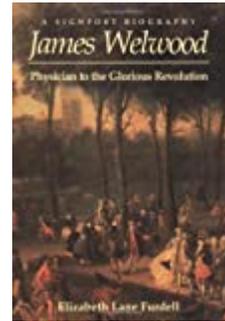




**Elizabeth Lane Furdell.** *James Welwood: Physician to the Glorious Revolution.* Pennsylvania: Combined Publishing, 1998. ix + 288 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-1-58097-005-1.



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Elizabeth Lane Furdell has written an eloquent and informative biography of the physician and, more importantly, the Whig apologist, James Welwood (1652-1727), who she labels a “second-tier figure in an age of titans.” (p. 20) While Welwood certainly was that, “second tier,” his interests and activities intersected with various arenas of considerable importance to historians of the Restoration. Like Locke, Welwood was both a physician, a man of science in the age of the Scientific Revolution, and a political polemicist and partisan in the first age of party. Like Defoe, he was an ardent supporter of the Glorious Revolution, all things Williamite, and the author of a Whig newspaper of opinion. Welwood, the gentleman-scholar, was “mobile, versatile, and long-lived,” and examining his life, argues Furdell, “enables us to know the intricacies of Augustan Britain.” (p. 21)

In her opening chapters Furdell examines Welwood’s youth and education. She asserts that Welwood’s Scottish childhood was shaped by Scotland’s continuing struggle with England for authority over its national politics and culture, the religious divisions among the Scots themselves, and a “terrifying witch-hunt” in the region of Welwood’s parental home. How much these were the “soul-shaping influences” (p. 31) for Welwood, as Furdell claims, is difficult to determine. How do we assess their impact, conscious or subconscious, on a child’s mind?

Nevertheless, Furdell provides readers with a good deal of historical background on the history of religion in Scotland and its numerous seventeenth-century troubles with England, as well as on the Scottish witchcraft craze. While Furdell may overplay the influence of this context, particularly the witch-hunt, on the young Welwood, what is certainly true is that Welwood came out of his years in Scotland, confirmed again by his time in France, with a strong distaste for religious bigotry and in-fighting. He was, Furdell points out, a life-long proponent of religious toleration.

Welwood studied medicine in France and here Furdell gives us plenty of interesting detail on the state of the medical curriculum in late seventeenth-century Europe. It is during Welwood’s travels about the continent that he meets Gilbert Burnet, the ill-fated duke of Monmouth, and the Prince of Orange himself, connections which served to further Welwood’s growing conviction that only Protestantism provided “real spiritual and political liberty.” (p. 79) By the time of the Revolution, Welwood had married and set up shop in Newcastle. There he exchanged a series of open letters with the Tory vicar, John Marsh, over the Revolution and the doctrine of passive obedience. Furdell believes that these letters proved Welwood an “effective polemicist for the Glorious Revolution and the Whigs” (p. 99). And indeed his writ-

ings, along with a few good words from Burnet, procured Welwood appointments in the joint monarchy. By May 1689, Welwood had proceeded to London and launched a popular newspaper, *Mercurius Reformatus or the New Observer*, whose pages continually harangued the French and sang the virtues of William and Mary. The *Mercurius Reformatus* lasted for three years, after which time Welwood continued to publish, shifting the focus of his enmity to the Jacobites.

Welwood's training as a physician was also called upon at court where he attended to Mary II. It was she who inspired him to write his most famous work, *Memoirs of the Most Material Transactions in England for the Last Hundred Years, Preceding the Revolution in 1688* which he finally published in 1700 and was popular enough to go through six editions in Welwood's life time. While Welwood's *Memoirs* portrayed James I as vulgar and stupid, he saw Charles I as "a wise, decent, and solidly Protestant ruler." (p. 152) But Welwood was no precursor to our modern revisionist historians. He was also certain that Charles was more than a bit immoderate in his desire for power. Moreover, he had surrounded himself with inept ministers, particularly, of course, Laud and Strafford. Welwood found Cromwell, quite naturally, beyond the pale, a vicious tyrant with blood on his hands – all Whig historians followed this line. Yet England's darkest hours, for Welwood, were amid the Popish Plot, (which he absolutely believed in) followed by the reign of a religious zealot and French pawn, James II. James's crime was his subversion of the constitution, but fortunately the country was rescued from disaster by the heroic House of Nassau. Furdell argues that Welwood's *Memoirs* "presaged the development of the Whig interpretation of history." (p. 148) This, states Furdell, is Welwood's lasting legacy. As she puts it in the epilogue, "He was a harbinger of Whig interpretation of English

history." (p. 228) Because Thomas Babington Macaulay cited both the *Memoirs* and *Mercurius Reformatus*, Furdell claims that, "Welwood was a bridge from the Augustan Age to that of the Victorians, a forefather of the Whig interpretation of history." (p. 229) But, in fact, no bridge was necessary; the Whig interpretation was being developed and embellished throughout the eighteenth century. Further, there were many other memoirs and histories produced by Whigs in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries that were more indicative of the Whig historical paradigm and far more influential on subsequent history writing than Welwood's *Memoirs*. There were the histories of Laurence Echard, White Kennett, John Oldmixon and, most supremely important, there was Bishop Burnet's *History of His Own Time*, to name just a few.

This does not detract from Furdell's fine biography, which is a smooth and entertaining read. But one does wonder for whom Furdell's book is meant. The reading public is fond of biography but generally not those of "second tier" Augustan gentlemen. The specialist may well be inclined to learn more about James Welwood but may also be irritated by having to wade through so much well tread historical context as well as the little errors in fact: such as identifying John Trenchard of *Cato's Letters* as the son of William III's Secretary of State of the same name (he was his nephew). Finally, Furdell's choice of terms such as "Englishmen," "Scotsmen," and "Dutchmen," throughout when referring to whole populations gives the strange impression that, well back then, women just did not exist, and gives discomfort to the academic historian.

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