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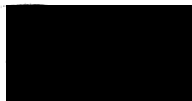
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A dissertation submitted for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

University of Warwick

Department of History

December 2013

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Abstract

The focus of this dissertation is the county of Cheshire during the momentous religious changes of the sixteenth century. It aims to show that it is unrealistic to expect a monolithic reaction to such change: as in any county a combination of factors came together resulting in a variety of responses. It also seeks to discredit a number of myths which continue to proliferate about local people and events of this time. The prominence given by both contemporaries and subsequent scholars to Catholic survivalism in the neighbouring county of Lancashire has tended to overshadow the position in Cheshire; indeed some studies have conflated the two. A central aim of this dissertation has been to demonstrate that the two counties responded differently, and to seek to explain why this might have been.

A chronological approach has been adopted because it was felt that this would afford a cohesive structure. Within each time period certain continuities and recurring themes will become apparent, however. This is, in part, a function of the sources used, since many of these records derive from institutions or practices which continued fundamentally unaffected throughout the period. This was markedly also a time of radical change, and the abolition of some existing institutions and the introduction of new procedures produced new types of records which demonstrate the local impact of some of those changes.

The focus of much Reformation scholarship has now moved away from regional studies towards a more thematic approach, representing one strand of post revisionism. One outcome of the local study in this dissertation has been to demonstrate how new regional studies can contribute to a variety of debates by offering fresh insights and conclusions from a re-consideration of familiar evidence and an examination of evidence which may not be widely known.

Conventions

Where quotations have been incorporated in the text, spelling and punctuation have not been modernised and contractions have been expanded silently. Where English words have been extended this has been done in accordance with how they are spelled if they appear in full elsewhere in the same text, otherwise the modern spelling has been used. Names often present difficulties and although spelling of names has not been modernised in quotations, the nearest modern equivalent has been used in the text as has the English equivalent of Latinised forenames. It must be noted, however, that a number of local surnames with the same pronunciation are spelled differently by different families and as far as possible the spelling adopted by individual families has been followed. Where quotations are in Latin, my translation into English either follows or is given in a footnote.

Dating is Old Style, that is, in accordance with the Julian calendar, except that the year is taken to begin on 1 January.

References to documents held at The National Archives are cited in accordance with guidance to be found at <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records/citing-documents.htm>> (accessed 16 April 2013).

The area treated as comprising the county of Cheshire takes no note of the boundary changes consequent upon administrative reforms from 1974 onwards.

Abbreviations

- APC* *Acts of the Privy Council of England*, ed. J. R. Dasent, new series, 32 vols (London: H.M.S.O., 1890-1907).
- BIY* Borthwick Institute for Archives, York.
- BL* British Library.
- CALS* Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester. This body is the successor to Cheshire Record Office (CRO) and City of Chester Records Office (CCRO), which became a joint service in April 2000. It was then briefly known as Chester and Cheshire Archives and Local Studies (CCALS).
- CCEd* Clergy of the Church of England Database
<<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk>>
- CPR* *Calendar of the Patent Rolls Preserved in the Public Record Office: Edward VI*, 5 vols, ed. R. H. Brodie (London: Public Record Office, 1924-1926).
- CSPD* *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, of the Reigns of Edward VI, Mary, Elizabeth I and James I*, 12 vols, eds R. Lemon and M. A. E. Green (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans & Roberts, 1856-1872).
- DA* Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin.
- DNB* *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2009) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>
- Earwaker* J. P. Earwaker, *East Cheshire Past and Present or a History of the Hundred of Macclesfield in the County Palatine of Chester*, 2 vols (London: printed for the author, 1877, 1880).
- LJ* *Journal of the House of Lords: volume 1: 1509-1577*
<<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=116>>
- LP* *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, of the Reign of Henry VIII, 1509-47*, 21 vols, eds J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner and R. H. Brodie (London: H.M.S.O., 1862-1910).
- Notitia Cestriensis* F. R. Raines (ed.), *Notitia Cestriensis, or Historical Notices of the Diocese of Chester*, by Right Rev. Francis F. Gastrell, vol. 1 Cheshire (Chetham Society, old series, 8, 1845).

- OED* *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, online edition, March 2013) <<http://www.oed.com>>
- Ormerod George Ormerod, *The History of the County Palatine and City of Chester* (second edition, revised and enlarged by T. Helsby, 3 vols, London: George Routledge & Sons, 1882).
- Piccope *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories from the Ecclesiastical Court, Chester*, ed. Rev. G. J. Piccope, 3 volumes (Chetham Society, old series, 33, 1857 (First Portion); old series, 51, 1860 (Second Portion); old series, 54, 1861 (Third Portion)).
- Strype, *Annals* J. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation and Establishment of Religion*, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1824).
- THSLC* *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire*.
- Valor* *Valor Ecclesiasticus temp. Henrici VIII*, ed. J. Caley and J Hunter, 6 vols (London: Record Commission, 1810-34).
- VCH* *Victoria County History*.

Epigraph

The people of the Countrey, are of nature very gentle and courteous, ready to help and further one another; In Religion very zealous, howbeit somewhat addicted to Superstition, which cometh through want of Preaching ... Otherwise, they are of stomack, stout, bold, and hardy; of stature, tall and mighty; withall impatient of wrong, and ready to resist the Enemy or Stranger that shall invade their Countrey: The very name wherof they cannot abide; and namely of a Scot. So have they been always true, faithful and obedient to their Superiors; insomuch, that it cannot be said, that they have at any time stirred one spark of Rebellion, either against the Kings Majesty, or against their own peculiar Lord or Governour.

William Smith and William Webb, *The Vale-royall of England or The County Palatine of Chester* (London, 1656), p. 19.

1

INTRODUCTION

Almost from the earliest development of History as an academic discipline the English Reformation has fascinated historians, who have sought to explain how such a fundamental change was accepted, apparently with little popular opposition. Three major post-war interpretations have been identified by historiographers. The traditional version was followed by revisionist interpretations succeeded by post-revisionism. In this introductory chapter I will consider how these interpretations differed in approach by examining successive changes in methodology and perspective. Post-revisionism aims to explain the process of Reformation partly by examining the popular response. Although such an approach necessarily involves the use of examples drawn from localities, the county-study - which was a mainstay of the revisionist historians - has become unpopular and side-lined as having nothing new to say. This introduction will therefore also examine recent developments in county-based Reformation studies and discuss why local studies continue to be of relevance and why I consider that this study has something important to add to current debates.

The second section of this chapter comprises a brief description of the social and economic structure of the county of Cheshire, and considers the extent to which these factors were important in the progress of the Reformation there. The relevance of the county's Palatine status and the accuracy of the reputation of Cheshire as a 'dark corner of the land' will also be discussed.

This dissertation adopts a chronological approach, with an examination of different sectors of local society during successive reigns. There has been no previous

general consideration of religious life in Cheshire during the period covered by this study which begins at a time when Lollardy was gaining ground in parts of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, of which Cheshire was then a part. It ends with the death of the first Elizabethan bishop of Chester, William Downham. In some ways this represented the end of an era since he was the only Elizabethan bishop of Chester who tried to travel the *via media*.

The Development of Local Reformation Studies

Writing in 1931, Sir Herbert Butterfield described the Whig interpretation of history as a study of ‘the past with reference to the present’, and deplored the ‘tendency to patch the new research into the old story.’¹ He also decried the Whig historians’ view of the historical process as a linear progression towards modern society, brought about, if only in part, by the actions of individuals. Butterfield preferred the analogy of history as ‘a labyrinthine piece of network’.² At the same time he tacitly assumed that there was general agreement that the history of England did reflect ‘progress’ towards liberty. The ‘old story’ had been expounded since the nineteenth century by historians such as Froude, a prime exponent of the Whig interpretation. He considered that through the political intervention of ‘two strong Tudor monarchs’, Henry VIII and Elizabeth I, England was delivered from the backward superstition of Catholicism, with its inherent dominance by a foreign power, to the enlightened Protestantism which was ‘a prelude to the release of that energy which would enable Englishmen to conquer and colonize the

¹ H. Butterfield, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London, 1931), pp. 6, 11.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 44-45.

world.’³ By 1930, the Whig paradigm had so penetrated the national consciousness that a parody could have popular appeal in *1066 and All That* - ‘England is bound to be C of E’, an outcome predictable even from the conversion of England to Christianity: ‘*not* Angels, but *Anglicans*’.⁴

In rather more academic terms, F. M. Powicke summarised the Whig interpretation thus: ‘we find it hard to think of England as other than a Protestant country, so we are disposed to feel, if not to think, that the Reformation was, as it were, a rebound to the normal, and the more self-conscious because it appears to have been so easy.’⁵ For Powicke, the ‘one definite thing which can be said about the Reformation in England is that it was an act of state.’⁶

After the Second World War, the traditional teleological analysis was abandoned by most historians, some of whom adopted new methodologies such as an inter-disciplinary approach favoured, for example, by the *Annales* school.⁷ However, most leading Tudor scholars continued to favour a ‘top down’ model for the Henrician Reformation. Elton, for example, considered that the contemporary development of

³ A. F. Pollard, ‘Froude, James Anthony (1818–1894)’, rev. William Thomas, *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 April 2008).

⁴ W. C. Sellar and R. J. Yeatman, *1066 and All That* (London, 1990), pp. 57, 6. (This is a Folio Edition facsimile of the original edition published in London in 1930).

⁵ F. M. Powicke, *The Reformation in England* (London, 1941), p. 8.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1, but see Christopher Haigh, ‘A. G. Dickens and the English Reformation’, *Historical Research*, 77 (195) (2004), p. 25, for the suggestion that this opening sentence ‘got him into a lot of trouble and he amended it for the second edition’. Powicke’s essay was first published in 1936.

⁷ The philosophy behind the *Annales* school is set out in Marc Bloch, *The Historian’s Craft* (English translation; Manchester, 1954), written without access to libraries while he was working with the French Resistance and during his subsequent imprisonment. Post-war developments are discussed in Rosemary O’Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (paperback edition, London and New York, 1986), p. 115. A ‘growing willingness to hop over the traditional disciplinary walls’ has been welcomed by Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (paperback second edition, London and New York, 2012), p. xii. However, recent inter-disciplinary developments differ little from the post-war methodological innovations advocated by historians such as Bloch, although they tend to encompass different disciplines. The immediate post-war period involved the incorporation of methods used in sociology and statistics, for example, whereas recent developments incorporate approaches derived from disciplines such as literature and art.

reforming ideas, particularly at the universities, ‘played no part in bringing about the Reformation, but for the political revolution they would have been stamped out.’⁸

Bindoff made rather more allowance for the influence of popular opinion, seeing the Henrician Reformation as ‘an act of state’ although it ‘embodied ... the collective will of the nation.’⁹ Even Scarisbrick, in his biography of Henry VIII, written nearly two decades before his revisionist work, *The Reformation and the English People*, thought that while the ‘Henrician Reformation had large support, sprung from all manner of motives, high and low’ it was ‘essentially an act of state.’¹⁰

From the 1960s the attempt to record and interpret the popular reformation shifted the emphasis of the debate towards whether religious change was fast or slow by reference to regional diversity. Local Reformation studies were not new to that decade, however, having ‘got going in the nineteen-thirties’, but turning into ‘a torrent in the sixties and a flood in the seventies’. This increase in local studies was facilitated by the development of county archives.¹¹ Working in the nascent local archives even into the 1950s was not without its difficulties, as described by K. B. McFarlane in a letter to Gerald Harriss dated 16 March 1955 from Lincoln: ‘I keep on having to crawl under the table to use the ultra-violet lamp which they keep there’ although the ‘Record Office women have been very sporting ... allowing me to stay on after closing until dinner time in the evening.’¹² In John Morrill’s pragmatic, if rather cynical, view there was another consideration underlying the proliferation of local studies from the 1950s: ‘the simple

⁸ G. R. Elton, *England under the Tudors* (London, 1955), p. 111.

⁹ S. T. Bindoff, *Tudor England* (paperback second edition, 1991), p. 99.

¹⁰ J. J. Scarisbrick, *Henry VIII* (paperback edition, London, 1971), p. 427. (This book was originally published in 1968). J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984); Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 4.

¹¹ Haigh, ‘A. G. Dickens’, pp. 27, 29.

¹² Gerald Harriss (ed.), *K.B. McFarlane Letters to Friends 1940 – 1966* (Oxford, 1997), p. 123.

one that a local study makes a highly suitable subject - in terms of bulk and availability of sources - for a Ph.D.’¹³ The 1970s doctoral dissertations of several Reformation scholars were based on diocesan local studies.¹⁴

Specific dioceses were the focus for some of the earliest of these. Perhaps the seminal diocesan study is A. G. Dickens’s *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558*.¹⁵ Dickens concluded that the ‘religious characteristics of society in the diocese of York present features of great complexity’ and that it was just as inaccurate to attempt to attach simple labels such as ‘Catholic and Protestant’ as to represent the Tudor north as reactionary and barbarous.¹⁶ This work was among the first to attempt to assess the progress of the popular Reformation from an analysis of wills, in particular the soul bequest. Dickens did sound a note of caution regarding the influences which may have impacted on the testator when drafting his will, suggesting that while the results of any analysis ‘should not be presented in any spirit of statistical pedantry’ they might be used to adduce general trends.¹⁷ Prior to this examination of the survival of Lollard ideas in the diocese, Dickens had considered the extent to which there was a reactionary backlash under Mary. He concluded that, despite the evidence from wills that some testators returned to the old formulae, the attempt by the Marian régime to restore Catholicism was doomed to failure. This was due to lack of ‘a positive religious policy’ and ‘its failure to enter the mission field and revivify the old religion by means of fresh minds and ideals’. He also pointed out that the restoration of papal supremacy

¹³ John Morrill, ‘The Diversity of Local History’, *The Historical Journal*, 24 (3) (1981), p. 717.

¹⁴ For example Felicity Heal on Ely (1972); Ralph Houlbrooke on Norwich (1970); William Sheils on Peterborough (1974).

¹⁵ A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York 1509-1558* (Oxford, 1959).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-2.

meant nothing to the vast majority since by this time only old men remembered ‘the pre-Wolsey era of papal jurisdiction’.¹⁸ Patrick Collinson considered that ‘There was... in everything that Dickens wrote about the subject, a profound respect for locality and regionality, and a corresponding distrust of broad generalizations which ignore regionalism’.¹⁹ Lack of such respect has also led some historians to draw conclusions which local knowledge shows to be misleading.

There is a potential problem inherent in choosing a diocese as the area for study since the diocese was an artificial creation often with no community or regional cohesion or identity. Because the diocese is an ecclesiastical unit, studies based on the diocese tend to concentrate on the approach of the church authorities to perceived problems of the development of extremism of one sort or another. This is often achieved by reference to the work of consistory or other church courts or activities of the clergy of the diocese or character and career of a particular bishop.²⁰ Such an approach clearly does not always capture the popular response or political pressures brought to bear on those responsible for law-enforcement in the localities.

County studies gave historians the opportunity to examine community reaction to the Reformation in the interaction of county-based local government and the popular response. The concept of ‘county community’, developed by Alan Everitt, but also

¹⁸ A. G. Dickens, *The Marian Reaction in the Diocese of York*, part II (York, 1957), pp. 27, 29.

¹⁹ Patrick Collinson, ‘A. G. Dickens’, *Historical Research*, 77 (195) (2004), p. 18.

²⁰ The work of Margaret Bowker on the early reformation in the Diocese of Lincoln, for example, concentrates almost exclusively on Bishop Longland and his clergy see, for example, Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: the Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland, 1521-1547* (Cambridge, 1981). The work of the church courts is examined in Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1979) and Ronald Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560-1642* (London, 1960). Martin Ingram’s work on the church courts, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 1990) covers a slightly later period and is not particularly concerned with the role of the courts in dealing with religious extremism.

adopted by other historians such as Morrill in his work on Cheshire, is more commonly used as an analytical tool by historians of the seventeenth century than the sixteenth. In particular it has been adopted to describe how these communities were subsumed in the course of the Civil War.²¹ As Hassell Smith has suggested, distinct county identities were already developed by the sixteenth century:

There is considerable evidence to suggest that in late Tudor and early Stuart England most people who could think politically regarded themselves as members of a county community which had its own economic, social, and political character, and which stood apart from, sometimes even in opposition to, the greater but remoter community of the nation, of which – and let there be no mistake about this – they were also conscious. They referred to their county as their ‘country’; those who lived beyond its boundaries were ‘foreigners’ and ‘strangers’.²²

Medieval historians have also found the concept to be of relevance, and Michael Bennett, for example, has described the importance of such a group in Cheshire as early as 1400 in forming a ‘personal link between the King and the humblest of his subjects.’²³ As an analytical tool, therefore, the idea of ‘county community’ describes both a political philosophy and a social group or network. It can thus be helpful in

²¹ Ann L. Hughes, ‘Warwickshire on the Eve of the Civil War: a “County Community”?’ , *Midland History*, 7 (1982), p. 43; A. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* (Leicester, 1973), p. 13. Everitt’s ‘county community school of local historian’ is not without its critics, however, see, for example, Clive Holmes, ‘The County Community in Stuart Historiography’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 19 (2) (1980), pp.54-73 in which Holmes is scathing about ‘a romantic evocation of an organic gentry community’. For Morrill’s work on the ‘county community’ in seventeenth-century Cheshire see, for example, *Cheshire 1630-1660: County Government and Society during the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), Chapter 5.

²² A. Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Elizabethan Norfolk, 1558-1603* (Oxford, 1975), p.108.

