Ussher, James

by John McCafferty

Ussher, James (1581–1656), Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh and scholar, was born 4 January 1581 in St Nicholas parish, Dublin, fifth among ten children of Arland Ussher, clerk of chancery, and his wife Margaret Stanihurst.

During his long life Ussher wrote many books and generated a voluminous correspondence. Many of these, along with scholarly notes and unfinished projects, are extant. Yet he wrote very little about himself and so little is known about his early years. His first biographer was his secretary Nicholas Bernard (qv), whose publications were designed as much for the controversies of the 1650s as they were to memorialise their subject. They must be used with caution. One thing is very clear – Ussher was from a religiously mixed background. His paternal uncle, Henry Ussher (qv), was Church of Ireland archbishop of Armagh (1595–1613), while his maternal uncle, Richard Stanihurst (qv), was a notable recusant exile who became, in later life, a catholic priest. Ussher’s own mother was also catholic and this may account for the prominence Nicholas Bernard gives to two blind aunts who somehow taught their young nephew James Ussher how to read.

Education and early academic career

His formal education began at eight years of age when he was sent to a Dublin free school run by the Scottish protestants James Fullerton and Hamilton (qv). Several early biographers depict this pair as agents for James VI of Scotland, sent to cultivate protestant gentry in Dublin. When the long-mooted Dublin university opened its doors in 1594, Ussher entered as a student and his two teachers as prominent fellows. Originally the university had been an expression of the civic pride of Dublin’s patricians, but the increasingly polarised religious atmosphere of the 1590s meant that it functioned from the very outset as a protestant seminary. Here the young Ussher imbibed a robust Calvinism and an attachment to the Ramist philosophical method. The overall theological tenor of the new college was probably set by the provost, Walter Travers (qv), an English presbyterian. Ussher’s academic career was both smooth and assured. By 1598 he had gained his BA and in 1601 he took the MA degree. His father’s death (1598) left him financially secure and at liberty to pursue a clerical career rather than the legal training which had been planned for him.

In 1599 he reportedly impressed the lord lieutenant, the 2nd earl of Essex (qv), at a public disputation held in TCD. These were important years in Ussher’s formation because not only did he acquire Greek, Hebrew, and other oriental languages, but he embarked on controversial theology by presenting himself as an opponent to his cousin Henry Fitzsimon (qv), SJ, then a prisoner in Dublin castle. In the end Fitzsimon, who had been seeking a showpiece disputation, declined to debate with his relation on grounds of his youth. Youth, however, proved no barrier to his
ordination as deacon and priest by his uncle Henry Ussher on 20 December 1601. Even before ordination Ussher was already a regular preacher as one of a trio of Trinity fellows in Christ Church. He preached on Sunday afternoons on controversies between catholics and protestants. This was a subject on which he propounded directly to recusants during a brief campaign in 1602 to enforce attendance at the services of the established church. A subsequent decision by Lord Deputy Mountjoy (qv) to suspend conformity led Ussher to preach against official toleration, on Ezekiel 4.vi. Playing on the words ‘thou shalt bear the iniquity of the house of Judah for forty days: I have appointed thee each day for a year’, he predicted a judgment of God in forty years’ time. When this incident was viewed in hindsight of the 1641 rebellion and massacres, it went a long way to giving Ussher a reputation as a prophet. In terms of his own immediate career, though, this was one of the first of a number of outbursts against Dublin Castle’s politic dealings with recusants. While his attitude would not have endeared him to his many catholic relations in Dublin, his pronouncements certainly irritated chief governors. But it did little harm to his career and, in fact, gave him a reputation for godly honesty, which would, during the 1630s and 1640s, turn him into a figure of puritan veneration.

