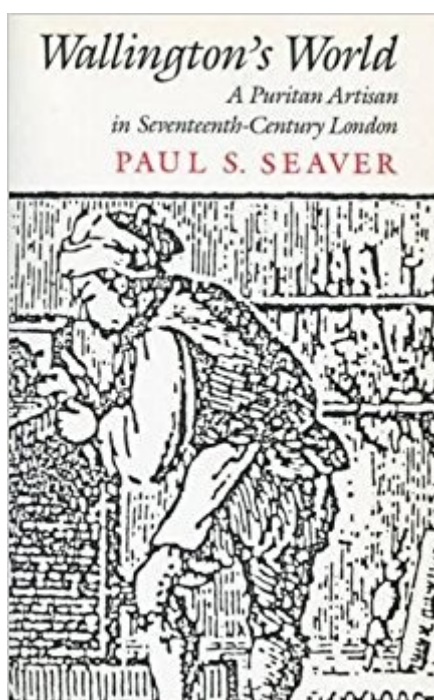


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Wallington's World: A Puritan Artisan In Seventeenth-Century London



Synopsis

Seventeenth-century England has been richly documented by the lives of kings and their great ministers, the nobility and gentry, and bishops and preachers, but we have very little firsthand information on ordinary citizens. This unique portrait of the life, thought, and attitudes of a London Puritan turner (lathe worker) is based on the extraordinary personal papers of Nehemiah Wallington—2,600 surviving pages of memoirs, religious reflections, political reportage, and letters. Coming to maturity during the reign of James I, Wallington witnessed the persecution of Puritans during Archbishop Laud's ascendancy under Charles I, welcomed what he thought would be the godly revolution brought by the Long Parliament, and watched with increasing disillusionment the failure of that dream under the Rump republic and the Cromwellian Protectorate. The author reconstructs Wallington's inner world, allowing us to see what an ordinary man made of a lifetime of reading Puritan doctrine and listening to the sermons of Puritan preachers. For the first time we can penetrate the mind of one of those who made up the London mob calling for the end of episcopacy and the death of the Earl of Strafford in 1641, who welcomed the revolution, if not the war that followed, and who finally came to approve the death of his king.

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Customer Reviews

Nehemiah Wallington (1598-1658) was a simple and firmly Puritan member of the Turners Guild in London. In extraordinary compliance with the Puritan dictum to lead a disciplined and examined life, he filled a number of notebooks with personal memoirs, political observations, and religious advice.

Using this material and other relevant sources, Seaver has produced a richly documented reconstruction of Wallington's world view. The result is a look at the turbulent early Stuart era through the eyes of a common man. Since Wallington was an urban layperson, this book complements the rural and clerical viewpoint of Alan MacFarlane's *The Family Life of Ralph Josselin: a seventeenth-century clergyman* (1970). Appropriate for academic libraries. Ronald Fritze, History Dept., Lamar Univ., Beaumont, Tex. Copyright 1985 Cahners Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Seventeenth-century England has been richly documented by the lives of kings and their great ministers, the nobility and gentry, and bishops and preachers, but we have very little firsthand information on ordinary citizens. This unique portrait of the life, thought, and attitudes of a London Puritan turner (lathe worker) is based on the extraordinary personal papers of Nehemiah Wallington—2,600 surviving pages of memoirs, religious reflections, political reportage, and letters. Coming to maturity during the reign of James I, Wallington witnessed the persecution of Puritans during Archbishop Laud's ascendancy under Charles I, welcomed what he thought would be the godly revolution brought by the Long Parliament, and watched with increasing disillusionment the failure of that dream under the Rump republic and the Cromwellian Protectorate. The author reconstructs Wallington's inner world, allowing us to see what an ordinary man made of a lifetime of reading Puritan doctrine and listening to the sermons of Puritan preachers. For the first time we can penetrate the mind of one of those who made up the London mob calling for the end of episcopacy and the death of the Earl of Strafford in 1641, who welcomed the revolution, if not the war that followed, and who finally came to approve the death of his king.