²³ Michael J. Bennett, ‘A County Community: Social Cohesion amongst the Cheshire Gentry, 1400-1425’, *Northern History*, 8 (1973), p. 43.

analysing local response to a variety of central government initiatives. The relevance of the county community as an aid to analysis of the process of Reformation in Cheshire will be examined in this study.

In what was hailed on publication as ‘one of the three or four most significant works to appear in the field of English Reformation Studies in the last generation’²⁴ Christopher Haigh chose as the basis for his study a county – Lancashire.²⁵ In looking at that county Haigh found an impoverished and backward area generally with little trade or other contact with the rest of England, largely due to poor communications. He concluded that as a result, Catholicism flourished and the Reformation initially made little headway. The one exception was Manchester, in closer contact with the south, where a radical Protestant congregation developed early, centred on the college. This was the first major revisionist work in Reformation studies, stressing the vitality and appeal of pre-Reformation Catholicism. Haigh’s conclusions on the speed and direction of religious reform conflicted with A. G. Dickens’s theory that an anti-clerical population with a lingering Lollard tradition broadly welcomed the ‘official Reformation’.²⁶ Haigh used similar evidence to that adduced by Dickens, such as wills and church court records, but found a very different picture in Lancashire from that which Dickens had found in the diocese of York. By concentrating on a county, rather than a diocese, Haigh was able to identify a certain regional cohesion – a county

²⁴ Roger B. Manning, review of Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* in *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 7 (1) (1976), p.116.

²⁵ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975).

²⁶ The concept of ‘anti-clericalism’ in the context of the English Reformation has also become controversial and consequently the subject of debate, see, for example, Christopher Haigh, ‘Anticlericalism and the English Reformation’, *History*, 68 (1981), pp. 391-407, reproduced in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 56-74. Collinson and Craig find it a concept more relevant to nineteenth-century France see Patrick Collinson and John Craig (eds), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 6.

community – and so to explain how the continued influence of feudal connections and the ‘introspective and self-sufficient’ character of Lancashire society combined to limit the government’s ability to enforce change.²⁷ Several decades later, Haigh, praised Dickens for having put ‘local people into the Reformation’. However, he felt that Dickens took the work of revisionist historians as a personal attack, while Haigh himself felt that they were ‘revising a manifest-destiny version of Reformation history that went back to Froude – and a Protestant version that went back to Foxe’.²⁸

Dickens, however, firmly opposed the suggestion that the north of England was generally backward and out of touch with sophisticated philosophical debate.²⁹ Much academic writing on the northern county of Cheshire continues to suggest that the county was ‘religiously conservative’³⁰ and it has also been described as ‘uncouth and backward’.³¹ Haigh’s study of Lancashire has established, I think beyond question, that that county had areas of strong Catholic survival, and there has been a tendency to lump Cheshire with Lancashire and to tar them both with the same brush. In this study I will demonstrate that Cheshire, despite being in the same diocese as Lancashire, and thus subject to some similar influences, responded in a markedly different way to the Reformation. I will also examine the reasons why the two counties in the same diocese

²⁷ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, Chapter 7, ‘The County Community and the Outside World’, *passim*.

²⁸ Haigh, ‘A. G. Dickens’, pp. 30-31.

²⁹ A. G. Dickens, ‘The Writers of Tudor Yorkshire’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 13 (1963), pp. 49-76; ‘Charges of backwardness and barbarity should hence not be aimed indiscriminately at the Tudor north, for little resemblance existed between the rough-riding marches and the more populous parts of Yorkshire, where social and cultural conditions were largely comparable with those of the Midlands and most parts of southern England’, p. 73.

³⁰ For the county’s conservative reputation see, for example, Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, ‘During Elizabeth’s reign the major problem for successive bishops was Catholicism’, p. 17; Catherine M. Frances, ‘Networks of the Life-course: A Case Study of Cheshire 1570-1700’ (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000), p.20 ‘Cheshire ... was religiously conservative’.

³¹ Michael B. Pulman, ‘An Interjection of the Royal Prerogative into the Legal and Ecclesiastical Affairs of Cheshire in the Fifteen Seventies’, *Albion*, 5 (3) (1973), p. 226.

were so different. Some general conclusions which Haigh drew for the north-west in general demand re-examination in relation to Cheshire. For example, he suggests that the 'obvious reason for the failure of heresy to penetrate the north-west is the simple geographical one; the area was at the opposite corner of England from the old Lollard centres, and contact between the two was disrupted by the Derbyshire Peaks and the Pennine chain.'³² The extent to which this geographical determinism applied to the pre-Reformation church in Cheshire will be considered.

The two main works on religion in sixteenth-century Cheshire are K. R. Wark's book on Elizabethan recusancy³³ and R.C. Richardson's study of Puritanism from 1579 to 1642 in the diocese of Chester.³⁴ Wark's study has contributed to the county's reputation for religious conservatism, partly because he considered only Catholic recusancy. However, his 'main conclusion is a negative one: there were few recusants in Cheshire in the second half of the sixteenth century.'³⁵ Richardson's study of Puritanism has given the county the later reputation as a Puritan stronghold, although his study does not begin until the episcopate of William Chaderton in 1579. It has therefore been suggested that by the end of the sixteenth century 'the religious life of the county was dominated by radical factions on either extreme'.³⁶ Conclusions about religious extremism of whatever form tend to be the most pervasive, because the resulting conflict has left the most evidence. However, Judith Maltby's examination of the signatories of Cheshire's petitions in favour of the episcopacy and the Book of Common Prayer in

³² Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 80.

³³ K. R. Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire* (Chetham Society, 3rd Series, 19, 1971).

³⁴ R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972).

³⁵ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 130.

³⁶ S. Hindle, 'Aspects of the Relationship of the State and Local Society in Early Modern England with Special Reference to Cheshire c.1590-1630' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1992), p. 90.

1641 ‘reinforces the evidence from church court records that conformity was a real and active strand in parish religion’.³⁷ Although she was considering a period rather later than that covered in this present study, an important question which I will consider is whether such a response can be said to have developed by 1577.

The 1970s and 1980s saw the appearance of a number of studies of other counties which examined the contribution of the gentry in enforcing the Reformation, with more or less enthusiasm.³⁸ However, by the 1990s an emphasis on the ‘popular’ Reformation had stimulated a number of urban studies.³⁹ Among the most important of these was John Craig’s work on East Anglian market towns which includes a discussion on the use of wills, and particularly the soul bequest. Craig suggests that any ‘attempt at statistical classification of soul preambles becomes unwieldy in its attempt to include all variants or runs the danger of constructing arbitrary categories for grouping similar preambles, ignoring the importance testators may have placed in particular words or phrases.’⁴⁰ In his analysis of ‘the remarkable run of probate material’ for Bury, Craig

³⁷ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 227. It must be noted that in only one of the five parishes and chapelries studied in detail has Dr Maltby demonstrated that the signatories of the Book of Common Prayer petition constituted the majority of the male parishioners: the proportions which she cited were Tilston (27%); Frodsham (27%); Wilmslow (69%); Marbury (29%); Middlewich (41%); *ibid.*, p. 188. However, Tilston was the next parish to Malpas where Wark identified a strong Elizabethan recusant presence.

³⁸ For example Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Hassocks, 1977); Hassell Smith, *County and Court: Government and Politics in Elizabethan Norfolk*; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986).

³⁹ For example Collinson and Craig, *The Reformation in English Towns*; Barbara Coulton, *Regime and Religion: Shrewsbury 1400-1700* (Almeley, 2010); John Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics: the Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns, 1500-1610* (Aldershot, 2001); Laquita M. Higgs, *Godliness and Governance in Tudor Colchester* (Ann Arbor, 1998); Muriel C. McClendon, *The Quiet Reformation: Magistrates and the Emergence of Protestantism in Tudor Norwich* (Stanford, 1999). This is not, of course, to overlook Susan Brigden’s magisterial work on London which had appeared in 1989 Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989).

⁴⁰ Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics*, pp. 80-82. Although he had collaborated with Litzenberger in an earlier work, J. Craig and Caroline Litzenberger, ‘Wills as Religious Propaganda: The Testament of William Tracy’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (3) (1993), pp. 415-31, this is apparently a critique of the methodology employed by Litzenberger in her *The English Reformation and the Laity*

therefore looked beyond the soul bequests to the main body of wills in an attempt to trace, among other factors, the proportion of townsmen who had embraced Protestantism by 1590.⁴¹ Looking in detail at four market towns in varying periods between 1500 to 1610, Craig found that each had experienced reform in different ways and concluded that these differences highlighted the difficulties in generalising about the ‘process of reformation’ in these small towns.

The development of what has become known as ‘microhistory’ has also seen the emergence of studies of even smaller areas, such as Eamon Duffy’s prize-winning book on one small village parish in Devon. This book was based around the same churchwardens’ accounts which had been used by historians since W. G. Hoskins in the 1950s to show Morebath as ‘the perfect example of a sleepily conformist country community’. On re-examining his main source in manuscript, rather than relying on the nineteenth-century transcription, Duffy found a very different story.⁴² This emphasises the importance of returning to original records. Duffy’s study of Morebath set out to survey the process of Reformation in the village, whereas in other works of microhistory religion has been just one strand in the study of a village as a community.⁴³

It was, perhaps, this type of study which prompted Patrick Collinson’s laconic remarks about ‘the ever-closer scrutiny of the religious entrails ... of the weighty

Gloucestershire, 1540-1580 (Cambridge, 1997). In this work she analysed more than 3,500 wills, on which she relied heavily in her assessment of the progress of the Reformation in that county. She has described her methodology in detail in Appendix A of her book on Gloucestershire, and has given great weight to her categorisation of will preambles, pp. 172-83.

⁴¹ Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics*, pp. 81-5.

⁴² Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath* (New Haven; London, 2001), pp. xiii-xiv.

⁴³ For example Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525 to 1700* (paperback Oxford edition, Oxford, 1995).

parishioners of Much-Binding-in-the-Marsh.’⁴⁴ He suggested that ‘some of the more hopeful developments of the 1980s and 1990s have been transgressive’, comprehending the ‘so-called “new historicism” currently fashionable in North American departments of English Literature’.⁴⁵ In the case of Cheshire, there has certainly been a recent upsurge of interest in the cycle of Chester mystery plays, partly considering sixteenth-century religious changes, with a notable contribution from North-American scholars.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, however, such work sometimes perpetuates the stereotype that Cheshire was a ‘strongly conservative’ area. A recent example is the claim that ‘the privy council described Chester in 1574 as [sic] “very sink of popery”’.⁴⁷ The reference to State Papers cited in support of this contention has no connection with the Privy Council and does not include such a description of Cheshire and the reference to Haigh’s work clearly relates to Lancashire, not Cheshire.

Such transgressive work is related to the post-revisionist emphasis on ‘the Reformation as an agent of social and cultural change’ which has ‘led to a further

⁴⁴ Patrick Collinson, ‘The English Reformation, 1485-1558’, in Michael Bentley (ed.), *Companion to Historiography* (London, 1997), p. 354, although Duffy’s study of Morebath appeared after this essay of Collinson’s.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p.354.

⁴⁶ For example Michelle M. Butler, ‘The Borrowed Expositor’, *Early Theatre*, 9:2 (2006), pp.73-90; Theresa Coletti, ‘The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth-century Religious Culture’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 37:3 (2007), pp. 531-46; Theodore K. Lerud, ‘Negotiating the Reformation in the Northwest: The Reinvention of the Chester Cycle’, *Reformation*, 8 (2003), pp. 1-39; Sally-Beth MacLean, ‘Marian Devotion in Post-Reformation Chester: Implications of the Smiths’ “Purification” Play’, in Tom Scott and Pat Starkey (eds), *The Middle Ages in the North-west: Papers Presented at an International Conference Sponsored Jointly by the Centres of Medieval Studies of the Universities of Liverpool and Toronto* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 237-56; David Mills, *Recycling the Cycle: the City of Chester and its Whitsun Plays* (Toronto (Ontario), 1998); David Mills, ‘Some Theological Issues in Chester’s Plays’ in David N. Klausner and Karen Sawyer Marsalek (eds), *Bring furth the pageants’: Essays in Early English Drama Presented to Alexandra F. Johnston* (Toronto; London, 2007), pp. 121-29. See also L. M. Clopper (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Manchester, 1979) and Elizabeth Baldwin, Lawrence M. Clopper and David Mills (eds), *Records of Early English Drama: Cheshire including Chester* (London, 2007).

⁴⁷ The word ‘the’ appears to be missing before the quotation in this source; David Klausner, Helen Ostovich and Jessica Dell, ‘Introduction: The Chester Cycle in Context’, in Jessica Dell, David Klausner and Helen Ostovich (eds), *The Chester Cycle in Context, 1555-1575* (Farnham, 2012), p. 5; citing TNA: PRO SP 12/48, ff. 73-4 and Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 223.

enlargement of the source-base'.⁴⁸ Post-revisionist historians have concentrated on concepts or themes, especially in relation to popular religion, although they inevitably continue to rely on examples drawn from different localities. There is also a growing interest in the survival of pre-Reformation practices and the adaptation of existing observances and spaces to accommodate the changes brought about during the Reformation throughout the British Isles.⁴⁹ At the same time, revisionist historians like Eamon Duffy have continued to produce important work stressing the vitality of the pre-Reformation church and the achievements of the Marian restoration of Catholicism.⁵⁰

Is it true to say, therefore, that 'the golden age of the local study in English Reformation history is passing' and that most of the questions raised in local studies have been answered and without new methodologies such studies are 'unlikely to reveal new trends with which we are not already familiar'?⁵¹ It is my contention that there is still a great deal of general relevance to be learned by looking at localities, and not just from a cross-disciplinary standpoint. Duffy, for example, has recently suggested that a detailed study of the process of enforcement of the Marian restoration in the dioceses is needed.⁵² Furthermore, county studies do continue to develop new methodologies. In his recent work on the Browne family Michael Questier highlighted the importance of patronage networks in the survival of Catholicism in their sphere of influence in Sussex.

⁴⁸ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. xii.

⁴⁹ For example Susan Guinn-Chipman, *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London; Vermont, 2013); Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003); Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002); Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford; New York, 1999); Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2011); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1500 – 1640* (Cambridge, 1991).

⁵⁰ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (paperback second edition, New Haven; London, 2005); Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, Conn; London, 2009).

⁵¹ Alec Ryrie, *The Gospel and Henry VIII: Evangelicals in the Early English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 7.

⁵² Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, p. 17.

He also discussed the importance of reconstructing the ‘entourage’ of the first Viscount Montague to reveal ‘the sharper edges of his reputation for Catholicism’ in the face of his ‘studiously conformist pose’.⁵³ Questier had, apparently, originally envisaged ‘a modified form of county study’ but felt that this would have been too limiting because of both the lack of surviving records and because of the methodology of ‘self-consciously Catholic county studies’ which ‘emphasise the Catholic presence in the county at the expense of its context’.⁵⁴ He stressed the value of recovering networks in understanding Catholic survival and his resulting work is, in effect, a new approach to the county study.⁵⁵ I suggest that the emphasis on Catholic survival at the expense of context is a problem with Wark’s study of Elizabethan recusancy in Cheshire, which is partly why it has contributed to the county’s reputation for religious conservatism.

This dissertation is a county study. It offers a reinterpretation of certain key events and individuals of the county at a crucial stage in the Reformation process. Not least of these is a reappraisal of the character and achievements of William Downham himself. A re-examination of original sources such as wills, churchwardens’ accounts, letters to central government and the records of both consistory and Palatine courts also reveals that there are certainly new things of general relevance to be said without necessarily having recourse to new methodologies. Those expecting a study of a backward and conservative area may be surprised.

⁵³ Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c.1550-1640* (Cambridge, 2006), Chapter 6.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.15-17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

Society and Topography

Cheshire has been selected as the geographical location for this study for a number of reasons. Firstly, it presents an important and interesting contrast with neighbouring Lancashire. Secondly, there is an extensive range of surviving ecclesiastical records. These include a good run of records from the consistory court, both before and after the foundation of the diocese of Chester, although there are some gaps.⁵⁶ There are also some visitation correction records and call books, although again these are not complete.⁵⁷ Thirdly, the records of the Palatine courts survive at The National Archives, providing some interesting insights drawn from civil litigation.⁵⁸ A fourth reason is that I happen to live in Cheshire, which has obvious practical advantages, and local knowledge can sometimes be helpful.⁵⁹

The importance of the county's palatine status has been the subject of debate, but it is now generally accepted that by the early sixteenth century, as a result of that special status, Cheshire occupied a unique position in England. It was not subject to ordinary English taxation and had its own exchequer and county court in Chester.⁶⁰ The county

⁵⁶ These comprise the court books (CALS EDC 1); the deposition books (CALS EDC 2) and court papers (CALS EDC 5).

⁵⁷ CALS EDV 1 (correction books) and EDV 2 (call books).

⁵⁸ Two series of court records examined were TNA: PRO CHES 24 (gaol files, but some files also contain a variety of other records such as indictments, presentments and calendars of gaol delivery) and TNA: PRO CHES 29 (plea rolls). Cheshire Quarter Sessions Books, held locally, survive from 1559 (CALS QJB) and Quarter Sessions Files from 1571 (CALS QJF). These have not been examined in the course of this present study as they form the basis of Wark's study of Elizabethan recusancy.

⁵⁹ One example of the value of local knowledge is the question of names. Names of people and places can be particularly problematic in view of the phonetic basis and frequent abbreviations of sixteenth-century orthography. Although 'Chumley' may be widely identifiable as 'Cholmondeley', for example; other spellings such as 'Wimbery' for 'Wybunbury' and 'Daneham' for 'Davenham' may not be so easily recognisable.