Scholarly contacts; first publication; the ‘Irish articles’ Unlike many Irish clergy Ussher took only one benefice, that of the rectorship of Finglas, where he made a point of preaching each Sunday. This would prove to be his only parochial appointment, as his main trajectory was as a scholar cleric. In 1605 he was collated to the chancellorship of St Patrick’s by Archbishop Adam Loftus (qv); in 1607 he proceeded BD, followed by the DD (1612). He had become a fellow of Trinity (1600), then a catechist, and in 1607 professor of theological controversies. His major contribution to the nascent college was his concern to build up a substantial library. To this end he made book-buying trips to England on a triennial basis – in 1603, 1606, 1609, and 1612. These expeditions not only allowed him to indulge his evident passion for books but also permitted him to forge enduring links with English antiquarians and collectors. His acquaintance with William Camden meant that he contributed information about Ireland for the 1607 edition of Britannia. He also made contact with Thomas Bodley, Henry Briggs, John Davenant, Henry Savile, and John Selden. Ussher's antiquarian researches were inspired by his religious views, sustained by his academic interests, and occasionally had practical outcomes. For example, his work on the termon and erenach lands, which pertained to the organisation of the early Irish church, very likely contributed to the crown’s decision in 1609 to grant these considerable tracts of land in their entirety to the protestant bishops as part of the Ulster plantation scheme. Ussher's first published work, Gravissimae quaestionis de Christianarum ecclesiarum (1613), aimed to answer catholic jibes about the antiquity of the reformed churches. In it Ussher married his scholarship with his providentialist view of history by arguing that a series of medieval heretical groups were, in fact, the remnants of the true church who preserved faith and doctrine as Antichrist inexorably took over the Roman obedience. As a work of meticulous manuscript scholarship it was most impressive but as controversial literature less so, since it faltered after the eleventh century
and petered out entirely in the thirteenth century. Ussher never did get around to completing the crucial late medieval section of the work.

The year 1613 was important for him in other respects. It was the year in which he married Phoebe, daughter of Luke Challoner (qv), vice-provost of TCD. It was also the year in which the first national convocation of the Church of Ireland was called. Almost the sole surviving record of this assembly is a code of 104 articles (usually known as ‘the Irish articles’), approved in 1615. These are important in several respects. Unlike the thirty-nine articles, they explicitly identified the pope as Antichrist. They incorporated the nine Lambeth articles approved by the English archbishops in 1595, but which Queen Elizabeth had refused to ratify. The Lambeth articles were expansively Calvinist in their treatment of predestination and functioned as a supplement to the thirty-nine. This is also what the Irish articles were – a considerable supplement to the thirty-nine – and in 1647 they came to have a major influence on the Westminster confession of faith. In 1613–15 Ussher was a member of the lower house and, according to Bernard, ‘was appointed to draw them up’ (Life and death (1656), 49). Given that within a decade of the convocation there was already uncertainty whether the articles had been confirmed by James I himself or instead by the lord deputy, Sir Arthur Chichester (qv), it is impossible to verify Bernard’s claim of his authorship. Subsequent views range from flat denial of Bernard’s contention to portrayal of Ussher as theological editor-in-chief, to vigorous defence of his authorship. Ussher certainly believed the pope to be Antichrist and he was a keen sabbatarian. He did not see the Irish confession as creating a divergence between the Irish and English churches.