Discusses my immigrant ancestor before he came to America.

This book is poorly written, boring, and historically insignificant, the author even tells you about its limitations throughout the text. Unless you have to read it for a class do not read.

A better book on the Puritan worldview I have not read, and I've read quite a few. Seaver takes the copious diaries of a single London artisan and converts it into a cornucopia of knowledge about the godly movement that it is impossible to put down. This book holds enough speculation about Wallington and his motivations to fulfill any desire of a biography-reader. He has bouts of melancholy which make him human. Those of us who have had to deal with depression, panic

disorder, or other mental illnesses will be heartened by the fact that people in the past were just as we. Wallington leads the self-examined life, which may be foreign to some, but will strike others as very typical of medieval Catholic monasticism, the English godly movement (Puritans), and Ming-Qing neo-Confucists like Li Gong. For those who prefer a short read, Wallington's World has very few pages. For those who are tired of the scholarly establishment's contempt of Christians of the past, look no further. Saylor treats his subject with delicacy and understanding, carefully separating modern prejudices from historical worldviews. Even if you-- like myself-- aren't into reading about England during the Stuart revolutions, this book will fascinate you. A treasure I'd guarantee fit to read for anyone.

First of all, ... it has nothing to do with American military history, but is a study of the life and writing of a 17th-century English Puritan. Nehemiah Wallington was a turner (i.e., he made wooden furniture and utensils with a lathe) and second-generation Calvinist who spent his life (1598-1658) within a small area of London. Although he was not famous during his lifetime, he has become invaluable to historians because of the tremendous written record he left behind. In an age when most artisans were illiterate, Wallington wrote over 2,600 pages of diaries, letters, and religious and political essays. These provide a rare window into the life of the common man at the time of the English Civil War. Paul Seaver offers insightful and often entertaining commentary on Wallington's life -- along with copious excerpts from the original documents -- in a series of thematic chapters dealing with Wallington's religious beliefs, family life, trade, etc. While Wallington is a fascinating character, it soon becomes clear that he cannot be considered entirely typical of his time. It isn't just that he could read and write, or that he spent his whole life in the same neighbourhood at a time when Britain's population was highly mobile, or that he outlived 97% of the people in his generation. It's obvious from his memoirs that Wallington was mad. In his youth, he had spells of suicidal depression and religious delusions (he once believed that the Devil talked to him for an hour in the shape of a crow). The delusions stopped in his early 20s, but throughout his life he was plagued by recurrent "melancholy" accompanied by religious doubts. Nor is Wallington always easy to like. He comes across as utterly self-absorbed, and he was fanatical and judgmental to a degree that was probably unusual even among the Puritans of his time. Whenever something bad happened to one of his neighbours, Wallington assumed it was God's punishment -- and he usually knew exactly what sin had triggered it, too. That said, Wallington is not an entirely unsympathetic character. Though some of his religious agony was so overblown that it can cause nothing but pity, some of the questions that troubled him are the same ones that have troubled believers throughout history.

There are also times when he strays from his usual subjects and gives us glimpses of his daily life and family relationships, which let us in on his full range of feelings. His reactions to the deaths of four of his five children are especially moving. Nor should the turner be dismissed as wholly unrepresentative of his time. Even his most bizarre delusions were heavily influenced by the predestinarian beliefs of his time. As for his self-righteousness and intolerance, they give a taste of the atmosphere which led to revolution and the death of the king. Seaver does a good job of presenting a character who is unusual enough for a novel, but also indisputably of real life.

Seaver turned very forbidding material into gold. Understanding the mentality of people in the past is very tricky, especially people outside the elite. Seaver found over thirty volumes of notes, transcribed sermons, and other writings and turned them into an intellectual biography of an obscure man. If you want to get inside the skin of a seventeenth-century English Puritan, there's no better way to do it than to read this book.

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