⁶⁰ The importance of the county's continuing palatine status is discussed in Dorothy Clayton, *The Administration of the County Palatine of Chester 1442-1485* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 35, 1990), Chapter 2; Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), Part I. See, however, Geoffrey Barraclough, 'The Earldom and County Palatine of Chester', *THSLC*, 103 (1952

court had far greater powers than the county courts of other English counties, with full jurisdiction over all criminal and civil proceedings. Although the justice of Chester was a royal nominee, usually a non-Cheshire man, and the office regarded as a sinecure, deputies carried out the work of the office and they were normally local men.⁶¹ The procedures adopted in the county court meant that numbers of local gentry were required to act in concert through the jury system and in the making of peace bonds.⁶² Thus, although there was no Commission of the Peace in the county until 1536, the gentry community was used to acting together to maintain the peace. Dorothy Clayton has convincingly shown that the large number of recognisances of the fifteenth century argues not for a lawless area, but provides ‘evidence that the majority of the gentry were responsible citizens who were making an effort to police their own actions and maintain stability.’⁶³

It has also been suggested that this cohesion extended to other spheres of activity, and by the early fifteenth century the ‘Cheshire gentry were well accustomed to acting together in a wide variety of capacities, and their collective activities tend to suggest the existence of a close – if completely informal – network of social relations which embraced the entire county.’⁶⁴ This network comprehended not only social relations, but also local politics, the law and military campaigning.⁶⁵ It has not been possible to establish with precision when Cheshire became a county palatine, and

for 1951), pp. 23-57 and Garthine Walker, ‘Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire’ (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1994), p. 18 for alternative views.

⁶¹ Clayton, *Administration of the County Palatine*, p. 3.

⁶² *Ibid*, pp. 138-9.

⁶³ Dorothy Clayton, ‘The Involvement of the Gentry in the Political, Administrative and Judicial Affairs of the County Palatine of Chester, 1442-85’ (PhD thesis, University of Liverpool, 1980), vol. i, p. 349.

⁶⁴ Bennett, ‘A County Community’, *Northern History*, 8 (1973) p. 27.

⁶⁵ Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), Chapter 2 *passim*.

attempts to locate the event in the pre-Conquest period became part of a foundation myth exploited by county leaders in support of claims to special treatment, notably in matters of taxation.⁶⁶ This myth contributed to a sense of county cohesion, if only among the gentry and the literate.⁶⁷ The existence of a number of reading networks which have been identified among the late medieval gentry of the county was of enormous importance for the spread of ideas and for inculcating ‘a group consciousness’ among a cultural community which shared literary interests and a common idiom. One important feature of these literary circles was the lending of books, particularly manuscripts, for copying.⁶⁸

The tenure of palatine offices offered ample opportunities to dispense patronage and amass wealth.⁶⁹ The chamberlain of the Chester exchequer, for example, was chief financial officer of the county. The post was normally held by a local man and during the fifteenth century the position of deputy chamberlain increased in importance as the office of chamberlain became more of a sinecure while still facilitating the accumulation of considerable wealth. When the chamberlain Sir Randle Brereton of Malpas died in 1530, he was buried in Malpas church, where he had remodelled the chancel and ‘prepared my burielles’, making provisions for an elaborate funeral (see Figure 1 below). He had also endowed a free school and an almshouse in Malpas, with obligations on the beneficiaries for regular prayers for the founder, his family and his

⁶⁶ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 1-5; Clayton, ‘The Involvement of the Gentry’, vol. i, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 41-3.

⁶⁸ Deborah Youngs, ‘Cultural Networks’, in Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (eds), *Gentry Culture in Late Medieval England* (Manchester, 2005), pp. 119-33.

⁶⁹ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 162-3; Philip Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 34, 1987), pp. 9-11.

ancestors.⁷⁰ In addition to his local influence, Sir Randle Brereton had been in a position to advance court careers for five of his sons. Three, Urian, Roger and William were laymen; two, John and Peter, were clerks, both of whom became chaplains to Henry

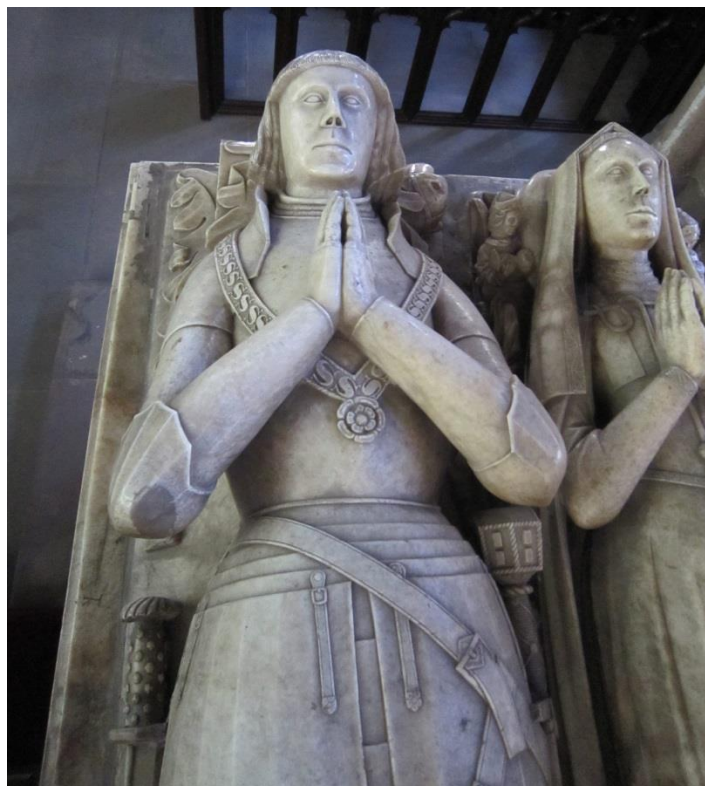


Figure 1 – Alabaster tomb effigy of Sir Randle Brereton in St Oswald's church, Malpas.⁷¹ Photograph copyright Patricia Cox 2013.

⁷⁰TNA: PRO PROB 11/23/338 Sir Randall Breerton; Mary Pearson (ed.), *The Wills and Inventories of the Ancient Parishes of Malpas, Tilston and Shocklach and their Townships in the County of Chester from 1508 to 1603* (Malpas and District Local History Group, undated), i, pp. 4-11; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 240; David Hayns, 'Almshouse to Housing Trust: Philanthropic, Affordable and Social Housing in Malpas, c. 1500 to the Present', *Cheshire History*, 52 (2012-2013), p. 110. Pevsner described Brereton's tomb as a 'superb alabaster piece', Niklaus Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of England – Cheshire* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1971), p. 274.

⁷¹ The inscription around this monument records that it was created in 1522, which was during Sir Randle Brereton's lifetime, so it must be assumed that he is depicted in accordance with his own wishes. He is wearing plate armour, probably the 'Almayn Ryvettes' (almain rivet = a kind of flexible light armour, originating in Germany (*OED* online edition accessed 28 April 2013)) mentioned in his will. At this time such adoption of military dress was no romantic affectation, as it later became, since Brereton was a seasoned campaigner, and his will also mentions assets acquired as loot. His effigy also wears a collar of esses, which has been identified as a Lancastrian device, with a Tudor rose in the centre. This chain, his 'best cheyne', was to be divided among his three courtier sons and the Tudor rose was bequeathed separately to one of them, Roger; Pearson (ed.), *Wills of Malpas*, pp. 5, 7; Ormerod, ii, p. 686.

VIII and were considerable pluralists.⁷² The Breretons exploited their position at court to acquire valuable leases and offices back in their home county where their power rested upon this influence and patronage, and thereby they developed a network of clients. They were not alone among minor Cheshire gentry who advanced their position at home through connections developed at court.⁷³ Although ambition may have caused conflicting interests within Cheshire, when away from the county the local gentry remained very conscious of their common origin. Thus, while campaigning in northern France in 1513, William Brereton put aside local rivalry to join Ralph Egerton in a heated defence of the Cheshire troops who were said to have deserted at Flodden.⁷⁴

The church was also an avenue of advancement for ambitious Cheshire men, and in Thomas Savage produced an archbishop whose affection for his home county led him to arrange for his heart to be buried at Macclesfield.⁷⁵ A less dramatic way in which leading churchmen expressed their continuing links with the county was by using their position to dispense patronage to Cheshire clerks.⁷⁶ More humble churchmen also

⁷² Ormerod, ii, pp. 686-7. For John Brereton see Tim Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 66; for Peter Brereton see Douglas Jones, *The Church in Chester 1300-1540* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 7, 1957), p. 166. Jones expresses some doubt about whether Peter Brereton was the fifth son of Sir Randle Brereton, as Ormerod claimed, and from an examination of a family tree prepared in 1564 Eric Ives identified Peter Brereton as a royal chaplain, and third son; E. W. Ives, 'Court and County Palatine in the Reign of Henry VIII: the Career of William Brereton of Malpas', *THSLC*, 123 (1972 for 1971), pp. 3-5. Although Ormerod refers to William as 'Sir William', he was never knighted, Ives, 'Court and County Palatine', p. 35.

⁷³ See, for example, E. W. Ives, 'Patronage at the Court of Henry VIII: the Case of Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley', *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 52 (2) (1970), pp. 346-374.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 352-55.

⁷⁵ S. J. Gunn, 'Savage, Thomas (d. 1507)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 23 August 2009).

⁷⁶ Michael J. Bennett, 'Sources and Problems in the Study of Social Mobility: Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages', *THSLC*, 128 (1979 for 1978), p. 69.

remembered their home county; thus in 1537 Nicholas Mainwaring willed 20s with a corporas and altar cloth to the church of 'Widenbury in Chesshire where I was borne'.⁷⁷

Nor was it only the gentry and clergy who looked outside the county for advancement, it has been suggested that emigration from the northwest into London began on a large scale by about 1400, with probably the first London alderman of Cheshire origins being Thomas Knolles, elected in 1393. He was followed by the 'real invasion of the civic oligarchy' from the middle of the fifteenth century, facilitated by 'foundations laboriously laid by kinsmen and compatriots in earlier decades.'⁷⁸ By the end of the fifteenth century, one of the wealthiest men in England was Sir Edmund Shaw who originated in the 'panhandle', one of the poorest areas of Cheshire, but who rose through the ranks of the goldsmiths company to become Lord Mayor of London and wealthy enough to lend money to Edward IV and Richard III, whose downfall he survived 'without apparent difficulty.'⁷⁹

However, it was the majority of the gentry, those who remained in Cheshire for most of their lives, who were the mainstay of local government and who formed the 'county community'. Dorothy Clayton suggests that in the second half of the fifteenth century 'the position of dominance enjoyed by the Cheshire gentry could not be challenged by any other class.' This was because there was no resident noble family, the Cheshire clergy 'did not constitute an august or powerful group' and 'the palatine

⁷⁷ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, p.218; TNA: PRO PROB 11/27/69 Nicholas Maynwaring. He does not indicate in his will where he held his living, but as he makes numerous references therein to Exeter, including to the cathedral church of St Peter, and requests burial in St Peter's (Nicholas Orme, *English Church Dedications* (Exeter, 1996), p. 159) it may be assumed to have been in Exeter. 'Widenbury' is Wybunbury.

⁷⁸ Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, pp. 125-6.

⁷⁹ P. Tucker, 'Shaw, Sir Edmund (d. 1488)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 3 August 2009). His surname is often spelled 'Shaa', presumably a reflection of local pronunciation.

sources do not give the impression of an influential resident merchant class.’⁸⁰ It may be noted, however, that several gentry families such as the Leighs and the Traffords held property in both Lancashire and Cheshire. The most significant noble family in the area was the Stanleys of Lathom, later earls of Derby, but they had hardly any land in Cheshire, and the little authority they had there rested upon office-holding, subject to royal whim. In Cheshire they could not approach the immense power they wielded in Lancashire.⁸¹ One reason for the absence of a local noble family was that the earldom of Chester had vested in the crown early in the thirteenth century.⁸²

Bennett and Clayton agree in their assessment of the importance of the medieval county community, a network whose connections were as much social as political. Thus Bennett detected ‘a kinship network of considerable complexity’ among the leading Cheshire gentry and noted that between ‘1374 and 1427 a quarter of all the papal dispensations granted to English couples for consanguineous marriages were issued to residents of the archdeaconry of Chester.’⁸³ Where they disagree, however, is over the size of the county community, as Clayton argued that Bennett’s quantification of the group at about one hundred families is too restricted.⁸⁴

Thornton’s more recent study has also suggested that by the beginning of the sixteenth century an elite group among the gentry was beginning to emerge which came to dominate the government of the county. This conclusion stems from his study of the Cheshire grand jury system. He has calculated that the numbers of those impanelled had

⁸⁰ Clayton, *The Administration of the County Palatine*, pp. 132-4.

⁸¹ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 17-23.

⁸² *VCH Cheshire*, ii, pp. 1-97.

⁸³ Bennett, ‘A County Community’, p. 29; Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, pp. 11-12.

⁸⁴ Clayton, *The Administration of the County Palatine*, pp. 138-9 referring to Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, p. 27.

grown immensely by 1524, although the size of the average jury was much the same as it had been in 1495. By 1524 those whom he identified as senior members of county society were still included on the jury lists but it was unusual for them to be selected for service. This opened the jury system to wider involvement and Thornton detected two 'contradictory trends.' On one hand, more men from all levels of society were summoned to attend, on the other, the greater gentry were increasingly prepared to suffer fines for non-attendance rather than involve themselves in jury service. 'This choice may well have been the result of the rise in status of the Cheshire elite and its separation from its inferiors in the local gentry.'⁸⁵

This group of elite gentry has been numbered by Thornton at thirty to fifty families whose status he elicited from their wealth, administrative involvement and military contribution. It was this elite group which Thornton saw as forming the basis of the commission of the peace, introduced into the county in 1536, and he suggested that one reason for the acceptance of this and other administrative changes was that it gave this elite group a new route to involvement in local government in a way which differentiated them from the lesser gentry. I will also argue that the identification of some of this elite group with the enforcement of religious policy, notably under Elizabeth, was also seen by them as a means to reinforce their authority locally.

The gentry of Cheshire were, therefore, not a monolithic entity and there is one further small local group which added to the complex nature of this society. This was the barons. Six baronies survived into the Tudor period, and they continued to exert a powerful influence, derived from their historical status, out of all proportion to their

⁸⁵ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 26-8.

wealth.⁸⁶ Their power was mainly expressed through the baronial courts, each of which had jurisdiction over several manors and townships.⁸⁷ As late as 1597 a murderer was hanged on the authority of Thomas Venables, baron of Kinderton, although it is not clear whether he believed that his power in this case derived from the court baron of his manor or his baron's court. It is possible that the two had become inseparable by that time.⁸⁸

Population density has been considered by some historians to be a factor in the spread of new religious ideas. For example, it has been noted that Lollardy often developed in densely-populated areas, while a sparse population has been seen as inhibiting the spread of new ideas, both generally and with specific reference to religion. Thus Davis linked the development of Lollard ideas in the south-east of England to three 'major textile producing centres, with a relatively high density of population', while Haigh noted that in Lancashire Puritans 'went to the south-east of the county because it ... had the densest and most rapidly-expanding population. There prospects for conversion may have been thought higher than in the more sparsely populated and isolated parishes.'⁸⁹ Conversely, however, Haigh also considered that recusancy 'was

⁸⁶ Ormerod, i, p. 52; the surviving baronies were those of Dunham Massey, Halton, Kinderton, Malpas, Nantwich and Stockport. In the Tudor period forenames such as Randle, Urian and Hamo traditionally associated with particular baronies continued to be popular with Cheshire parents, although these names were by then unusual elsewhere. Thornton cited the continuing popularity of these names as evidence of the continuing importance of the barons and enduring appeal of tradition; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 48, 54.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸⁸ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, i, p. 20; 44. This confusing nomenclature causes problems in distinguishing the two.

⁸⁹ John F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation in the South East of England* (London, 1983), p. 2; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 299.

most extensive where it was more difficult to control, in densely populated and fragmented parishes, protected by conservative gentry families.’⁹⁰

It is still generally asserted that in the late medieval period Cheshire was one of the least densely-populated counties of England, and that even by 1664 population density was low.⁹¹ This acceptance has contributed to the county’s reputation as an under-developed backwater.⁹² Various records have been adopted as a basis for extrapolating English population figures from available sources, but the methodology employed in carrying out this exercise is not without difficulty.⁹³ In addition, sources used in other areas to calculate population in the early sixteenth century do not exist for Cheshire.⁹⁴ These include chantry certificates from 1546 and 1548, used in some counties as a basis for extrapolating population figures based on returns of houseling people.⁹⁵ However, the 1546 chantry certificates for Cheshire are lost and in 1548 only

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁹¹ J. C. Russell, *British Medieval Population* (Albuquerque, 1948), pp. 312-3; C. B. Phillips and J. H. Smith, *A Regional History of England - Lancashire and Cheshire*, (paperback edition, Harlow, Essex, 1994), pp. 5, 135; E. Kate Jarman (ed.), *Justice and Conciliation in a Tudor Church Court: The Consistory Court of Chester, September 1558-March 1559* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 146, 2012), p. xv. It has recently been suggested that Russell’s calculations for the Domesday population of Cheshire are probably too low; N. J. Higham, *A Frontier Landscape: The North West in the Middle Ages* (Macclesfield, Cheshire, 2004), p. 71.

⁹² J. T. Driver, *Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages: 1399-1540* (Chester, 1971), p. 5.

⁹³ E. A. Wrigley and R. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871: a Reconstruction* (Cambridge, 1981), but for a critique of the ‘dauntingly complex’ methodology employed by Wrigley and Schofield see M. W. Flinn, ‘The Population History of England, 1541-1871’, *The Economic History Review*, New Series, 5 (3) (1982), pp. 443-57.