**Vice-chancellor; London; bishop of Meath** Ussher became vice-chancellor of Dublin University on 2 March 1615 and vice-provost on 13 May 1616. He had been offered but declined the provostship in 1609. On 23 July 1617 he was one of four academics to perform a theological lecture and disputation in front of the lord deputy, Sir Oliver St John (qv). By the autumn of 1619, when Ussher made his next trip to England, he was an established senior academic, a published author, and a man with good connections in the interlocking worlds of religion, politics, and antiquarianism. In April St John recommended him to succeed Thomas Jones (qv) in the see of Dublin. It is possible that Ussher’s two-year stay in England was partly designed to secure Dublin; and, while he was not successful on this occasion, the move to London was no waste of time. He preached in a number of prominent London pulpits and appears to have come into regular contact with the king who, famously, enjoyed the company of bright clerics. In September 1619 his only child, Elizabeth, was baptised in St Dunstan-in-the-East. The prospect of a Spanish match for Prince Charles, along with the outbreak of the thirty years’ war, led Ussher into enunciating his anti-Spanish views publicly; and while this was a risky strategy, it did not prevent the king’s nominating him as bishop of Meath on 16 January 1621. On 5 February the English house of commons selected him as special preacher. His parliamentary sponsors clearly hoped for a trenchant appeal for support for the defence of protestant Bohemia, which was ruled by the king’s son-in-law Frederick.
James had other ideas and summoned Ussher for an informal conversation about the eucharist, during which he made some heavy hints about unruly flocks. In the event the new bishop-elect was lucky. On 16 February the commons voted two subsidies, so that by the 20th Ussher was free to preach on 1 Cor. 10:17, ‘we being many, are one bread and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread’, with more latitude than he had expected. His sermon urged protestant unity, excoriated toleration for catholics, and praised parliament for its generosity. This left him free to return to Ireland for consecration on 2 December 1621, still firmly in favour with all of his English connections.

Meath was ranked as the most senior bishopric in the hierarchy after the four archbishoprics. This may account for the invitation Ussher received to preach at the swearing-in of the new lord deputy, Henry Cary (qv), Lord Falkland, in September 1622. In a direct sermon on Romans 13:4, ‘he beareth not the sword in vain’, he called for enforcement of the recusancy laws. If the king chose to exercise clemency to recusants, then at the very least, he argued, ‘they should not give us public affronts and take possession of our churches before our faces’ (Whole works, xv, 181). The sermon created a flurry of catholic protest and drew a pointed rebuke from the primate, Christopher Hampton (qv), who wospishly reminded Ussher that many of the furious Old English were his own blood relations. He further suggested that an extended sojourn in Meath might be wise. Ussher's care for, and knowledge of, his new diocese was considerable, as he compiled a vastly detailed response for the royal commission of 1622 on the state of Ireland. Any departure from Dublin was short-lived because on 22 November he was ordered by the Castle authorities to deliver a speech to catholic officials who had refused the oath of supremacy. Lord Deputy Falkland did Ussher the further favour of drawing the discourse to the king's attention.

**Scholarship and controversial writing** Ussher's reputation also rested on his scholarly achievements. He resigned his TCD offices and became a member of the Irish privy council on 13 June 1623. He still maintained an extensive correspondence with other antiquarians and theologians. His researches were usually driven by contemporary controversies, and during these years he turned his attention from the Christian church as a whole to continuity and succession in the Irish and British churches in particular. His desire to use always the best and earliest sources led him into sustained contact and exchange with catholic scholars. His caution led him to do so clandestinely. His beliefs led him to condemn those same catholic collaborators as servants of Antichrist, when he published his findings. His contacts with recusant scholars were extensive and reciprocal. They included his uncle Richard Stanihurst, whose *Brevis praemunitio pro futura concertatione cum Jacobo Usserio* (Douay, 1615) was directed against his nephew. He also exchanged information with Bishop David Rothe (qv) of Ossory, author of the *Analecta sacra nova . . . in Hibernia*, the Jesuit William Malone (qv), and the Franciscans Thomas Strange, Micheál Ó Cléirigh (qv), and Luke Wadding (qv). In this way the vigorously catholic Louvain school made use of Ussher's private library, and in return he had indirect access
to manuscript sources in the Vatican library. Through Conall Mageoghegan (qv) of Westmeath he was able to consult vital sources such as the books of Lecan and of Ballymote. This world, in which the participants dealt with each other in terms of mutual respect, was a hidden one. It functioned through codenames and intermediaries and occasionally broke down under the strains created by politics and polemical print. So while Ussher’s dealings with learned catholics extended over the three decades from the 1610s onwards, his first two publications as bishop of Meath were detailed ripostes to Roman claims of superior antiquity.

