough consideration of the extent to which, in addition to the factors discussed by Day, in some circumstances, invaders and conquerors were used and manipulated by already-established groups in order to advance their own interests. Indeed, in many respects, far from being supplanters, conquerors were bit-players in long standing local struggles, with the conquerors sometimes following – one after another.

The concise and strongly-argued treatment of individual countries – Australia, Israel, Japan, the USA and so on – will meet with approval from some readers and anger from others. Day is inclined to be critical of much of the process of supplanting. The balance between vigorous exposition and nuanced interpretation is never an easy one, and Day tends to lean to the former. This makes for a clear and stimulating read, but there is room for more on this complex subject. **E**

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The rebel yell

Ted Vallance enjoys a fascinating account that listens to the voices of medieval rebels



The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England by Andy Wood

Cambridge University Press, 316 pages, £55
BBC History Book Club £52.25

THE BARE facts of 'Kett's Rebellion' are well-known. On 7 July 1549, a riot broke out in the village of Wymondham, Norfolk. Enclosures were torn down, including those of Robert Kett, a wealthy yeoman farmer. Yet, rather than attempt to stop them, Kett assumed leadership of the rebels. By 11 July, the rebels had set up camp outside the city of Norwich on Mousehold Heath.

Here Kett administered government under the 'Oak of Reformation'. The rebels dispatched the first royal force sent to suppress the rising, but a second army, led by the Earl of Warwick, eventually regained control of Norwich after days of bloody fighting. On 27 August 1549 the rebel forces were finally crushed at the battle of Dussindale. Kett was hanged in chains from the walls of Norwich Castle, his

body a grim warning of the punishments for rebellion.

However, as Andy Wood reveals in this brilliant study of the events of 1549, what we know as Kett's Rebellion was an

invention of later historians. In the 16th century, 1549 was more aptly remembered as the 'commotion time', probably the most serious explosion of civil disturbance in England between the Peasants' Revolt and the Civil War, taking in not only Norfolk but most of Southern England and the Midlands. In this fascinating work, Wood traces the process of historical erasure through which a positive oral memory of the rebellion (as the 'camping time' a "mery worlde" when the poor of Norwich feasted on "roste meate") was supplanted by the hostile written commentaries of Tudor chroniclers,

who re-wrote the story of 1549 as the cautionary tale of an over-ambitious rebel captain, Kett, who met his providential comeuppance.

Wood offers a rich narrative of the events, filled with vivid, unsettling detail. In the wake of the repression of the rebellion, receipts were sent to the exchequer for such grisly expenses as "wood for fier to burne the intrailles". However, these brutal punishments elicited compassion as well as fear. One Norwich weaver, John Redhead, looking at Kett's body hanging from the castle walls, was reported to have prayed that the king and his council "of their owne gentylnes" would see Kett taken down and "buryed and not hanged uppe for wynter stoore".

This is arguably the greatest strength of the book: its attentiveness to the voices of the rebels themselves. As Wood demonstrates, hostile chroniclers often described the medieval crowd in aural terms: as "noise", "grumbling" and "murmuring". Yet the political speech of the people of Norfolk was not univocal but contained many dissonant elements. Divisions particularly emerged between the "honest men", the wealthier tradesmen and tenant farmers, and the poor commons. Soon these rents in the social fabric would make this kind of popular rebellion a thing of the past.

Nonetheless, the rebels of 1549 were far from backward-looking, their own ideology of 'popular monarchism' briefly chiming in with the 'populist absolutism' of Protector Somerset's rule. In the summer of 1549 it appeared, tantalisingly, as if politics might be recast into a radically new mould. That it was not does not make Wood's definitive history of the 'commotion time' in East

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