⁹⁴ Such sources include the muster rolls from the 1522 ‘military survey’ which do not survive for the north of England; John S. Moore, ‘Population Trends in North-east England, 1548-1563’, *Northern History*, 45 (2) (2008), p. 239. Exchequer lay subsidy returns have also proved a useful tool elsewhere, but Cheshire was exempt from this type of taxation, voted by the national parliament, paying instead a special form of levy, the ‘mise’, a privilege fiercely defended by reference to palatine privilege, as discussed above. This had been fixed at 3,000 marks since at least the mid-fifteenth century and was usually paid in six instalments of 500 marks over three years. The assessment was based on townships and was thus not a personal or household imposition and thus does not assist in population estimation; Clayton, *Administration of the County Palatine*, pp. 48-9.

⁹⁵ Nigel Goose and Andrew Hinde, ‘Estimating Local Population Sizes at Fixed Points in time: Part II – Specific Sources’, *Local Population Studies*, 78 (2007), p. 81.

two parishes and two chapelries covered by certificates returned the numbers of houseling people.⁹⁶

The earliest available source of population data for sixteenth-century Cheshire in general is presented by the ecclesiastical return of households of 1563, sometimes known as the Bishops' census.⁹⁷ The accuracy of the returns and methodological problems of analysis have been the subject of some discussion, however.⁹⁸ Although the return for Chester diocese has survived, it has been suggested that it is one of the less reliable returns.⁹⁹ In addition to the apparent errors and approximations in the return, there are other problems with the Chester diocesan return such as a blank for the parish of Aldford.¹⁰⁰ Further, the figures for Lymm and Astbury seem very high, and are perhaps head counts, rather than households.¹⁰¹ Based on the return, however, the population of Cheshire in 1563 has been estimated at roughly 55,000.¹⁰² Using this

⁹⁶ Moore, 'Population Trends', p. 240; Cheshire Chantry certificates are at TNA: PRO E 301/8 and the figures for houseling people are given only for the parishes of St John's in Chester and Bunbury, both of which contained substantial colleges. There are also observations on the size and population of the chapelries of Nantwich and Pott.

⁹⁷ D. M. Palliser and L. J. Jones, 'The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603', *Local Population Studies*, 30 (1983), pp. 55-58.

⁹⁸ Nigel Goose, 'The Ecclesiastical Returns of 1563: a Cautionary Note', *Local Population Studies*, 34 (1985), pp. 46-7; Alan Dyer, 'The Bishops' Census of 1563: its Significance and Accuracy', *Local Population Studies*, 49 (1992), pp. 19-37; Nigel Goose, 'The Bishops' Census of 1563: a Re-examination of its Reliability', *Local Population Studies*, 56 (1996), pp. 43-53. Problems of extrapolating the size of the population from the returns include not only the accuracy of the figures returned by the various bishops but also the multiplier to be applied in converting households to population.

⁹⁹ BL Harley MSS, 594, ff. 97-108. Dyer, 'The Bishops' Census of 1563', pp. 29-36, *passim*, suggests that the frequency of figures rounded to tens, scores or dozens is one factor which puts the Chester diocese among the 'unreliable areas'. Detailed returns of household numbers returned in 1563 survive for thirteen dioceses of which Chester has been placed third from bottom for reliability although the archdeaconry of Richmond is 'much worse' in terms of apparent estimates than the archdeaconry of Chester, which included the county of Cheshire; Alan Dyer and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, 2005), pp. xxxvi-xxxvii, 76-77.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁰¹ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, p. 6, suggest that the figure of 595 for Lymm is overstated, and I would suggest that 853 for Astbury is also overstated, even though it includes the town of Congleton. This is based on the return for Nantwich, the second largest town in Cheshire at that time, which is given as 441.

¹⁰² C. B. Phillips, 'Population Distribution and Change, 1563-1801', in A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips (eds), *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (Chester, 2002), pp. 42-3; this calculation is based on

figure the average population density would be in the region of 83.7 per thousand acres as the area of the county was 657,122 acres at this time. This may be compared with Norfolk and Suffolk, generally regarded as one of the most densely populated areas of the country. There the median density has been calculated at 75.2 persons per thousand acres in the 1520s and 103.4 persons in 1603.¹⁰³

Of more relevance, however, is the distribution of the population, since in the sixteenth century there were still areas of Cheshire which were almost without settlement, while several towns were growing rapidly. Even by the nineteenth century however, the perception was that Cheshire was rural rather than urban.¹⁰⁴ The biggest town, Chester, was the largest in the region, and was an important port as well as a market town. Recent estimates have indicated that by the 1520s it was among the largest sixteen English towns, with a taxable wealth equal to Hereford or Lincoln.¹⁰⁵ The market town of Nantwich was the second largest town in the county, and was important as a staging-post for troops travelling to Ireland through Chester.¹⁰⁶ There were two incorporated boroughs, Congleton and Macclesfield, which had their own internal

mean household size of 4.75 and Phillips's population figure corresponds to this multiple of the county's households, rounded down. This household size, which Phillips describes as 'arbitrary' is not without problems, however. It has been suggested that as the 1563 figures were drawn up following a period of high mortality it could be expected that household size would be smaller; John S. Moore, 'Population Trends in Lancashire, 1548-1563', *THSLC*, 157 (2009 for 2008), p. 38. Phillips stresses, however, that his figure is very much an estimate and it is hedged with caveats. Garthine Walker gives the county's 1563 population figure as 146,000, derived from Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, p. 5, where this figure is stated to refer to the whole of the north-west; Walker, 'Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire', p. 43.

¹⁰³ John Patten, 'Population Distribution in Norfolk and Suffolk during the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 65 (1975), pp. 51, 55. This is not to suggest that this rough average and Patten's median computations are calculated in the same way, the figures are offered as a general comparison.

¹⁰⁴ M. J. Power, 'Types of Cheshire Towns', in A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips (eds), *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (Chester, 2002), p. 81.

¹⁰⁵ Jane Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester 1275-1520* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 11-12. The area's exemption from national taxation at this time again renders estimation difficult.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Garton, *Tudor Nantwich: A Study of Life in Nantwich in the Sixteenth Century* (Cheshire, 1983), p. 10.



Figure 2 – Christopher Saxton's 1577 map of Cheshire.

CALS PM 12/10.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ Records held at the Cheshire Record Office are reproduced with the permission of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies and the owner or depositor to whom copyright is reserved.

administrative and judicial systems.¹⁰⁸ In the seventeenth century, Smith and Webb identified eleven market towns in addition to Chester and early in the following century fifteen fairs were listed.¹⁰⁹ In contrast, large areas, notably the Wirral in the west and the area bordering the Pennines in the east, were sparsely populated as was Delamere Forest.¹¹⁰ The conclusion must be that in the sixteenth century the county was an area of uneven population distribution.

The county's borders changed little between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries and historically it derived 'cohesion and a distinct identity from the natural features which demarcated its ancient boundaries' (see Figure 2 above).¹¹¹ To the north of the county the River Mersey formed the boundary with Lancashire and in addition to the barrier posed by the river, the river basin itself was wide and marshy from the estuary to the central Mersey valley where a series of 'mosses' or peat bogs lay on both sides of the river.¹¹² This belt of marsh and moss was a formidable obstacle and, indeed, it was extremely dangerous to attempt a crossing in this area.¹¹³ Towards the west the Mersey estuary was crossed by boat and there were a number of ferries, both legal and illegal, from points on the Wirral to the area of Liverpool. Birkenhead Priory and St

¹⁰⁸ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, pp. 30-35.

¹⁰⁹ William Smith and William Webb, *The Vale-royall of England or the County Palatine of Chester* (London: published by Daniel King and printed by John Streater, 1656), p. 16; W. Owen, *An Authentic Account Published by the King's Authority of all the Fairs in England and Wales* (London, 1756), pp. 12-13.

¹¹⁰ See the map of population distribution in 1563 in Phillips, 'Population Distribution', p. 43. Delamere itself was an extra-parochial area so no household figures were returned in 1563.

¹¹¹ *VCH Cheshire*, i, p. 1; for a discussion of the later history of the county boundary see *VCH Cheshire*, ii, pp.2, 94-6.

¹¹² N. J. Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire* (Manchester, 1993), p. 213. According to Higham the name Mersey means 'frontier river', N. J. Higham, *A Frontier Landscape: The North West in the Middle Ages* (Macclesfield, Cheshire, 2004), pp. 6, 17. This mossland reached right into Manchester, hence the area known as 'Moss Side'.

¹¹³ The largest of these marshes in the Mersey basin were Chat Moss, Trafford Moss and Carrington Moss and despite the efforts of agricultural improvers they were not drained until well into the 19th century. Alan Crosby, *A History of Cheshire* (Chichester, 1996), p. 65; F. Walker, *Historical Geography of South-west Lancashire before the Industrial Revolution* (Chetham Society, New Series, 103, 1939), p. 9.

Werburgh's Abbey had enjoyed the rights to the only legal ferry crossings prior to the dissolution and subsequently these rights were fiercely contested and thus, presumably, lucrative.¹¹⁴ The lowest point at which the river could be crossed by road-bridge was at Warrington in Lancashire where the main north-south route in the west of England crossed the Mersey.¹¹⁵

The highest parts of the county were found on the eastern borders where the Pennines separated Cheshire from Yorkshire, Derbyshire and Staffordshire. Crossing the Pennines has never been easy, however, and to the east of Macclesfield the bleak moorland roads still frequently suffer winter blockage by snow.¹¹⁶ Thus the Pennines presented almost as formidable a border as the Mersey, although the drovers' roads and salt-ways across the hills via Macclesfield were in regular use.¹¹⁷ To the west Cheshire was bounded by the estuaries of the Dee and the Mersey, forming the Wirral peninsula, and by the sea. To the south, however, the county boundary was less clearly defined by physical features and contiguity with Wales often led to disorder.¹¹⁸ By 1500, therefore, the county of Cheshire had for centuries been bordered on three sides by obvious physical boundaries and this helped to foster a sense of local identity, bolstered in the south of the county by differences of language and nationality with their Welsh neighbour. Although some natural boundaries presented formidable obstacles to contemporary travellers, there were no such obstacles to travel towards the south-east and by the early seventeenth century, and probably before, carriers travelled three times

¹¹⁴ Tony Dyson, "'Honeygreave" and the Rock House ferry', *THSLC*, 156 (2008 for 2007), pp. 115-119; R. Stewart Brown, *Birkenhead Priory and the Mersey Ferry* (Liverpool, 1925).

¹¹⁵ Sir H. G. Fordham, 'The Earliest Tables of Highways of England and Wales', *The Library*, 4th Series, 8 (1928), pp. 349-354 reproduces an unpaginated facsimile copy of a road-table of 1544 giving the 'waye fro[m] Cokermouth to lancastre, and so to London' going via 'Warryngton' and 'Couentre'.

¹¹⁶ *VCH Cheshire*, i, p.1.

¹¹⁷ Higham, *Frontier Landscape*, p. 189.

¹¹⁸ Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, pp. 55-6.

a week to London from Chester and Nantwich and regularly from Stockport and other parts of Cheshire.¹¹⁹

Within the county itself communications were relatively easy as there was little high ground apart from the Mid-Cheshire Ridge, a discontinuous sandstone ridge which was widest towards the north, where part of Delamere Forest covered much of the high ground.¹²⁰ The other main area of forest was around Macclesfield, but both forests were much reduced in area from the 'barrier of dense woodland' which deterred early medieval settlement.¹²¹ The dominant geographical feature of northern and central Cheshire was, however, the Cheshire plain; the lowland area of the county which was interspersed with peat mosses.¹²² Both woodland and moss were slowly brought into cultivation by piecemeal enclosure which had begun early, and by the time of the Civil War the hedges which surrounded enclosed fields caused difficulties during military skirmishes.¹²³

A variety of soil types meant that there was no overall pattern of farming throughout the county although livestock farming was more prevalent than arable; 'in the Tudor period it was a grassland county, with no more land under the plough than was necessary to feed the family and the farmer's stock'.¹²⁴ According to William

¹¹⁹ John Taylor, *The Carriers Cosmographie* (London, 1637), not paginated but arranged alphabetically; for Stockport see 'Stopfoord'.

¹²⁰ Higham, *Origins of Cheshire*, p. 8. By the turn of the sixteenth century much of the ancient forest of Mondrem, mentioned in the Domesday Book, was subsumed into Delamere Forest, *VCH Cheshire*, ii, p. 172.

¹²¹ Dorothy Sylvester, 'Rural settlement in Cheshire: some Problems of Origin and Classification', *THSLC*, 101 (1950 for 1949), p. 2.

¹²² Higham, *Origins of Cheshire*, p. 10.

¹²³ C. Stella Davies, *The Agricultural History of Cheshire, 1750-1850* (Chetham Society, 3rd Series, 10, 1960), p. 54; R. N. Dore, *The Civil Wars in Cheshire* (Chester, 1966), p. 35.

¹²⁴ The quotation is from Joan Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England: I. Cheshire and Lancashire', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales volume IV: 1500-1640* (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 80-81; J. P. Dodd, 'The English landscape in Cheshire', *Cheshire History*, 15 (1985), pp. 12-18; J. P. Dodd, 'A View of Cheshire, 1570-1630: Livestock Farming, 1570-1603', *Cheshire History*, 21 (1988),

Smith, arable farming consisted mainly in the production of wheat and rye, together with oats, barley, pulses and French wheat.¹²⁵ Dairy farming tended to predominate in the north of the county while in the south cattle were reared and some bought in for fattening to sell on as beef.¹²⁶ The county was famous for the production of cheese: according to Camden, Cheshire cheeses were ‘of a most pleasing and delicate taste such as all England againe affourdeth not the like’.¹²⁷ However, although some cheese and butter was sold through local markets, very little was distributed to other areas of the country before about 1650.¹²⁸ Oxen were kept for farm work, particularly ploughing, and some sheep were grazed on the higher ground.¹²⁹ Many farming families were also involved in by-employments such as the production of linen or woollen cloth which at this time was a rural, rather than an urban, industry, unlike in other areas of England.¹³⁰ The predominance of cattle farming fostered the production of leather and leather goods,

pp. 46-51; J. P. Dodd, ‘A View of Cheshire, 1570-1630: Livestock Farming, 1604-20’, *Cheshire History*, 23 (1989), pp. 12-16; J. P. Dodd, ‘A View of Cheshire, 1570-1630: Conclusion’, *Cheshire History*, 24(1989), pp. 10-15; J. P. Dodd, ‘Wirral Agriculture, c.1550-1800’, *Cheshire History*, 28(1991), pp. 15-16; G. E. Fussell, ‘Four Centuries of Cheshire Farming Systems, 1500-1900’, *THSLC*, 106 (1955 for 1954), p. 57; Higham, *Origins of Cheshire* p. 14.

¹²⁵ Smith and Webb, *The Vale-royall of England*, p. 17; French wheat = buckwheat (*OED* online edition accessed 28 April 2013).

¹²⁶ Dodd, ‘Livestock Farming 1570-1603’, p. 49. Dodd drew his conclusions primarily from a study of probate inventories and his conclusions coincide with Foster’s study of cheese production, which centred on areas in the north of Cheshire, Charles F. Foster, *Cheshire Cheese and Farming in the North West in the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Northwich, 1998). Both these findings differ from Thirsk who concluded the opposite, based partly on a report of JPs of Nantwich hundred in 1623 concerning failure to enforce the tillage statute of 1597 as noted in S. Hindle, ‘Aspects of the Relationship of the State and Local Society in Early Modern England with Special Reference to Cheshire c.1590-1630’, p. 88. It may well be the case that cattle were kept both for dairying and fattening throughout the county.

¹²⁷ William Camden, *Britain* (translated by Philemon Holland) (London, 1610), p. 601.

¹²⁸ Foster, *Cheshire Cheese and Farming*, p. 6; see Part One *passim* for the development of the London market for Cheshire cheese in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries following the development of sea freight and a network of cheese factors. It does not seem that a substantial trade in butter developed at the same time, however, in the Tudor period it was considered a food to be eaten with a spoon see Alison Sim, *Masters and Servants in Tudor England* (Stroud, 2006), p. 51.

¹²⁹ Smith and Webb, *The Vale-royall of England*, p. 17.

¹³⁰ Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, pp. 41-6.

concentrated in towns, notably Chester, Congleton and Nantwich.¹³¹ The main industry, however, was salt production, which was concentrated in the wick towns of the Weaver valley.¹³² Salt was an extremely important commodity and had a variety of uses. Symbolically, each Sunday before Mass salt and water were blessed and at baptism salt was placed in the infant's mouth to impart wisdom.¹³³ Practically, it was one of the few methods of preserving food.¹³⁴

Cheshire was thus unusual in several ways; geographical and political factors had promoted independence, but not isolation. By the fifteenth century, men from Cheshire who made their careers elsewhere, notably in London, continued to be conscious of their place of origin and to look back to their home county both as a power base and as an object of their benevolence; they remained bound by what Philip Morgan has termed 'the ties of locality'.¹³⁵ Such men relied on networks of local connections, partly for advice and support and partly as a client base. The absence of any dominant noble family had resulted in the emergence of a powerful local gentry, and by the sixteenth century this group was becoming less monolithic. However, the vesting of the earldom of Chester in the crown meant that much local patronage came from the monarch, and so ambitious gentry were obliged to look to the centre for local advancement. All of these factors would be of relevance in the way that the Reformation in the county unfolded.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-7; Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, pp. 145-9; D. M. Woodward, 'The Chester Leather Industry, 1558-1625', *THSLC*, 119 (1968 for 1967), pp. 65-8.

¹³² Phillips and Smith, *Lancashire and Cheshire*, p. 50.