A discourse of the religion anciently professed by the Irish and British was first published as an appendix to Christopher Sibthorpe (qv), A friendly advertisement to the pretended catholickes of Ireland (1622, reprinted 1623). Over eleven chapters Ussher explored ‘the more substantial points of doctrine that are in controversy betwixt the church of Rome and us at this day’. His early Irish church based its teaching on sola scriptura, its monks were godly dons, who propounded double predestination, rejected purgatory, and eschewed transubstantiation. St Patrick (qv) and his successors respected Rome but did not obey it, especially when it came to dating Easter. Corruption only percolated slowly into this pristine church but picked up pace after the close of the first Christian millennium. As work, the Discourse married first-class antiquarian research with controversial theology very well and adroitly turned the Tudor reformations into a triumphant restoration of ancient purity. Yet Ussher’s general apocalyptic scheme required him to mark the rise of Antichrist at the very same point in time when English rule extended to Ireland. In a later edition (1631) Ussher warned the reader against excessively literal and anachronistic readings of his work. Despite its flaws it went on to serve as an extraordinarily durable origin legend for the Church of Ireland and still persists in various modified forms.

The 1631 edition of the Discourse drew attention to the number of manuscripts in Sir Robert Cotton’s collection. It seems as if a desire to compile an edition of the early Irish and British material used in his researches drew Ussher back to England in the late summer of 1623. Serious recurrent illness caused his stay to be protracted until March 1626. On 20 June 1624 he preached before King James at Wanstead, publishing the sermon in the same year as A brief declaration of the universality of the Church of Christ. Later in 1624 he dedicated An answer to a challenge made by a Jesuit in Ireland to the king. The Jesuit in question was William Malone, through whom Ussher had corresponded with David Rothe. The work was a doctrinal history of the early church, designed to show that his reformed church had preserved true continuity while Rome had deviated and twisted. In his biography Nicholas Bernard claimed that the student James Ussher had embarked on an eighteen-year complete reading of the Greek and Latin church Fathers. In An answer the bishop of Meath vindicated those labours by reclaiming patristic writings for the protestant cause.

Archbishop of Armagh; the ‘graces’ Ussher continued to visit, preach, and teach in godly circles. These connections, along with his familiarity with the king, paid
off in January 1625. Christopher Hampton, archbishop of Armagh, died 3 January 1625. On 29 January James Ussher was nominated to Armagh, making him the last episcopal appointment of James I's reign. Lady Mary Vere, a leading puritan, used her influence with her brother-in-law, Sir Edward Conway, to overcome Ussher's rivals for the Irish primacy. Ussher received his letters patent on 21 March, just six days before the death of the king. Repeated bouts of what contemporaries described as 'quartan ague' immobilised him for long stretches in 1625.

During the early months of Charles I's reign the theological temperature rose sharply, especially as it was bound up with intrigue against the enduring royal favourite George Villiers, duke of Buckingham. Elements in the English parliament 'discovered' the Irish articles as an antidote against the alleged rise of Arminianism, and in mid June 1626 they drafted a bill to give joint statutory authority to the thirty-nine articles and the Irish articles. Charles dissolved parliament in 15 June. The initiative had been prompted by the disappointment felt by godly Calvinists with a theological debate staged in February 1626 under the presidency of Buckingham, known as the York House conference. All of this activity certainly touched on Ussher's deepest interests, and many expected the new archbishop to participate. Instead he stayed out of the limelight. In November 1625, at the invitation of Lord and Lady Mordaunt, he was involved in a disputation with a catholic priest in their house at Drayton, Northamptonshire. Privately, though, he was in contact with many of the York House protagonists throughout the winter of 1625, and the tone of his sermons throughout this period was gloomy. There has been some uncertainty about Ussher's whereabouts in spring 1626. The diary of his physician Thomas Arthur (qv) suggests that he returned to Ireland in March and there succeeded in shaking off the illness that had dogged him for the previous eighteen months. He was back in England for the summer but by August he had returned to take up his duties as archbishop and primate.

