

Collections for Veterans in Elizabethan London

On Sunday 28 April 1588, the parishioners of St Botolph's Aldgate, a large parish in the eastern suburbs of London made two collections. One was for the poor of the parish and the amount collected was not recorded. The second collection was for John Darsye who had 'received dyvers hurts and maymes in the queenes Majesties warrs in Ireland'. Darsye was armed with a brief, or licence to receive charitable offerings, valid for one year and the parishioners, on this occasion, handed over three shillings and sixpence. Historians have long known that Elizabethan society licenced maimed and impoverished soldiers and sailors to collect funds in this way but the detailed records from the parish of St Botolph's Aldgate permits us to ask more searching questions about the ways in which local assistance towards veterans actually operated in the years before and after the Elizabethan statute of 1593 that provided a pension for veterans. My paper will analyse the surviving evidence from this parish concerning the voluntary relief of veterans and how these collections served as potent reminders of the perceived threats posed by Spaniards and Papists to the city of London and the realm of England.

I am Professor of Early Modern English History at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, British Columbia Canada. I'm completing a book entitled 'Reformation by the Book, 1536-1642', an account of why, how and with what consequences the Crown and Church worked to furnish all parish churches with printed books.