¹³³ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 280-1.

¹³⁴ Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism*, p. 122.

¹³⁵ Morgan, *War and Society*, pp. 137-8.

2

THE PRE-REFORMATION CHURCH IN CHESHIRE

In the introduction some unusual features of the political and social life of Cheshire in the early sixteenth century were explained. This chapter will examine four elements of pre-Reformation religion in Cheshire to establish whether religious life in the county also demonstrated any unusual characteristics. Firstly, the organisation of the church will be discussed. Important factors here were the relative independence of the archdeaconry of Chester and an atypical parochial structure. Secondly, an analysis of the county's parish clergy reveals the domination of clerical patronage by local gentry and monastic patrons, resulting in the predominance of local recruitment. The influence of the gentry on the county's monasteries was also significant, as an investigation of the county's religious houses will indicate. Latterly local faction became an increasingly important element in the control of the monasteries and also encroached upon their parochial patronage, extending gentry influence. However, because there were so few monastic institutions they were not generally an important feature of county religious life. Lastly, lay piety will be considered, although the reconstruction of lay religion is notoriously difficult.

Ecclesiastical Organisation

Prior to the formation of the diocese of Chester in August 1541, the county of Cheshire formed a part of the see of Coventry and Lichfield.¹ The collegiate church of St John in Chester had briefly served as a cathedral of the diocese. However, the threat of Welsh

¹ Ormerod, i, p. 95; R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria*, (London, 1958), p. 1.

invasion, among other considerations, which seem to have been more political than religious, led to the bishop's removal to Coventry by the end of the eleventh century.²



Figure 3 – Dioceses of England and Wales in the early sixteenth century.

² Douglas Jones, *The Church in Chester 1300-1540* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 7, 1957), pp. 4-5; Jane Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester 1275-1520* (Oxford, 2008), p. 74; John Doran, 'St Werburgh's, St John's and the *Liber Luciani De Laude Cestrie*', in Catherine A. M. Clarke (ed.), *Mapping the Medieval City: Space, Place and Identity in Chester c.1200-1600* (Cardiff, 2011, reprinted 2013), pp. 59-60.

The canons of the college of St John jealously preserved its title of cathedral and the bishops of Coventry and Lichfield continued to own a palace in Chester, retaining the additional title of Bishop of Chester which was used interchangeably until the formation of Chester diocese in the sixteenth century.³

The diocese of Coventry and Lichfield was the third largest in pre-Reformation England, after York and Lincoln (see Figure 3 above).⁴ Chester was the principal of the diocese's five archdeaconries and comprised the whole of Cheshire, together with Lancashire south of the Ribble plus some parishes in Flintshire in north Wales, mostly in Bangor deanery.⁵ There were no peculiars in Cheshire.⁶ The archdeaconry of Chester enjoyed a considerable degree of exemption from episcopal control under a series of agreements negotiated by successive archdeacons. Surviving versions of these agreements gave the archdeacons a variety of powers, including three separate agreements in 1449 which authorised the archdeacon to hear all causes save heresy, simony and incest, in return for payment to the bishop of an annual pension of £40.⁷ However, the archdeaconry remained subject to the bishop's supervision and there were episcopal visitations of parishes and religious houses in the early sixteenth century.⁸ In

³ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 6; Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 5; Ormerod, i, pp. 93-94; P. Heath, 'The Medieval Archdeaconry and Tudor Bishopric of Chester', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 20 (2) (1969), p. 244; A. Hamilton Thompson, 'Diocesan Organisation in the Middle Ages: Archdeacons and Rural Deans', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 29 (1943), p. 165.

⁴ Tim Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 3.

⁵ *Notitia Cestriensis*, p. 19.

⁶ The peculiar of Hawarden, which was in the jurisdiction of its incumbent, was in Chester deanery but it was situated in Flintshire; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, vi, p. 81, transcript of *Notitia Cestriensis* for Hawarden; Alan Dyer and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, 2005), p. 78.

⁷ Heath, 'The Medieval Archdeaconry and Tudor Bishopric', pp. 245-6.

⁸ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 2. Unfortunately no parochial visitation records survive.

1535 Rowland Lee commented that ‘the Archdeacon there taketh himself as Ordinary and will doo as it pleaseth him sometymes’.⁹ Although cases could be cited to the archdeacon of Chester’s court sitting outside the county, it seems that without royal support bishops were unable to cite Cheshire offenders to any other ecclesiastical court outside the county palatine. Efforts to do so were firmly resisted citing palatine privilege thus, in Peter Heath’s view, identifying the political independence of the county with ecclesiastical freedom from outside interference.¹⁰ The local view that palatine privilege was a defence against being cited outside the county was enduring. In the 1570s the curate of Weaverham complained to the Chester Exchequer that his summons to appear in York was unlawful as it was outside the county.¹¹

As the senior archdeaconry of the diocese, Chester had become a reward for royal service. It was therefore normal for later archdeacons to be non-resident.¹² The last pre-Reformation archdeacon was William Knight, a career diplomat. He was appointed archdeacon of Chester in 1522 and in 1526 was appointed royal secretary, in that capacity he travelled to Italy in connection with Henry VIII’s quest for a papal annulment for his first marriage. He was rewarded with a number of ecclesiastical preferments, and he ended his days as bishop of Bath and Wells.¹³ Knight’s two

⁹ Rowland Lee, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, to Thomas Cromwell, 31 October 1535, *LP* ix, 712; TNA: PRO SP 1/98, f.96.

¹⁰ Heath, ‘The Medieval Archdeaconry and Tudor Bishopric’, pp. 244-9. However, as part of Lancashire was the most northerly area of the diocese, Christopher Haigh saw the question of geography, rather than politics, as the key to the devolution of power to the archdeacon, Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 1.

¹¹ TNA: PRO CHES 15/3; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxi, pp. 18-19.

¹² Thompson, ‘Archdeacons and Rural Deans’, p. 156.

¹³ Richard Clark, ‘Knight, William (1475/6–1547)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 11 July 2009); Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 51.

predecessors as archdeacon were John Veysey (1499 to 1515) and Cuthbert Tunstall (1515 to 1522).¹⁴

Successive absentee archdeacons of Chester entrusted much of their daily administrative business to a series of chancellors or ‘officials’. In November 1522 William Knight appointed to this role Adam Beconsall, a canon of St Asaph, described by Christopher Haigh as ‘something of an ecclesiastical trouble-shooter’ who ‘specialised in difficult and delicate tasks’ but was also Cromwell’s man.¹⁵ His commission gave him power to deal with most cases in the archdeacon’s court and to conduct visitations. Additionally, however, he turned his attention to the administrative problems of the area and in an effort to enforce attendance at his court held sessions in three centres in south Lancashire, as well as in Chester, and eventually in 1523 or 1524 established a second court at Bury, under a commissary. Haigh concluded that this new system did not last because the commissary was often absent.¹⁶ Beconsall resigned to assist in the visitation of the Welsh religious houses in 1535.¹⁷

He carried out a visitation of the archdeaconry, probably late in 1534 or early in 1535, and submitted to Cromwell a lengthy report on his findings.¹⁸ The report concentrated on the moral failings of the local gentry especially in the ‘cuntrie in

¹⁴ Ormerod, i, p. 115; *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese*, pp. 12-14 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=139>> (online edition accessed 11 July 2009) gives the date of Veysey’s resignation and Tunstall’s appointment as 1519. Nicholas Orme, ‘Veysey, John (c.1464–1554)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 11 July 2009); D. G. Newcombe, ‘Tunstall, Cuthbert (1474–1559)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 11 July 2009).

¹⁵ Beconsall was also known as Adam Beconsaw. Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (paperback edition, Cardiff, 1999), p. 82; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 2-3. Reports from Beconsall to Cromwell on the situation in Cheshire in 1535 may be found at *LP* viii, 495; *LP* viii, 496.

¹⁶ Thompson, ‘Archdeacons and Rural Deans’, pp. 153-4; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 2-4.

¹⁷ Anthony N. Shaw, ‘The *Compendium Compertorum* and the Making of the Suppression Act of 1536’ (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), pp. 156-65.

¹⁸ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, viii, p. 48; *LP* viii, 496(1); TNA: PRO SP 1/91, ff. 168-172v. The visitation returns themselves have not survived.

specyall callyd chyshyre'.¹⁹ The tenor of his findings suggests that he felt that diocesan supervision was lax. Offences were allowed to continue 'withowte correccyon of the byshop or archedekon', and the archdeacon's officials allowed offenders to 'yerly compound the [sic] offycyall for a small somme without monycion to leaue thar noghty lyuing'.²⁰ Gentry influence was also demonstrated by Beconsall's complaint that these offences were 'yet not reformede, for I ne durst procede to reformacion for fere of complayntes'.²¹

In the absence of successive archdeacons the role of the rural deans also developed significantly. There were seven of them in Cheshire at this time.²² The duties of rural deans seem to have varied widely between dioceses. Traditionally they were elected by the clergy of the deanery, an area covering about ten parishes, to oversee the morals of the clergy, hearing their confessions and visiting them when sick. The rural deans were also required to communicate the bishops' mandates at monthly meetings and to travel to the cathedral church to collect holy oils at Easter.²³ The method of choosing the candidates varied. In Bath and Wells, for example, the appointment was annual, based upon the benefice held and was often seen as a burden, sometimes delegated for payment.²⁴ In the archdeaconry of Chester, however, the office was viewed as a source of profit and by the 1520s the deaneries were retained by the

¹⁹ TNA: PRO SP 1/91, f. 168.

²⁰ TNA: PRO SP 1/91, f. 168v; *LP* viii, 495; TNA: PRO SP 1/91, f. 166.

²¹ *LP* viii, 496(2); TNA: PRO SP 1/91, f. 172.

²² The rural deaneries were Macclesfield, Middlewich, Nantwich, Frodsham, Wirral, Chester and Broxton (subsequently renamed Malpas); *VCH Cheshire*, iii, pp. 10-11.

²³ Thompson, 'Archdeacons and Rural Deans', pp. 185-6.

²⁴ Robert W. Dunning, 'Rural Deans in England in the Fifteenth Century', *Historical Research*, 40 (102) 1967, pp. 208-9.

archdeacon and leased out either for lives or years, often to poor quality deputies.²⁵ At this time, rights of the rural deans of Chester included the right to prove wills of the majority of those who died with goods worth less than £40.²⁶ Probate hearings were held by rural deans in various parish churches and the records were often retained in private hands and are ‘generally not well preserved.’²⁷ This is one reason why so few wills of the county’s residents are extant.²⁸

The rural deans of Chester did have certain disciplinary powers, although these and their administrative duties were extended following the creation of the new see of Chester in 1541.²⁹ By that time the rural deans had grown accustomed to exercising a great deal of independent power; this tradition of independence was to prove problematic when the bishops of Chester later sought to use the deans to enforce any religious reform with which the individual dean did not agree.³⁰ There were also complaints about corruption and abuses in the probate of wills.³¹ When William

²⁵ Much later, under bishop Bridgeman (appointed in 1619) the deanery of Middlewich even ‘fell, by administration’ (presumably under an intestacy) to a woman and it was only when ‘she was taken in adultery, on a Good Friday, in ... Chester and publicly punished for it’ that she could be evicted. William Dansey, *Horae Decanicae Rurales*, vol. ii (London, 1835), p. 379; Christopher Haigh, ‘Finance and Administration in a New Diocese: Chester, 1541-1641’, in R. O’Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church of England, 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), p. 159.

²⁶ *Notitia Cestriensis*, p. 26; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 11.

²⁷ Anne Tarver, *Church Court Records: An introduction for Family and Local Historians*, (Chichester, 1995), p. 56. I would also suggest that copies of the wills may also have been kept in the parish chest and thus lost with other ephemera.

²⁸ It has been suggested that the few survivals are mainly due to the comprehensive archives maintained by gentry families with the principal aim of recording their title to the lands to which they laid claim; Philip Morgan, *War and Society in Medieval Cheshire* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 34, 1987), p. 115; Deborah Marsh, ‘“I see by sizt of evidence”: Information Gathering in Late Medieval Cheshire’, in Diana Dunn (ed.), *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1996), pp. 71-92.

²⁹ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 11; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212. This was more of a problem in Lancashire than in Cheshire, where there is little evidence of deans’ recalcitrance.

³¹ Michael J. Bennett, *Community, Class and Careerism: Cheshire and Lancashire Society in the Age of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 45.

Chaderton, then bishop of Chester, drew up his visitation articles 1581 one article concerned connivance by rural deans in omitting leases from inventories.³²

In general, the primary point of contact between the local community and the ecclesiastical establishment, and the focus for spiritual loyalty, was the parish church.³³ Cheshire, however, lacked an ‘adequate’ parochial structure.³⁴ Dorothy Sylvester has described how township and parish were co-terminous throughout most of south-eastern England, while this settlement pattern was not general in the greater part of north and north-western England.³⁵ These two ‘major geographical divisions in parochial structure’ are separated by what she called the ‘Parish Line’. To the north of the Parish Line, Cheshire was one of the counties with the highest average and absolute number of townships per parish.³⁶ This situation is reflected in the relative size of its parishes (see Figure 4 above). In the north of the county were two of the largest parishes in England in terms of the number of townships they contained. These were Great Budworth with thirty-five townships and Prestbury with thirty-two. Such large, sprawling parishes were not confined to the north of the county, however, as the third largest parish in the county, Malpas, comprising twenty-four townships, was on the southern border.³⁷ The size of these parishes made them difficult to administer; Prestbury, for example, covered

³² Rev. F. Sanders (ed.) ‘Bishop Chadderton’s Visitation Articles’, *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 13 (1907), p. 22.

³³ D. M. Palliser, ‘Introduction: the Parish in Perspective’, in S. J. Wright (ed.), *Parish, Church and People. Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350-1750* (London 1988), p. 11.

³⁴ Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village: Terling 1525 to 1700* (paperback Oxford edition, Oxford, 1995), p. 11.

³⁵ Dorothy Sylvester, *The Rural Landscape of the Welsh Borderland: A Study in Historical Geography* (London, 1969), p. 165.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, Figure 18; pp. 166-7.

³⁷ Dorothy Sylvester, ‘Parish and Township in Cheshire and North-east Wales’, *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 54 (1967), pp. 27, 29; by the sixteenth century Malpas was a divided rectory.

more than 65,000 acres and Great Budworth more than 35,000.³⁸ The Puritan minister, Adam Martindale, while curate at Rostherne which was contiguous with Great Budworth, complained in the mid-seventeenth century that ‘the minister of Great Budworth and I had such vast parishes to go through, that multitudes of the people would be dead, in all probability, ere we could goe once over them’.³⁹ Contemporaries recognised that the parish structure of Cheshire was unusual and as the civil functions of the parish increased later in the sixteenth century conflicting interests of the constituent townships became increasingly apparent.⁴⁰

Enumerating the county’s parishes at this time is not straightforward and calculations vary widely. F. I. Dunn, erstwhile county archivist, commented that the ‘situation “where parishes were especially large and their numerous dependent chapels were of uncertain status and fluctuating existence” has defeated several writers.’⁴¹ Many chapels had all the attributes of a parish church and some contemporaries found the situation confusing. In 1566 a Consistory Court deponent in a case involving the chapelry of Daresbury

saieth that he knoweth not ... what a parish Church is biecause he knowes not the certen diffinition of the word but saieth that certen Townshippes repaire to

Dersbury church or Chappell ... he hath knowne and sene ... the Sacramentes of

³⁸ A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips (eds), *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (Chester, 2002), p. 110.

³⁹ F. Parkinson (ed.), *Life of Adam Martindale* (Chetham Society, old series, 4, 1845), p.122.

⁴⁰ The matter was especially commented upon in relation to complaints that justices did not fairly distribute fines collected for failure to attend church. Local justices were accused ‘of using the fines they collected from prosperous villages under good lords to relieve their own tenants in villages which they had reduced to beggary by their racking of rents’; Joan Kent, ‘Attitudes of Members of the House of Commons to the Regulation of “Personal Conduct” in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 46(113) (1973), p. 53. Although this point was raised in a debate of 1606, some years after the focus of this dissertation, the claim was based on actions of justices under earlier statutes.

⁴¹ F. I. Dunn, *The Ancient Parishes, Townships and Chapeltries of Cheshire* (Chester, 1987), p. 5. The quotation by Dunn is from *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 37.

the Lordes Supper and baptisme mynistred Marriagis solempnized and this deponent hath hard the bans askid in dersbury church or chapell ... and the dead buried there ... and also he this deponent hath paid certen tieth of hempe to the Curate there or to his fermor.⁴²

Daresbury was, however, not formally recognised as a parish until the nineteenth century.⁴³ Conversely, some of the county's ancient parishes which had been wholly impropriated were relatively insignificant and were understood by the compilers of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* to be chapelries. Thus, for example, under St John's college in Chester were listed 'capell' de Geldon Sutton' and Shocklach 'cum capella Sce' Edithe'.⁴⁴ The rectory of Guilden Sutton had been annexed to St John's in 1318 and Shocklach, where the church itself was dedicated to St Edith, had been a parish since at least the twelfth century.⁴⁵ Both were therefore ancient parishes, and presumably retained that status in 1535 as they were still considered to be parishes in the eighteenth century.⁴⁶ Five parishes are not mentioned in the Cheshire section of the *Valor* at all.⁴⁷

The *Victoria County History* recorded that the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* listed 63 benefices with cure of souls in 1535.⁴⁸ Alan Kreider gave the total number of parishes as

⁴² CALS EDC 2/8, f. 3.

⁴³ Ormerod, iii, p. 735.

⁴⁴ *Valor*, v, p. 201.