His leadership was tested almost immediately as England drifted to war with Spain, and Charles I became anxious to secure the loyalty of Irish catholics. Old English recusants proposed making a significant contribution to an expanded army if, in return, they were granted certain 'matters of grace and bounty'. These 'graces' consisted of a set of reforms which mainly centred on landholding and trade but also included an easing of certain civil disabilities which affected catholics. Recusant lawyers would once again be allowed to plead, a modified oath of allegiance would be used by the court of wards, and the ecclesiastical courts of the Church of Ireland circumscribed. On the other hand the graces contained several measures to prevent pluralism and encroachments on glebe lands, which would have been quite pleasing to Ussher and his fellow bishops. Initially the English government was prepared to openly suspend collection of recusancy fines. This was not at all pleasing to the Irish bishops. In November 1626, after a meeting of nobility convened by the lord deputy, Falkland, a dozen bishops met secretly at the primate's Drogheda residence. Their joint declaration was uncompromising: 'The religion of the papists is superstitious and idolatrous; their faith and doctrine erroneous; their church in respect of both
apostaticall [sic]. To give them therefore a toleration . . . is a grievous sin’ (Bernard, 60).

Ussher and his colleagues still hoped that negotiations would stall and kept the declaration private until April 1627 when, believing there was an imminent threat, they embarked on a preaching campaign. On 23 April George Downham (qv) of Derry read the declaration to a congregation at Christ Church, Dublin. He was closely followed by Ussher and Malcolm Hamilton (qv), archbishop of Cashel, who both warned of the dangers of mixing toleration with financial necessity. This was a risky move, as it was an open criticism of a known crown policy. Yet on 30 April, at Falkland's invitation, the primate addressed an assembly of peers at Dublin castle. Here, Ussher harped on about the ancestral loyalty of the Old English and proposed that the incompatible positions of protestant and catholic be sidestepped through a general grant to King Charles for the army, leaving everything else to royal discretion. Nothing came of this proposal because in June Charles ordered negotiations transferred to England. By January 1628 a religiously mixed delegation secured limited concessions from the English privy council, but no formal suspension of recusancy fines took place.

**Laud and Wentworth; the Antiquitates** During 1628 Ussher shrewdly began a correspondence with William Laud, the new bishop of London who was a rising star in the Church of England. Their styles of churchmanship were, to say the least, quite divergent but they were able to find common ground on temporalities, patronage, and the overall condition of TCD. Falkland left Ireland in 1629 and was replaced by Richard Boyle (qv), earl of Cork, and Adam Loftus (qv), Viscount Loftus, as lords justices. They initiated a lively though somewhat ineffectual anti-recusant campaign targeted at mass houses and communities of regulars. Ussher was pleased by the tenor of their action but dismayed by the growing confidence of recusants and signs that the catholic church was now offering a parallel hierarchy and ecclesiastical jurisdiction. He pinned his hopes on Thomas Wentworth (qv), named as lord deputy in January 1632.

Despite the political duties attendant on being primate and a member of the privy council, Ussher did not abandon scholarship. In 1631 he published two books. The first was *Gotteschalci et praedestinatione controversiae ab eo motae historia*. Gotteschalk was a ninth-century theologian of extreme predestinarian views who also wrote on eucharistic theology. Some commentators have interpreted the work as a cloaked expression of Ussher's anxiety about new theological styles in the Church of England. His second publication, *A discourse of the religion anciently professed by the Irish and British*, brought out his earlier foray into early medieval history as a separate volume. It served as an English-language introduction to his 1632 *Veterum epistolarium Hibernicarum sylloge*, which was an edition of fifty key texts relating to the early and medieval Irish church.
On 23 July 1633 Thomas Wentworth landed in Ireland, and on 6 August 1633 William Laud was nominated as archbishop of Canterbury. These two, assisted by their client John Bramhall (qv) (who became bishop of Derry in May 1634) had a significant impact on the primate and his church. Initially Ussher was enthusiastic, canvassing for Laud's appointment as chancellor of Dublin University and delighting in a commission from Wentworth to go north and inquire into his see lands in September 1633. But by March 1634 Ussher had been rebuffed by Laud when he attempted to defend the placing of a funeral monument erected by the earl of Cork at the east end of St Patrick's cathedral. Wentworth had also informed the privy council that he would not be enforcing the recusancy fine. His approach was, in many respects, the inverse of Ussher's own. The lord deputy believed that the established church should be properly endowed and manned first of all, so that it could mount an apostolate which effectively competed with Rome's. In June 1634, at Ussher's prompting, Wentworth summoned him and Lancelot Bulkeley (qv), archbishop of Dublin, and resolved an ancient and bitter primacy dispute in favour of Armagh. A few weeks later Ussher took the primate's place in procession to parliament and preached the opening sermon.

