

Charles II and the Chapel Royal

Anna Keay (English Heritage)

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Anna Keay stressed that, despite his reputation for libertinism, Charles II regularly attended the Chapel Royal. Disagreeing with John Adamson, she said that the fabric of court life did not unravel during the restoration. The Chapel Royal was both a body of men and a place. There were three departments: the Chapel, the Vestry and the Closet. In accordance with the ritual of the church year, the King took communion on feast days. The account books of Stephen Fox show that, contrary to the received picture, the Chapel Royal continued to function before 1660, during the King's exile in Brussels and Bruges. After 1660 there were no complaints of his failure to attend, nor is there evidence that he slept during sermons. He took chaplains on his progresses, and improved the music of the Chapel Royal until its services became, in the words of Pepys, 'a sight very well worth seeing'. With the increase of anti-catholic feeling in the 1670's, the Chapel Royal became more important as a 'barometer of the confessional future of the kingdom'. In March 1673, unlike the King, the Duke of York did not receive holy communion. Charles II, however, made the entire royal household receive it. After March 1676, the Duke of York stopped attending the Chapel Royal. After 1681, as part of the King's programme of absolutism, the ceremony of 'touching for the King's evil' became more popular. In 1682 Charles II's private oratory at Windsor was remodelled by Verrio. In short, the Chapel Royal was 'a fundamental part of the king's view of his own majesty'. In the subsequent discussion Philippa Glanville asked whether the King fasted. Andrew Barclay pointed out that, due to Charles II, the children of the Duke of York and Mary of Modena were baptised as protestants. Anna Keay said that the illegitimate sons of the King took communion before the rest of the court.