⁴⁵ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 70; N. J. Higham, *The Origins of Cheshire* (Manchester, 1993), p. 134.

⁴⁶ *Notitia Cestriensis*, pp.133, 194-5.

⁴⁷ These five were the three medieval Chester parishes of St Martin, St Michael and St Olave which were served by curates; Burton in Wirral deanery which was impropriated by the Hospital of St John in Lichfield; Baddiley in Nantwich Deanery which was impropriated by Combermere Abbey and Stoke in Wirral Deanery. The parish of Stoke is sometimes spelled 'Stoak', but this seems to be a Victorian affectation to differentiate it from the industrial area of Stoke-on-Trent.

⁴⁸ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 7; *Valor*, v, pp. 201-18. According to my calculations the Cheshire cures listed in *Valor* comprised 44 rectories and 19 vicarages, to which should be added the colleges of St John's in Chester and Bunbury, both of which were also parish churches. This makes a total of 65, the figure used by Kreider. There were in addition 16 wholly impropriated parishes staffed by curates. *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 7, however, mentions 20 vicarages. I am not sure why our totals differ.



Figure 5 – Examples of the wide variety of chapels in Cheshire: from the top Marton, originally a chantry in the parish of Prestbury; remains of 13th century wall paintings in the chapel of St Mary de Castro in Chester Castle (extra parochial) depict apocryphal scenes from the life of the Virgin Mary; Nantwich, a parochial chapel of Acton, where the parish church was comparatively insignificant. Although the chapels at Marton and Nantwich were modified after their original construction, the comparative status of the buildings is clear.

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65 in 1548.⁴⁹ John Morrill referred to 70 parishes in the mid-seventeenth century.⁵⁰ Smith and Webb in their seventeenth-century survey of Cheshire calculated that there were about 125 'Churches or Chappels ... whereof 87 are Parish-churches'.⁵¹ Using a variety of sources I have calculated the number of parishes in Cheshire in 1535 at 81 (see Table 1 below).⁵² This may be compared with the diocese of Chichester, roughly conterminous with Sussex (approximately one and a half times the size of Cheshire) with 272 parishes at this time and also with the diocese of Lincoln, which had 1,736 parishes and, with an area of 7,265 square miles, was about seven times the size of Cheshire.⁵³ Nine of the county's parishes were in the city of Chester, leaving only 72 parishes to serve the rest of the county.

One solution to the logistical difficulties inherent in the parish structure was the development of chapelries.⁵⁴ There was a wide variety of types of chapel in the county (see Figure 5 above). Many chapels were founded as chantries, such as those at Marton,

⁴⁹ Alan Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge, Mass.; London, 1979), p. 16. He gives as his source the chantry certificate (TNA: PRO E 301/8) but I have not been able to reconcile this figure to the certificate. His figure may be derived from *Valor* as set out in note 48 above. His figure has proved enduring and is used, for example, by Susan Guinn-Chipman, *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London, 2013), p. 44.

⁵⁰ J. S. Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660: County Government and Society during the English Revolution* (Oxford, 1974), p. 6.

⁵¹ William Smith and William Webb, *The Vale-royall of England or the County Palatine of Chester* (London, 1656), p. 16.

⁵² Two of these parishes, Lymm and Malpas, were divided and one chapelry became a parish later in the reign of Henry VIII. This was Whitegate, which was made a parish by Act of Parliament. It must be noted, however, that the status of some parishes and chapelries is not entirely certain; Dyer and Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns*, p. 75. My list of the county's clergy of 1578 in the appendix names the parishes which I understand to have existed at that time.

⁵³ Roger B. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex: a Study of the Enforcement of the Religious Settlement, 1558-1603* (Leicester, 1969), p. 15; Margaret Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: the Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland, 1521-1547* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 4.

⁵⁴ Nicholas Orme has pointed out that a chapel could be part of a larger unit, demarcated by walls or screens such as a Lady chapel, and many chantry chapels were of this type; Nicholas Orme, 'Church and Chapel in Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 6, (1996), p. 76. However, the discussion of the Cheshire chapels which follows is concerned with free-standing buildings 'regarded as something less than or different from a parish church.' (The definition is from Canon J. S. Purvis, *Dictionary of Ecclesiastical Terms* (London, 1962), p. 41).

Pott and Woodhead. The motives for the foundation of chapelries were not always religious, however. In the parish of Prestbury, Humphrey Newton constructed a chapel

Table 1 – Early sixteenth-century parishes and chapelries of Cheshire.⁵⁵

Deanery	Parish churches	Parochial chapels	Chapels of ease	Free chapels	Extra-parochial	Sum of all types
Chester	22	3	2	-	3	30
Frodsham	9	5	14	-	-	28
Macclesfield	10	4	12	2	-	28
Malpas	7	-	2	1	-	10
Middlewich	9	4	2	1	-	16
Nantwich	9	3	2	-	-	14
Wirral	15	-	1	-	1	17
Total	81	19	35	4	4	143

at Newton in an attempt to elevate the status of his holdings there to that of a township and to refute claims to dependency on Butley, coincidentally improving his claim to rights over the heath previously held as common land.⁵⁶ Gilds were also active in the construction of chapels, especially in towns. In Chester a chapel was constructed for the gild of St Nicholas within the precincts of the abbey. This chapel was shared for some time by the parishioners of St Oswald's who had previously worshipped in an aisle of

⁵⁵ The sources for these figures are Sir Peter Leycester, *Historical Antiquities in Two Books: The First Treating in General of Great-Brettain and Ireland, the Second Containing Particular Remarks Concerning Cheshire ...* (London, 1673), pp. 192-9 supplemented by Dunn, *The Ancient Parishes of Cheshire*; Ormerod, i, p. 108 and Raymond Richards, *Old Cheshire Churches* (Didsbury, 1973). This calculation of the number of parishes may still be open to debate, however. Whitegate is included here as a parochial chapelry. It is quite possible that there were more chapels in regular use than those included in this table, since some chapelries were used for a time, abandoned and then re-opened. Domestic chapels are not included unless, like Cholmondeley, they are known to have been widely used by the general public.

⁵⁶ Deborah Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536): An Early Tudor Gentleman* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 93-100. (Youngs, however, states that this was 'a remarkable attempt' and uncommon in pre-Reformation England.)

the nave of the abbey church.⁵⁷ In Nantwich, the church building, which was a chapelry of Acton parish (see Figure 5 above), was mainly funded by the town gild. There were six chantry chapels in the church, including altars maintained by The Holy Cross gild and St George gild. The wealth of the town of Nantwich was reflected in the chapel building which was larger and more elaborate than its mother church but, despite attempts on the part of the population of Nantwich to assert their independence from Acton, Nantwich did not achieve parochial status until the nineteenth century.⁵⁸

Chapels often became the focus of local pride and became more important and relevant to the laity than the distant parish church, although visits to the mother church remained at least an annual requirement.⁵⁹ A similar parochial structure obtained in Lancashire and sometimes gave rise to conflicts of loyalty fostering a desire for independence and resentment of what was seen as interference by the parish incumbent or wardens.⁶⁰ The continuing importance of chapels to Cheshire testators is reflected in wills. In 1546 Richard Massey gave 2s 6d to Ringway Chapel ‘to the menteynyng of godes serysse & ... to be prayed for at the chappel’, while in 1576 Peter Booth left 6s 8d ‘to the reparacions off bosley chapell’. Neither testator left anything to his parish church.⁶¹

Smith and Webb, commenting in the seventeenth century on the preponderance of chapels, thought it ‘a diffused [sic] thing, that most of the Market-towns in this

⁵⁷ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 44; R. V. H. Burne, *The Monks of Chester: the History of St Werburgh's Abbey* (London, 1962), p. 23; M. R. V. Heale, ‘Monastic-Parochial churches in Late Medieval England’, in Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (eds), *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donington, 2006), p. 62.

⁵⁸ Dorothy Sylvester, *A History of Cheshire* (Second edition) (London and Chichester, 1980), p. 59; Eric Garton, *Tudor Nantwich: A Study of Life in Nantwich in the Sixteenth Century* (Cheshire, 1983), pp. 14-17; Ormerod, iii, p. 444; leaflet available in St Mary's church, Nantwich 25 May 2007 (unpaginated).

⁵⁹ Kitching, ‘Church and Chapelry in Sixteenth Century England’, p. 283.

⁶⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 31-2.

⁶¹ CALS WC 1546 Richard Massey; CALS WS 1576 Peter Booth.

Countrey, although they have fair Churches of themselves, yet are they accounted but Chappels'. This certainly applied to the leading market towns of Nantwich, Northwich, Macclesfield and Congleton and caused resentment on the part of their developing municipal authorities.⁶² Sir Peter Leycester described several different types of chapel in the county. He defined chapels of ease as having been built by several families of a township or townships, but not having a licence for baptism or burial. Parochial chapels he considered had been constructed by a 'more numerous multitude' and did have 'liberty for Baptism and Burial' as well as 'all the Rites and Ceremonies as the Mother-Church or Parish Church hath, except the Tythes, so that indeed they are as lesser Parishes created within the greater for the benefit of the Neighbourhood.'⁶³ Some domestic chapels, such as Cholmondeley, he also regarded as chapels of ease. An additional category, not defined by Leycester, was that of the 'free chapels', such as Harthill and Little Budworth. This term did not cover the same type of establishment as the royal free chapels of other counties but was intended to convey a greater degree of independence than the parochial chapelry without full parish status.⁶⁴ There were also a number of areas outside the parish system and some of these extra-parochial areas were served by chapels.⁶⁵ Table 1 above gives my calculation of the total number of parishes and chapelries in the pre-Reformation county as 143, of which 62 (just over 40 per cent) were chapels. It is noticeable that the greatest concentration of chapelries was in the two deaneries of Frodsham and Macclesfield in the north of the county, where most of the largest parishes were situated (see Table 1 and Figure 4 above). Nicholas Orme and

⁶² Smith and Webb, *The Vale-royall of England*, p. 45.

⁶³ Leycester, *Historical antiquities*, pp. 192-9.

⁶⁴ Dunn, *The Ancient Parishes of Cheshire*, p. 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 27, 35; Dyer and Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns*, p. 75; Ormerod, ii, pp. 107-112.

Gervase Rosser have seen the function of chapels partly as the provision of variety and choice in worship.⁶⁶ The distribution of chapelries in Cheshire, however, suggests that their construction is more likely to have represented not so much a matter of choice as of exigency.

The ecclesiastical structure of the pre-Reformation archdeaconry of Chester, in particular the county of Cheshire, demonstrated a tradition of independence from episcopal authority. Although it was not the most remote area of the large diocese, it was some distance from the main episcopal seat at Lichfield and thus from central control. Adam Beconsall reported that discipline was lax and officials were corrupt. The political structure of Cheshire, as a County Palatine, fostered the local view that residents could not be cited to appear outside the county. Successive non-resident archdeacons generally resisted episcopal interference, relying on the series of agreements to replace the bishop's usual jurisdiction with payment of a pension. The rural deans were also accustomed to exercise considerable autonomy, also in return for payment. Finally, the complex parochial structure made it difficult for the central authorities to employ the parish as a basis for implementing change. Some chapels had become virtually independent from parochial interference and competed with their mother church for the loyalty of the congregation. The fluctuating status of some made for genuine uncertainty about jurisdiction. Altogether, the county did not present a promising environment for parish-based imposition of religious change.

⁶⁶ Orme, 'Church and Chapel in Medieval England', p. 102; Gervase Rosser, 'Parochial Conformity and Voluntary Religion in Late-Medieval England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 6th series, 1, (1991), pp.182-3, 189.

Secular Clergy

Michael Zell has summarised the traditional model of the sixteenth-century clergy as ‘a two-tiered body, composed of an “upper clergy” of bishops, pluralists in the royal service and diocesan officials, and a “lower clergy” comprehending the remainder, occasionally described as an ecclesiastical proletariat.’ In considering the clergy of Kent during the 1540s and early 1550s he suggested that a hierarchy of three, rather than two, levels is more appropriate. His model added a stratum of unbeneficed clergy below the beneficed parochial clergy which he divided between the top 5 per cent, comprising church or government leaders, and the remainder of the beneficed.⁶⁷ A study of the clergy of Cheshire in the early sixteenth century, however, reveals a more nuanced picture strongly influenced by local and family connections.

Haigh has suggested that parochial incomes in Lancashire at this time were among the highest in England. This was because incomes from the county’s large multi-township parishes had grown in line with the increase in population and meant that the county’s livings were ‘lucrative prizes’. Despite this, many vacancies were filled by local men because one third of the patronage was in local hands.⁶⁸ Although many Cheshire parishes were also large, they were not as profitable as the Lancashire livings. Haigh found that in Lancashire, according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, fewer than half of the parishes were worth less than £15 *per annum* and under a third less than £10. He compared this with the national average proportions of three quarters and one half

⁶⁷ Michael L. Zell, ‘The Personnel of the Clergy in Kent, in the Reformation Period’, *The English Historical Review*, 89 (1974), p. 513, for the two-tier model Zell refers to the work of A.G. Dickens, H. Maynard Smith and A. Hamilton Thompson. Other historians such as Felicity Heal also advocate a three-tier model, Felicity Heal, ‘Economic Problems of the Clergy’, in Felicity Heal and Rosemary O’Day (eds), *Church and Society in England, Henry VIII to James I* (London, 1977), p. 102.

⁶⁸ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 23-6.

respectively.⁶⁹ In Cheshire of the 65 listed rectories and vicarages, 38 (about three-fifths) were worth less than £15 a year and 23 (just over one third) were worth £10 or less (see Table 2 below). The table below also shows that in Cheshire there were more

Table 2 – Value of Cheshire livings according to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.⁷⁰

Annual value	Number		Percentage of total		Total	Percentage of overall total
	rectories	vicarages	rectories	vicarages		
over £30	9	-	19.6%	-	9	13.8%
£25 to £30	3	-	6.5%	-	3	4.6%
£20 to £25	6	2	13.0%	10.5%	8	12.3%
£15 to £20	4	3	8.7%	15.8%	7	10.8%
£10 to £15	9	6	19.6%	31.6%	15	23.1%
£5 to £10	14	8	30.4%	42.1%	22	33.8%
Under £5	1	-	2.2%	-	1	1.5%
Total	46	19			65	

rectories than vicarages among the poorest and wealthiest parishes, whereas the proportion was much the same for parishes in the middle range of income. Peter Heath suggested that, for the pre-Reformation cleric in England, an income of between £10 and £15 would have been desirable and reasonable, but that half of all livings were not

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 23; comparative national figures from Peter Heath, *English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), p. 173.

⁷⁰ Values derived from *Valor*, v, pp. 201-18. The total parish livings included here do not include the colleges of Bunbury or St John's in Chester, but do include each half of the two divided rectories. As discussed above, the *Valor* does not include all the parishes of Cheshire.

worth £10, the amount which Cranmer held to be an adequate clerical income.⁷¹ As about two-thirds of Cheshire rectories and vicarages produced income of more than £10 the county was thus better-off than the national average.

It was officially recognised by the 1529 Pluralities Act that one parish yielding £8 a year was insufficient to live on, so it was discounted, if received first.⁷² The practice of uniting two small, poor parishes in close proximity, which prevailed in other parts of the country following the 1529 Act, does not seem to have been widespread in Cheshire, probably because there were so few parishes.⁷³ Sixteen Cheshire parishes were worth less than £8 in 1535 but ten of these were held by pluralists with a variety of other church appointments, so that just six of the county's incumbents held only one parish which realised income below the accepted poverty level.⁷⁴ The will of one of these men survives, that of Robert Danald of Handley who died by December 1578, having held the parish for nearly fifty years. He died owning an interest in a house and with amounts owing to him from thirty-three debtors totalling £7 16s 7d. The debts arose from amounts due for tithes, for produce sold, arrears of rent and small cash advances. He therefore must have had sources of personal income to supplement his clerical revenue. He bequeathed to his curate 'my cobborde which standeth in my

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Bowker, *The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland*, p. 118.

⁷³ e.g. in Lincoln, Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln 1495-1520* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 102. Tim Cooper's suggestion that Richard Warburton (or Werburton) held a moiety of Lymm and the parish of Pulford simultaneously is unlikely as the rector of Pulford by that name died in 1545 whereas the rector of the moiety of Lymm was still alive in 1548; Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 68; CCEd person ID 34322 (accessed 30 September 2010) for Pulford and CALS EDV 2/3, f. 8 for Lymm. These two parishes were, in any case, some miles apart.

⁷⁴ These six parishes were the rectories of Wistaston (£4 0s 0d), Swettenham (£5 1s 2d), Coddington (£5 4s 1d), Handley (£6 0s 3d) and Pulford (£6 15s 10d) and the vicarage of Great Budworth (£6 10s 0d) the vicar of Budworth was, however, a canon of Norton priory.

chambore' so must have had sufficient income to fund an assistant's wages, if only as he got older.⁷⁵

The majority of the county's parishes were held in plurality, however, and on the basis of surname evidence two-thirds were held by men of Cheshire origin, with a further one-sixth from neighbouring counties.⁷⁶ Probably 25, more than one third, of the county's rectories and vicarages were held by graduate pluralists, many with high positions in the ecclesiastical administration. Two parishes were held by careerists, considerable pluralists who were not from the area. These were two of the wealthiest livings in the county: Mottram-in-Longdendale, worth £32 3s 8d, and Bebington, worth £30 13s 4d. Mottram was situated in the remote 'panhandle' of the north-east and was held by the Italian, Peter Vannes, diplomat and Latin secretary to Henry VIII, with 'sufficient power and influence to acquire several ecclesiastical livings in England' by 1530.⁷⁷ He had been appointed to the rectory by Henry VIII in 1521, this being one of the county's few royal parish preferments.⁷⁸ His appointment illustrates how a network of connections at court interconnected with regional influence. By the 1530s Peter Vannes was papal collector and one of his deputies was Richard Gwent, dean of the Arches and a royal chaplain. Gwent was the rector of Bebington in Wirral Deanery and had been vicar general of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, where he continued to

⁷⁵ CALS WS 1578 Robert Dannalde.