Convocation met alongside parliament. At this point it became plain that the lord deputy's plan for the Irish church did not consist solely of an economic and organisational strategy. Acting through Bramhall, and with Laud's encouragement, moves were made to replace the 101 Irish articles of 1615 with the thirty-nine, and furthermore to establish the English canons of 1604 as the code for Ireland. Initially Ussher pursued his familiar strategy of playing his cards close to his chest, but by October it was obvious that he was opposed to a simple adoption of the thirty-nine articles without some acknowledgement of the 1615 confession.

Accounts of what happened in convocation vary. A number of facts are clear. Ussher was certainly not alone in his opposition, and his views were shared by the vast majority of the lower (clergy) house and by many bishops. Both Wentworth's peremptory treatment of the assembly and his repeated rejections of Ussher's efforts to procure a nuanced compromise left the primate bruised and annoyed. Yet while the lord deputy wished for a simple endorsement of the thirty-nine articles, and while he was incandescent with a committee which attempted to scrutinise the English canons, the outcome was, in fact, a compromise. This was partly because Ussher's wider reputation was such that Dublin Castle could not afford a public breach with him. The Irish canons of 1634 did contain much that was unpleasant for Ussher; they nonetheless adopted one of his pet catechetical schemes as well as a bracing sabbatarianism, and omitted puritan shibboleths such as kneeling, bowing at the name of Jesus, and the sign of the cross in baptism.

Ussher manifested his discontent at proceedings through attacks on a number of Wentworth's minor protégés and making public his unhappiness at the appointment of Laud's candidate, William Chappell (qv), as provost of Trinity. Like the viceroy, though, he fought shy of an open rupture and, pleading exhaustion and expense,
he moved from Dublin to Drogheda. His actions were so striking that they even fuelled rumours in catholic circles that he would convert. He effectively ceded administrative control over the Church of Ireland to John Bramhall; he made no journeys to England and ceased correspondence with Archbishop Laud. When the court of high commission was reestablished in 1636 he begged not to be made an ex officio member. When this request failed, he attended only infrequently. In the same year he closed a Dublin theatre previously licensed by Wentworth during the latter's absence in England. As one of the visitors of Trinity he allowed himself to become embroiled in a promotion dispute, during which he threatened to have Chappell removed. Apart from these moments of stress Ussher was careful to keep relations cordial during the second half of the 1630s. He worked well with Bramhall on church lands and revenues, and his 1638 tract *Immanuel* (a short meditation on the incarnation of Christ) was dedicated to Lord Deputy Wentworth. He did neglect to send a copy to Archbishop Laud.

In August 1639 Ussher published *Brittanarum ecclesiarum antiquitates*. In this vast history of Christian origins in Britain and Ireland he attempted to furnish a coherent narrative based on carefully edited primary sources. This was a gargantuan undertaking, given the accretion of legend about figures such as Joseph of Arimathea, Constantine, and St Patrick. Apart from the odd polemical sally his emphasis was on his sources and he explicitly acknowledged, for the first time, links with recusant scholars such as his uncle Stanihurst and David Rothe. So, like his Franciscan and other catholic scholarly opponents, his interest had been sparked by confessional controversy but was further sustained by an antiquarian movement which strove for authenticity, rigour, and accuracy in use of medieval manuscripts. As it happened, the *Antiquitates*, which were so important for an understanding of the early Irish church, turned out to mark the imminent close of Ussher’s own involvement in the early modern Irish church.

