

Samuel Rawson Gardiner Biography

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Contents

Samuel Rawson Gardiner Biography.....	1
Contents.....	2
Biography.....	3

Biography

The English historian Samuel Rawson Gardiner (1829-1902) was a major historian of the Puritan revolution. His work is a lengthy, detailed, and well-researched study of a brief but significant period in English history.

Samuel Rawson Gardiner was born at Alresford, Hampshire, on March 4, 1829. Educated at Winchester and Christ Church, Oxford, he was professor of modern history at Kings College, London, from 1871 to 1885 and was elected fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, in 1884.

Gardiner's historical writings dealing with the Puritan revolution cover the years 1603 to 1660: *History of England from the Accession of James I to the Outbreak of the Civil War, 1603-1642* (10 vols., 1863-1882), *History of the Civil War, 1642-1649* (3 vols., 1886-1891), and *History of the Commonwealth and Protectorate, 1649-1660* (3 vols., 1895-1901). The last two volumes of his final work were completed by Charles Firth as *The Last Years of the Protectorate* (1909).

Perhaps Gardiner was interested in the Puritan revolution because of his own descent from Oliver Cromwell, although this relation in no way caused a biased account. While critics questioned his method and judgment in his earlier volumes, he was highly respected by the late 1870s, especially for his extensive use of manuscript sources from the archives and private collections in England and Europe. His treatment of the period 1603 to 1660 is exhaustive, and his handling of special areas shows sympathy and great breadth of imagination. His treatment of constitutional history shows knowledge of the political philosophy and the utopian idealism of the time. He was interested in the subject of religious toleration and made use of the works of obscure pamphleteers. In his analysis of the causes of the civil war he deals with human motives and political conduct with great perception. His careful analysis of human character is seen in his portrayals of James I, Archbishop Laud, and Cromwell. The work as a whole has a clear and unadorned style, but it lacks force and enthusiasm and often suffers from excessive detail.

Gardiner's lesser works, often more specialized treatments of 17th-century problems, include *Prince Charles and the Spanish Marriage* (1869), *What Gunpowder Plot Was* (1897), *Oliver Cromwell* (1901), and several edited collections of documents. His reputation as a historian was acknowledged by honorary degrees from Oxford, Edinburgh, and Göttingen. Gardiner died on Feb. 24, 1902, while still at work on the final volumes of the history of the Protectorate.