

2020 PCCBS Article Prize: Jennifer Binczewski, “Power in Vulnerability: Widows and Priest Holes in the Early Modern English Catholic Community,” *British Catholic History* 35, no. 1 (May 2020): 1-24.

Jennifer Binczewski’s impressive article demonstrates the vital role played by widows within the English Catholic community in sheltering priests and preserving the faith in the later years of the reign of Elizabeth I. Building upon prior studies of the role of women and marital status among Recusant Catholics, Binczewski ably demonstrates how widows, especially those from the gentry and nobility, leveraged their legal autonomy, family status, and economic independence while subverting the gender stereotypes that marginalized women in order to harbor priests and frustrate their pursuers. Binczewski astutely observes that in a deeply patriarchal society, in which widowhood was often understood to be a weakened, limited, and potentially threatening condition for women, English Catholic widows had unique opportunities—ones unavailable to men and other women—within the clandestine environment of their own religious minority to ensure the survival of their faith. The article persuasively shows that a widow’s ability to command the household, in the absence of male oversight, was itself a subversion of early modern gender norms even as it aided in the subversion of increasing anti-Catholic persecution and, in particular, enabled the physical concealment of itinerant priests whose preaching and sacramental ministrations kept English Catholicism alive during these perilous years. Deeply researched and authoritatively argued, Binczewski’s article offers a nuanced and multi-layered contribution to the history of gender in the Recusant Catholic community and in post-Reformation England more broadly.