**After Ireland** In March 1640 he preached at the opening of a parliament in Dublin called by Charles I to deal with his Scottish and financial troubles. In early May he left Ireland, never to return. From this point on Ussher’s chief assets were his international reputation as a scholar and his British and Irish reputation as a scholarly and godly moderate. With the exception of visits to Oxford and Cambridge in July and August, Ussher resided in London from mid May 1640 to the winter of 1642. He preached weekly, first at Cheam in Surrey and then at Covent Garden, where he subsisted on contributions from the congregations. During this time he was consulted by, and moved between, parliamentarian and court circles. For example, he stayed in the earl of Warwick’s house but was also chosen by the king to manage the welfare of episcopalian refugees from Scotland. He was examined twice during the trial of Thomas Wentworth, earl of Strafford, and appeared at the trial itself on 2 April 1641. His answers were at all times precise and he testified that the lord deputy had intended the eventual conformity of Ireland to the protestant faith. In May, when the house of lords passed the bill of attainder against Strafford, the king consulted him on this aching matter of conscience. Ussher’s biographers have been
consistently divided on whether he advised the king to sign or not. Whatever about that, Ussher and Strafford were close during the latter’s final days in the Tower of London. The primate carried messages between the prisoner and the king, tended him the night before his execution, and accompanied him to the scaffold on 12 May 1641.

While the political theatre that was Strafford’s trial was playing itself out, the very future of episcopacy itself was increasingly in doubt as 1641 wore on. Ussher’s response was characteristic – scholarly publications and a private, manuscript, scheme to reach a compromise. During 1641 he offered three works on the early origins of episcopacy: *A geographical and historical disquisition touching Asia, The original of bishops and metropolitans, and The judgment of Doctor Rainoldes touching the origin of episcopacy*. As well as using scripture Ussher also relied on the letters of Ignatius of Antioch. This turned out to be one of those instances where contemporary exigencies caused him to make a lasting contribution to learning. In two linked treatises published in 1644, *Dissertatio non de Ignatii solum et Polycarpi scriptis, sed etiam de apostolicis constitutionibus et canonibus Clementi Romano tributes* and *Prefationes in Ignatium*, he distinguished between genuine and spurious letters attributed to Ignatius. Of all of his many scholarly conclusions, this is one of the few that still substantially stands. His 1641 manuscript work (printed posthumously in 1656 as *The reduction of episcopacy unto the form of synodical government*) proposed a series of interlocking synods from parochial up to provincial level. Bishops would not cease to exist but might be retitled superintendents. These superintendents would cooperate with and operate in the synodical system. His plan circulated as one of many private compromise schemes, but as relations between king and long parliament soured during 1641, its moment never came.