⁷⁶ This argument is based on a total of sixty-five livings, as in Table 2. Surname evidence is used with the caveat that it is not always infallible, and is intended here as a rough guide. Although several men held more than one of the county's livings each living has been counted separately here.

⁷⁷ L. E. Hunt, 'Vannes, Peter (c.1488–1563)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 30 September 2010).

⁷⁸ *LP*, iii, 1756.

hold a prebend.⁷⁹ As royal chaplain he was an associate of the Cheshire brothers John and Peter Brereton, both of whom held a number of appointments in the county.⁸⁰

Other graduate pluralist clergy were local men. These included Henry Trafford, who held a master's degree in divinity and was presented to the family living of Wilmslow in 1517 by his brother.⁸¹ By 1535 he also held the Yorkshire livings of Bolton Percy and Sigglesothorne.⁸² In 1529 he had been appointed Chancellor of York and cannot have been permanently resident in any of his parishes.⁸³ However, it would seem that he favoured Wilmslow as he rebuilt the chancel in 1522, including the roof where the ceiling still bears his initials on the bosses.⁸⁴ This expensive work at Wilmslow may be compared with his apparent neglect of Sigglesothorne, where the chancel was said to be in decay in 1575.⁸⁵ Henry Trafford also chose to be buried in Wilmslow church, where his effigy, tonsured and dressed in ecclesiastical robes, still

⁷⁹ TNA: PRO E 135/7/28; C 1/801/17; Glanmor Williams, 'Gwent, Richard (*d.* 1543), *DNB* (online edition accessed 30 September 2010).

⁸⁰ In 1535 John Brereton held the rectory of Christleton and a moiety of Malpas; *Valor*, v, pp. 207, 212; Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 176. Peter Brereton held the rectory of Heswall, a canonry at St John's College in Chester and the chantry of the Blessed Virgin at St John's College; *Valor*, v, pp. 213, 202; Ormerod, i, 313; Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 166.

⁸¹ Ormerod, iii, p. 595; Earwaker, i, p. 88. James Croston, *County Families of Lancashire and Cheshire* (London, 1887), p. 180. Despite the claim of Cooper (*The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 16) and, more tentatively, Peter Heath (*Bishop Geoffrey Blythe's Visitations c.1515-1525*, Staffordshire Record Society, Collections for a History of Staffordshire, 4th series, 7 (1973), p. 106) it is unlikely that he was the chaplain of that name in the collegiate church in Manchester who was responsible for examining ordinands there in August 1524. According to the history of the fellows of the college, that Henry Trafford had been appointed a chaplain at Manchester by 1484 and the rector of Wilmslow of that name cannot have been born until after 1485; F. R. Raines, *The Fellows of the Collegiate Church of Manchester*, ed. Frank Renaud (Chetham Society, new series, 21, 1891), p. 26 and Editorial Prefix unpaginated. Henry Trafford's age is extrapolated from that of his eldest brother, Edmund, aged 28 and above in 1513 and thus born in 1485, or perhaps earlier; Croston, *County Families*, p. 183. It is, of course, not impossible that two men of the same name were subsequently chaplains at the college at the same time.

⁸² *Valor*, v, pp. 215, 31, 119.

⁸³ 'Chancellors', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1300-1541: 6: Northern Province (York, Carlisle and Durham)* (1963), pp. 9-10. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=135>> (online edition accessed 22 April 2010).

⁸⁴ Earwaker, i, pp. 66, 88-9.

⁸⁵ 'North Division: Sigglesothorne', *A History of the County of York East Riding: Volume 7: Holderness Wapentake, Middle and North Divisions* (2002), pp. 359-373. <<http://www.british->



Figure 6 – Effigy of Henry Trafford in Wilmslow parish church and roof bosses bearing his initials. In 1572 the inscription, now largely illegible, could be read as ‘*Hic jacet corpus Mri Henrici Trafart sacre Theologie Doctoris licentiat’ quod’cancellarii metropolit’ ecclie Ebor’ et Rectoris de Bolton psy Rectoris etiam ecclie de Siglisthorne et istius ecclie qui obiit primo die mensis Augusti ano dni M^occcc^oxxx^ovij^o cujus aie omnipotens deus sit ppiciet’.*⁸⁶

Photographs copyright Patricia Cox 2013.

history.ac.uk/report.aspx?pubid=54> (online edition accessed 22 April 2010). Trafford paid a deacon £1 6s 8d a year to carry out his duties at Sigglesthorne.

⁸⁶ The 1572 details of the inscription are from BL Harley 2151, f. 75, since the wording on the monument itself is now barely legible. (Here lies the body of Master Henry Trafford, licensed doctor of Theology, once chancellor of the metropolitan church of York and rector of Bolton Percy, Sigglesthorne and of this church who died on the first day of August 1537, on whose soul may Almighty God show mercy).

lies with his head on a large book with broad clasps, ‘probably the Bible’ (see Figure 6 above).⁸⁷

Some of the graduate parish clergy held positions in the diocesan hierarchy of Coventry and Lichfield. Nicholas Darington, vicar of Wybunbury, was a diocesan visitor, responsible for preaching at general visitations.⁸⁸ His family came from the parish of Wybunbury, where there was a manor belonging to the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield and his education was probably sponsored by the bishop, Geoffrey Blythe. He studied abroad in Paris and Louvain, travelling to France in the winter of 1521-2 with ‘Magister Blythe’ (Geoffrey Blythe, presumed nephew of the bishop).⁸⁹ Darington held other livings concurrently with Wybunbury. These included Holy Trinity, Coventry and two prebends; Flixton, in Lancashire, which was financed by the appropriation of Flixton rectory and Beverleyhall, attached to the college of Gnosall in Staffordshire.⁹⁰ Ralph Sneyd, vicar-general of the diocese, held Tattenhall and Woodchurch in Cheshire, having been licensed by the pope to hold three benefices in plurality.⁹¹ Perhaps the most illustrious parish incumbent named in the Cheshire *Valor* was Edmund Bonner, later bishop of London, at that time archdeacon of Leicester. His appointment to Davenham gives credence to the contemporary suggestion that he was the illegitimate son of the previous incumbent, George Savage. Davenham was a Savage family living and it is

⁸⁷ Earwaker, i, p. 88; visit to St. Bartholomew’s church, Wilmslow, 10 March 2010.

⁸⁸ Heath (ed.), *Blythe’s Visitations*, pp. 127-8; *Valor*, v, p. 218.

⁸⁹ Heath (ed.), *Blythe’s Visitations*, p. xv. Heath suggested that it ‘may not be too fanciful to see in Daryngton a talented boy from an episcopal manor who was carefully nursed and launched upon a promising career by the bishop.’ P. S. Allen, ‘Some Letters of Masters and Scholars, 1500-1520’, *English Historical Review*, 22 (88) (1907), p. 747.

⁹⁰ Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 69; *Valor*, iii, p. 99; v, pp. 202, 226; CCED person ID 25714 (accessed 20 April 2010).

⁹¹ Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 67; *Valor*, v, pp. 211, 213; CCED person ID 29563 (accessed 20 April 2010).

likely that ‘Doctor Boner’ held it because of his family connections.⁹² Other graduate parish incumbents had been promoted to family livings but probably had no other church appointments. These included Master Robert Fouleshurst presented to Barthomley by his brother, Sir Thomas Fouleshurst, a groom of the chamber to Henry VIII.⁹³

Although much county patronage was in the hands of local gentry, monasteries were also important as patrons. Of the 43 parishes where the patron of the 1535 incumbent is known, 21 were presented by monasteries, 18 by gentry and 3 by the King. The majority of the monastic patronage was in the hands of St Werburgh’s monastery in Chester.⁹⁴ However, monasteries frequently sold or gifted the right of next presentation, and as the threat of dissolution loomed such patronage became an important bargaining counter. Gentry influence over monastic patronage became correspondingly greater, as monastic heads sought the support of the various factions. This is illustrated in the case of the succession to the rectory of Astbury. The Brereton family had used their court influence to bolster their position in Cheshire but their access to royal patronage in the county was not exclusive or guaranteed. Following the fall of Wolsey in 1529 personal antipathy between Cromwell and William Brereton led to an abrupt halt in the ‘flood of office and reward’ previously coming Brereton’s way.⁹⁵ In September 1531 Ralph Sneyd, vicar general of Coventry and Lichfield, presumably knowing of this, wrote to Cromwell offering him a yearly pension of twenty marks to recover for him the

⁹² Kenneth Carlton, ‘Bonner, Edmund (d. 1569)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 April 2008); CCed person ID 21727; 24916 (accessed 22 April 2010); Christopher Haigh, ‘A Mid-Tudor Ecclesiastical Official: the Curious Career of George Wilmesley’, *THSLC*, 122 (1971 for 1970), pp. 2-3; *Valor*, v, p. 214.

⁹³ *Valor*, v, p. 217 (where it is listed as Berkeley); Ormerod iii, pp. 304-5; LP iv, 4914; Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 223-4.

⁹⁴ Details of presentations are taken from the three volumes of Ormerod.

⁹⁵ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 199.

advowson of Astbury which he claimed that William Brereton had acquired merely to spite him.⁹⁶ Ralph Sneyd's father, Richard, had been granted the advowson in 1524 but William Brereton had managed to acquire a later grant. John Brereton, William's brother, was presented to Astbury in February 1536 by the King who was patron *pro hac vice* by grant of William Brereton so presumably Sneyd's offer to Cromwell had not prevailed.⁹⁷ Sir Richard Bulkeley also felt that an offer to Cromwell of £20 to buy him a saddle plus one third of the annual income of the parish might help him to acquire the Savage family living of Davenham for his brother, John, while the Savage heir was the King's ward. The offer was made in anticipation of a vacancy arising in 1533 while Edmund Bonner was the incumbent, 'as it is said that Dr. Bonar is to be bishop of Chester'.⁹⁸

Michael Bennett concluded from a study of the 1377 Poll Tax returns that the clergy of the late fourteenth-century archdeaconry of Chester were predominantly men of local origin 'and their local provenance no doubt tended to reinforce the regionalised character of the Church in these parts.'⁹⁹ As three-quarters of the parish churches were in the gift of local patrons he concluded that a large proportion of the parish clergy had been presented by relatives. The situation had not changed significantly 150 years later, although in a substantial proportion of parishes the patron of the 1535 incumbent is not known and some patronage had been gifted to monasteries in the interim. Hosker has

⁹⁶ Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 67; *LP* v, 426; E. W. Ives, 'Court and County Palatine in the Reign of Henry VIII: the Career of William Brereton of Malpas', *THSLC*, 123 (1972 for 1971), p. 26.

⁹⁷ Ormerod, iii, p. 26; Caroline de Vere, 'The Parish Clergy in the Diocese of Chester, 1500-80' (MPhil thesis, University of Manchester, 1994), p. 48; *LP* ix, 504(13); *LP* x, 392(50).

⁹⁸ *LP* vi, 179.

⁹⁹ M. J. Bennett, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Clergy 1379', *THSLC*, 124 (1972), p. 11. Although this article is primarily a study of the 1379 Poll Tax returns Bennett also discusses the returns of 1377 and 1381.

suggested that a Stanley attempt to extend their family power and influence in Cheshire in the fifteenth century by the acquisition of ecclesiastical patronage had been abandoned, leaving local gentry influence paramount.¹⁰⁰

Those few priests fortunate enough to acquire a parish represented only a small proportion of the parochial clergy, however. The 'third tier' in Zell's model comprised the unbeneficed clergy. Bennett pointed out that the taxation of 1379 indicated that 80 per cent of the clergy throughout the archdeaconry of Chester were unbeneficed.¹⁰¹ A subsidy list for the archdeaconry dated 25 Henry VIII (1533-4) names a total of 326 clergy employed in the seven deaneries of the county of Cheshire. Of these 326 clergy, 243 or almost 75 per cent were unbeneficed.¹⁰² The employment structure of the county's parish clergy had thus also changed little over one and a half centuries. As those listed are all named in connection with a specified church and the list was drawn up in connection with a tax on income it is probable that it does not include those clergy who had no position at all and 'eked out a precarious living by the celebration of occasional trentals and obits.'¹⁰³ Many of the county's unemployed clerks made their way to Chester where they formed a transient population and some turned to petty crime to supplement their meagre income from honest work or passed their time gaming, drinking or fighting. Thus, for example, in the Chester sheriffs court in 1506-7 William Percivall, *capellanus*, late of Barrow, in the county of Cheshire was fined 6s 8d for forestalling a hundred bushels of barley coming to market; in 1508-9 William Wirral,

¹⁰⁰ P. Hosker, 'The Stanleys of Lathom and Ecclesiastical Patronage in the North-West of England during the Fifteenth Century', *Northern History*, 18 (1982), pp. 212-29.

¹⁰¹ Bennett, 'The Lancashire and Cheshire Clergy', pp. 3, 5.

¹⁰² BL Harley 594, ff. 146-149; ff. 151v-154. This list is dated 25 Henry VIII being 22 April 1533 to 21 April 1534 and is referred to hereafter for convenience as the 1533 taxation list. The clergy at St John's College who are shown as prebendaries have been treated as beneficed as have the masters of hospitals at Chester and Nantwich. The vicars choral at St John's have been treated as not beneficed.

¹⁰³ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 11.

capellanus, was fined 12d for gaming and playing at ‘*lez Tabules & lez Bollez*’ and other such unlawful games and a fine of 5s was levied in 1532-3 on Thomas Tuder, *capellanus*, for an assault on Thomas Wynchester, tailor.¹⁰⁴

The unbeneficed clerks who were employed occupied a variety of roles with differing levels of income and security of tenure. A number were designated ‘curate’ in the list; in general each parish had no more than one named curate.¹⁰⁵ Sixteen parishes were wholly-impropriated to monasteries or colleges and staffed by curates. Other curates employed by incumbents enjoyed a certain security of tenure as, once appointed, they could not be removed without reasonable cause until the priest making the appointment left the parish when they could be dismissed summarily.¹⁰⁶ Some chapels were in the sole care of a curate, who must have had a considerable degree of autonomy and in some cases was responsible for the supervision of a number of other clergy. For example, the curate of Macclesfield chapelry is listed with four other clergy and the curate of Nantwich with eight others, although some of these clergy were chantry priests not resident at the chapelries.¹⁰⁷

There was also the slim chance of career progression for those curates with the connections and funds, the latter sometimes acquired through a legacy from the curate’s former employer. Thus William Witter, rector of Tarporley and commissary to the bishop of Lincoln, in his will of 1542 left 8 marks each to Sir Roger Witter (presumably

¹⁰⁴ CALS ZS/B/6b, f.18v; ZS/B/5d, f. 63v; ZS/B/7a, f.13.

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 95 discusses the terminology. ‘Although, strictly speaking *curatus* referred to a priest with cure of souls, in other words a parish incumbent ... it had long been shorthand for *capellanus curatus*, a hired assistant who was given charge of the cure of either the parish of a non-resident incumbent or a chapel which had not been formally ordained as a vicarage.’ In this discussion ‘curate’ is given the ‘shorthand’ meaning, but it should be noted that the evidence for Cheshire suggests that not all incumbents with curates were permanently absent from their parish.

¹⁰⁶ Heath, *English Parish Clergy*, p. 25

¹⁰⁷ This does not include the masters of the Nantwich hospitals of St Laurence and St Nicholas, both with Masters degrees.

a relative) and Sir Roger Bennett ‘to gett their services’.¹⁰⁸ Roger Bennett was curate of Tarporley in 1534 and 1542 and was subsequently vicar of St Oswald’s in Chester.¹⁰⁹ Other benefactors sometimes remembered clergy in their wills. For example, in 1527 Robert Honford left to ‘Sir Willm Godeor vjs viiid to gett hym a serves with’.¹¹⁰ In the parishes of Barthomley, Bebington and the Legh moiety of Lymm curates succeeded as incumbents during the 1530s and 1540s. On the whole, therefore, the lot of the early sixteenth-century curate in Cheshire was not altogether an unhappy one.

Other clerks found stable employment as priests in perpetual chantries. Askey has identified ninety endowed chantries extant in the county in the period from 1485 until the 1540s.¹¹¹ Sometimes the funding was generous. For example, Geoffrey Downes provided for an annual income of ten marks for his chantry priest at Taxal; in other cases, only a few shillings were provided.¹¹² Sometimes schoolmasters of endowed schools also acted as chantry priests, and these men were often well paid. At Malpas where the school was founded by Sir Randle Brereton, the first master appointed was John Lathom, an Oxford graduate, with a salary of about £15 (see Figure 7 below).¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, pp. 86-7.

¹⁰⁹ CALS EDA 2/4, f. 24v.

¹¹⁰ Piccope (First Portion), p. 5.

¹¹¹ T. F. Askey, ‘Chantry Foundations and Lay Piety in the Deanery of Macclesfield (1485 to 1558)’, (MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1981), p. 72. There may well have been more than this as several of the county’s parish churches have two surviving sixteenth-century chantry chapels with contemporary screens, one at the east end of each of the north and south aisles e.g. Malpas - Brereton and Cholmondeley chapels and Cheadle – Brereton and Savage chapels. The *Valor* lists only nine chantries in the whole county, clearly a substantial understatement.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp.14, 72-3.