**Civil war and interregnum** When Charles left London in January 1642, the moment of decision arrived for James Ussher. Initially he sought to postpone it. The Irish rising of October 1641 had deprived him of his revenue – but both sides compensated him. The king granted him the see of Carlisle *in commendam* in February 1642, and in November parliament voted him an interim pension of £400 a year. But parliament also voted to abolish episcopacy in September, so in November the primate made his choice and moved to Oxford, the king’s headquarters. Ussher even secured parliamentary permission for this move, but he repeatedly refused its summons to the grand national synod, the Westminster assembly in July 1643. During his time in Oxford Ussher preached before the king on several occasions, although he found royal negotiations with the Irish confederate catholics disquieting. In a sermon preached on 3 March 1644, published as *The soveraignes power and the subjects duty*, he was quite explicit about his reasons for choosing the royalist side. His argument was simple: a subject must never take up arms against the king, even for defence of religion; parliament had done this and was accordingly in the wrong. The royalist position worsened after the breakdown of the Uxbridge talks in 1644, and in February 1645 Ussher left Oxford. He travelled to Cardiff where his son-in-law, Sir Timothy Tyrell, was holding out for the king. There he preached to
Charles after Naseby in June and was forced to retreat still further in July when Cardiff itself fell. He was invited to St Donat's library in Glamorgan by the royalist Stradling family but lost many of his books and manuscripts to robbers en route. Most appear to have been retrieved following an appeal for their return, but their owner now fell seriously ill. In December 1645 parliament ordered his arrest. In June 1646 he returned to London of his own volition. He had been considering a move to the Continent since Oxford but now, aged 65, the capital would be his last regular place of residence. He stayed at the house of the dowager countess of Peterborough and devoted his attention to his studies and to making a living. Parliament linked the two in October 1647 when the commons voted him £400 for one year because of his international scholarly reputation. Fortunately for him a subsequent order directing him to take the ‘negative oath’ (not to assist the king) was not pressed. In January 1647, after a parliamentary debate, his appointment as preacher at Lincoln's Inn had been ratified along with an annual stipend of £200.

In November 1648 Charles I, now a prisoner on the Isle of Wight, was permitted to consult a number of clerics on what religious concessions he might make in order to reach an agreement with parliament. On 19 November, the king's birthday, Ussher made a robust sermon on divine right. Following ‘Pride’s purge’ in December the rump parliament put Charles on trial. On 30 January Ussher watched from the roof of the countess of Peterborough's house as the king went to the block. He fainted at the beheading.

**Calendars, chronology, and final years** James Ussher spent the remaining years of his life preaching and writing. His sermons at Lincoln's Inn were entirely pastoral. In 1654 he refused membership of a committee of theologians invited to draw up a Christian confession for use by all groups in England. His attention was now entirely given to origins. In 1647 he published *De Romanae ecclesiae symbolo vetere aliisque fide formulis*, which dealt with the origin of the creeds. In 1648 he produced *De macedonum et asianorum anno solari dissertatio*, which dealt with calendars. Then in 1650 he issued *Annales veteris testamenti* and in 1654 its sequel *Annalium pars posterior*. On these two works most of his posthumous reputation has rested, for it is in these that he created his synthetical chronology. Through meticulous calibration of biblical events with those in ancient secular history Ussher established 23 October 4004 BC as the date of creation. This astonishing feat commanded not just respect but fairly widespread acceptance until well into the eighteenth century. It was the masterwork of a mind always stimulated by the notion that it was possible to determine scientifically the divine timetable. His final published work, *De Graeca septuaginta interpretum versione syntagma cum libri Esthers editione Origenica et vetere Graeca* (1655), dealt with the dispute over the relative merits of the Hebrew and Septuagint versions of the Old Testament. Ussher had maintained an interest in oriental languages and manuscripts throughout his life and purchased eastern materials via agents in Aleppo and elsewhere. His brother Ambrose (qv) (d. 1629) was himself a linguist and scripture scholar.
Ussher had moved to Lady Peterborough's house at Reigate, Surrey, in early 1656. On 20 March he complained of severe abdominal pain. His last words were: 'O Lord forgive me, especially my sins of omission.' Then on 21 March 1656 at about one in the afternoon, he died. Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell (qv) insisted on burial in Westminster abbey and a state funeral. The funeral service, carried out according to the proscribed liturgy of the Church of England, took place on 17 April. The primate was buried in St Erasmus' chapel. Nicholas Bernard preached the sermon, which later formed the preface to the earliest biography, *The life and death of . . . Dr. James Ussher* (1656).

James Ussher's reputation, whether as theologian, historian, or churchman, has remained consistently high since his death. His biblical chronology ensured that he never fell into the relative obscurity that befell many of his contemporaries. The breadth and depth of his scholarship have rendered him famous but have tended to obscure his personal and political views. He continues to rank as one of the most distinguished members of the Church of Ireland clergy.