¹¹³ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, pp. 237, 240-1. *VCH* gives Lathom’s salary as £10 whereas Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, p. 71, states that he was paid £20 *per annum* which he says was ‘quite high’. In 1533 Lathom was taxed at 20s which equates to income of £15 (BL Harley 594, f.148v) in view of the apparent understatement of other income in the assessment it may be that his salary was, in fact, £20 which would certainly have been high in comparison with other endowed schools. For example, the remuneration of the headmaster of Winchester totalled about £13 in 1400 and the salary of the headmaster of Eton was initially set at £16 plus lodging, food and clothes whereas the standard



Figure 7 – One of the weepers on the tomb of Sir Randle Brereton at Malpas may represent the first schoolmaster, John Lathom.

Photograph copyright Patricia Cox 2013.

Another category of employed clerk was the domestic chaplain, but information about their pay and conditions is scarce. However, two wills left by members of the Carrington family of Carrington, in the parish of Bowdon near Altrincham, give some details about their family chaplain, Nicholas Warburton. When John Carrington's widowed stepmother, Emma, died about 1525 she left to Warburton, described as her son's chaplain, six marks 'to syng a yer for my sowlle and my husbandes sowlles'.¹¹⁴ John Carrington died more than twenty five years later and specified in his will that Warburton was to have 'xl^s with meate and drinke and honest lodginge or els iiij^{li}' for his

remuneration in contemporary endowed schools was £10, Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Schools from Roman Britain to Renaissance England* (Yale, 2006), p. 176.

¹¹⁴ Piccope (First Portion), p. 2.

full stipend accordinge to the gyfte of my father'.¹¹⁵ The salary of £2 plus board does not seem to have been particularly generous, even though it was augmented by additional casual fees for obits, although these must have ceased in the years leading to John Carrington's death in November, 1553. Nicholas Warburton appears in both the 1533 taxation list and the 1542 clergy list attached to the parish of Bowdon, although the Carrington family had their own domestic chapel. In 1542 he is noted as '*conduct*' *per Johem Carington*'.¹¹⁶ Another fifteen clergy are shown in the Cheshire deaneries in the 1542 list with a similar designation in relation to private individuals and they may well also have been domestic chaplains.¹¹⁷

The lack of surviving evidence from episcopal parochial visitation means that there is scant evidence of the behaviour and morals of the clergy in the early sixteenth century.¹¹⁸ However, archdeacons' visitations sometimes resulted in *ex officio* proceedings against individual clerks. For example, in February 1530 John Crosby, curate of Middlewich, was accused in the consistory court of offences arising from neglect of his cure which had been detected at the archdeacon's visitation. It seems that he was able to refute the charge as in 1534 he was still curate of the parish.¹¹⁹ Cases heard in civil courts indicate that some were not averse to resorting to violence, sometimes acting as agents of the gentry. An undated Star Chamber case from the reign

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

¹¹⁶ Irvine (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester, 1541-2; Together with a List of the Tenths and Subsidy Payable in the Deaneries of the Archdeaconry of Chester', *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 3 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 33, 1896), p. 6.

¹¹⁷ Irvine has translated *conductus* as 'presented' (*ibid.*, p. x) whereas Latham's *Revised Medieval Latin Word-list* gives one translation as 'hired priest'. Other priests in Irvine's transcription of the 1542 list were, for example, '*conductus per decanu' et caplm ecclie cath cestr*'.

¹¹⁸ Regarding episcopal visitations Peter Heath stated '[a] mandate informing the archdeacon of Chester of an intended visitation of parishes in 1527 is transcribed in Blythe's episcopal register, but no other evidence is known to the present editor.' (*Blythe's Visitations*, p. xiii)

¹¹⁹ CALS EDC 1/4, f. 12v; BL Harley 594, f. 152v.

of Henry VIII shows that Sir William Horseman and Sir Thomas Pinchware, priests of the fraternity of St Anne in Chester, broke into and damaged some half-built houses ‘adjoynynge of the ffraternitie of Saynt Anne ... by the subtele meanes and procurement of Sir Pyers Dutton knyght wt force and violently wt barres of iron breake open the doores of yor sayde poore subiects houses’.¹²⁰

The morals of two parish clergy were called into question by Adam Beconsall, the archdeacon’s commissary. These two were canons of Norton Priory: William Hardware who was vicar of Great Budworth and Thomas Fletcher, vicar of Runcorn. In 1535 Beconsall reported that both had women living with them and each had fathered several children.¹²¹ Thomas Fletcher had been repeatedly admonished by Geoffrey Blythe during visitations of Norton in the 1520s to put away the woman with whom he was living under penalty of excommunication, but although he seems to have taken no notice he had not been removed from the parish.¹²² The fact that they were singled out for criticism may also suggest that their conduct was unusual.

Cheshire was thus a county in which parochial incumbents of the early sixteenth century were predominantly local men. It is, however, too simplistic to conclude, as Zell described the position in Kent, that the top 5 per cent of the incumbents were leaders of church or state, below them was a group of incumbents ‘in relatively prosperous and secure positions’ while below them swirled an amorphous mass of the unbeneficed.¹²³

While Zell acknowledged that the unbeneficed occupied a variety of positions, this

¹²⁰ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 49; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, v, p. 63. The contributor suggests that the case may date from after the dissolution but as the guild of St Anne was not dissolved until 1547 and the case dates from the reign of Henry VIII this seems unlikely.

¹²¹ TNA: PRO SP 1/91 f. 167; LP viii, 496.

¹²² Heath (ed.), *Blythe’s Visitations*, pp. 95, 104.

¹²³ Zell, ‘The Personnel of the Clergy in Kent’, pp. 513–4. This is, perhaps rather an unfair summary of Zell’s position since he concedes that ‘[i]n treating the lowest class of clerics, it should be borne in mind that limitations in the sources, even when extant, render generalizations about this group tentative at best.’

group cannot be said to have represented a single stratum. Some of them occupied positions as secure as their incumbent; some were paid more than beneficed clergy and some were graduates while others lived a hand-to-mouth existence with no permanent employment. While Zell's suggested hierarchical model of three strata of clergy for Kent is less rigid than the traditional two-tier model, it is still too restrictive to describe the parochial clergy of Cheshire at this time. Furthermore, a complicating factor in Cheshire was the number of chapelries which functioned almost as parishes and might be staffed by the same curate for decades. An example is the chapelry of Lower Peover, in the parish of Rostherne, which was served in 1533 by Randle Maddock. He was still there in 1567, by which time he was aged 60 and had been curate for about thirty-eight years, boarding with a local gentry family.¹²⁴ His situation was almost indistinguishable from that of a beneficed clerk.

Regular Clergy

By the early sixteenth century there were few monastic foundations in Cheshire. This has been attributed to 'the feudal and physical geography of the county and ... the lack of monastic life before the Norman Conquest.'¹²⁵ The surviving foundations comprised the Benedictine houses of St Werburgh in Chester and Birkenhead priory, plus the county's only nunnery of St Mary's in Chester; two houses of Cistercian monks at Combermere and Vale Royal, together with a house of Augustinian canons at Norton.

¹²⁴ BL Harley 594, f. 153; CALS EDC 2/8, f. 129.

¹²⁵ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 124. The section of this volume of the *VCH* covering the county's religious houses is available online at < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=255> > (accessed 20 May 2013).

There were also two small cells on the Wirral Peninsula.¹²⁶ There were no surviving religious houses or cells in the east of the county (see Figure 8 below). The five

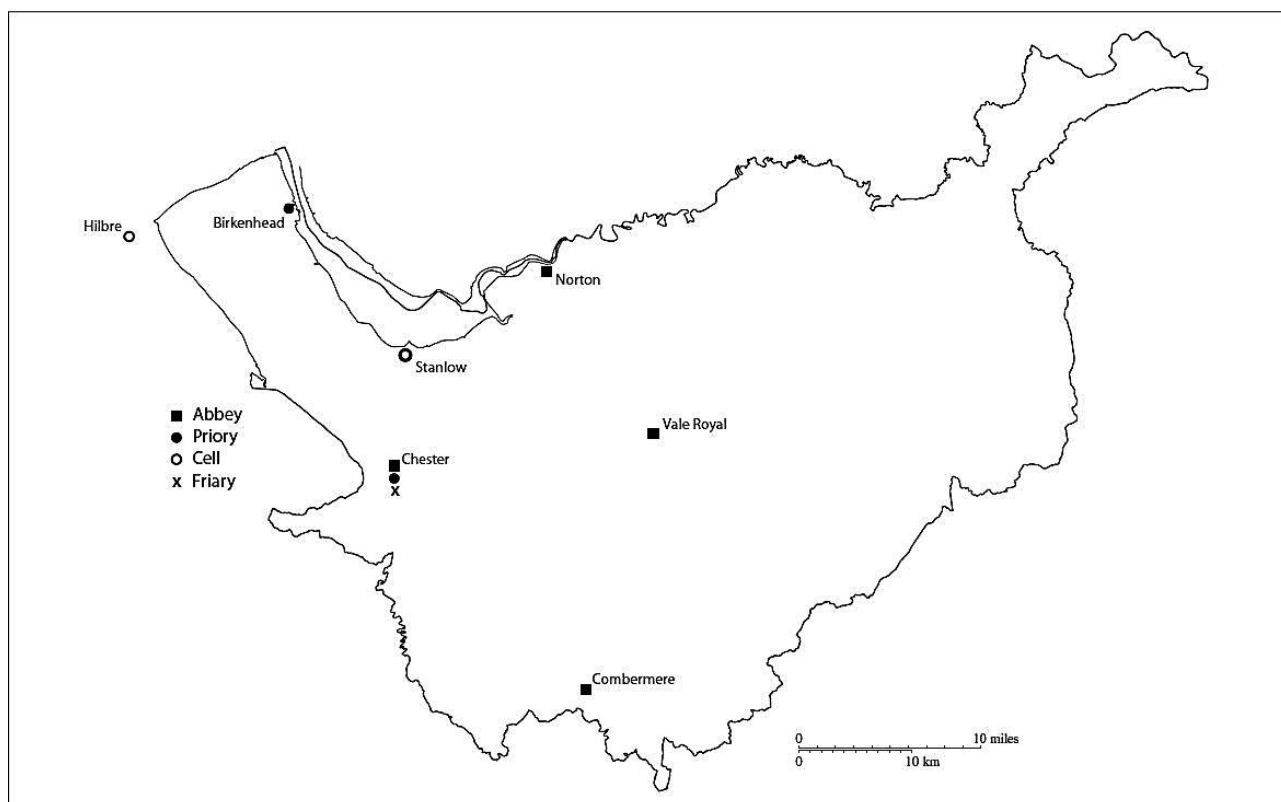


Figure 8 – The early sixteenth-century religious houses of Cheshire.

monasteries and one nunnery of Cheshire in the early sixteenth century may be compared with the position in Sussex, about one and a half times the size of Cheshire, with nine monasteries and two nunneries, or Gloucestershire, about one and a sixth the size, with twelve monasteries and one nunnery.¹²⁷

By far the largest, wealthiest and most important of the Cheshire foundations was St Werburgh's in Chester. It has been calculated that prior to its dissolution in 1540,

¹²⁶ These comprised a cell of St Werburgh's in Chester situated on Hilbre, an island at high tide, where the monks tended a light; Burne, *Monks of Chester*, p. 74 and a cell of Whalley Abbey in Lancashire at Stanlow; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 124.

¹²⁷ M. J. Kitch, 'The Reformation in Sussex', in M. J. Kitch (ed.) *Studies in Sussex Church History* (Sussex, 1981), p. 88; *Victoria County History: 'Religious Houses', A History of the County of Gloucester: Volume 2 (1907)*, pp. 52-106 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=240>> (online edition accessed 20 April 2010).

in terms of wealth, it ranked twenty-second out of approximately five hundred monasteries in England.¹²⁸ The cult of St Werburgh, once very popular, had declined by the sixteenth century, although pilgrims did continue to visit her shrine. The monastery also owned her girdle, 'in great request by lying-in women.'¹²⁹ Further contact between the laity and the monks had been through the monastery church, used by the parishioners of St Oswald's who worshipped in the south nave aisle until they were moved to St Nicholas' chapel in the south-west corner of the abbey precinct in 1348.¹³⁰

Surviving wills of the early sixteenth century indicate that the monastery was not popular with testators.¹³¹ Some of those who did make bequests to the abbey, such as Ralph Davenport, an alderman of Chester, had traditional family connections there. His will of 1506 requested burial in the abbey next to his father-in-law and left four candles and 10s to the abbey. He also left 10s to each order of friars and also to the nuns at Chester, but to St John's college he bequeathed five candles and to the vicars choral and the priest of Thornton chantry there he left a shop in Northgate Street in return for a mass and obits.¹³² Some testators, such as Dame Christiana Calveley still saw the abbot of Chester as a trustworthy figure, however, and in her will of 1516 she made him both an executor and overseer of her will.¹³³ However, individual monks of less exalted status in the abbey were regularly in trouble in the city courts in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries for a variety of offences ranging from assault to murder and rape.¹³⁴

¹²⁸ R. V. H. Burne, 'The Dissolution of S. Werburgh's Abbey', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 37, part i (1948), p. 7.

¹²⁹ Burne, *Monks of Chester*, pp. 58-9; LP xi, 364.

¹³⁰ Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, p. 68.

¹³¹ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 97.

¹³² *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxiii, p. 37.

¹³³ Piccope, (Second Portion), p. 133.

¹³⁴ CALS ZM/B/5, f. 74; ZS/B/2, ff. 45v, 86v, 87v.

Additionally, there was growing friction between the abbey as an institution and the town authorities by the late fifteenth century. In common with the experience of other urban monastic establishments such as the abbey at Bury St Edmunds and St Peter's Abbey in Gloucester such hostility was exacerbated by the increasing power and confidence of the municipal oligarchy seeking to extend its jurisdiction.¹³⁵ One enduring cause of resentment in Chester was the abbot's right to hold a manorial court for his tenants, as he had numerous tenants within the city itself who could therefore not be fined or taxed by the civic authorities. In 1509 arbitrators were appointed by the king to mediate.¹³⁶

One way in which the abbots sought to defend themselves against hostility from the city was by fostering connections with the county's gentry, but this led in turn to the development of faction within the monastery, linked to divisions among the gentry.¹³⁷ This situation was exacerbated during the tenure of the penultimate abbot, John Birchenshaw. He was a difficult and confrontational man and it was his intransigence which perpetuated the feud with the city authorities.¹³⁸ With the authority of the pope, he also attempted to assert his independence from English episcopal control, for which he was deprived under the Statute of Praemunire by Wolsey in 1524.¹³⁹ Birchenshaw's conflict with Wolsey was complicated by a dispute over his leasing of the tithes of

¹³⁵ Robert S. Gottfried, *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis; 1290-1539* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 250-1; Caroline Litzenberger, *The English Reformation and the Laity Gloucestershire, 1540-1580* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 13-4.

¹³⁶ Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, pp. 130-1; Tim Thornton, 'Cardinal Wolsey and the Abbot of Chester', *History Today*, 45:8 (August 1995) p. 14; Burne, *Monks of Chester*, pp. 145-6.

¹³⁷ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 21; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 143; Ives, 'Court and County Palatine', p. 25.

¹³⁸ Burne, 'The Dissolution of S. Werburgh's Abbey', p. 16; according to Eric Ives Birchenshaw was 'an insufferable character'; E. W. Ives (ed.), *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 116, 1976), pp. 31-2, and his resignation in 1538 was 'to the satisfaction of the whole country'; LP xiii (i), 224.

¹³⁹ Burne, *Monks of Chester*, pp. 151-2, 'It is not clear why Birchenshaw thought it necessary to seek confirmation of a privilege which had been granted in 1392 and never been withdrawn'.

Prestbury parish to two different local gentlemen simultaneously; one of the gentlemen involved was married to Wolsey's reputed mistress, Jane Larke.¹⁴⁰ Following Wolsey's death in 1530 Birchenshaw contrived to regain his post as abbot, possibly with the assistance of William Brereton, the courtier, whose power in the county had aroused considerable local resentment.¹⁴¹ From 1531 Brereton received an annual pension of £20 from the abbot and in that year he held his annual audit in the abbey at which time he paid gratuities to several of the abbey servants. It was also at this time that he obtained the abbey's advowson of Astbury, a living which later went to his brother, John.¹⁴²

The other Benedictine house for men in the county was the priory of St James at Birkenhead. The monks there operated a ferry crossing the Mersey to Liverpool.¹⁴³ This was a much smaller and poorer house than St Werburgh's but seems to have been more popular with the local community in the early sixteenth century. Several wills of the period appointed the last prior, John Sharpe, as executor or overseer and one testator entrusted him with £200 as a settlement pending the marriage of his three daughters.¹⁴⁴ The monks also held him in high esteem; in 1518 one of them '*commendat priorem atque summa laude extollit*.'¹⁴⁵ Bishop Blythe or his officials visited the monastery in 1518, 1521 and 1524 and the only complaint was the monastic debts.¹⁴⁶ At each of these visitations there were seven members of the house, far short of the standard number of

¹⁴⁰ Burne, 'The Dissolution of S. Werburgh's Abbey', p. 17; Burne, *Monks of Chester*, pp. 151-2; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 143; Thornton, 'Cardinal Wolsey and the Abbot of Chester', pp. 14-15.

¹⁴¹ *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas*, p. 32.

¹⁴² *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 143; *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas*, pp. 32, 245, 255.

¹⁴³ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 128.

¹⁴⁴ Piccope (First Portion), pp. 8, 96, 185. Thomas Scarisbrick, who was married to an illegitimate daughter of the earl of Derby made him trustee (p. 185).

¹⁴⁵ 'Commends the prior and extols him with the highest praise'; Heath (ed.), *Blythe's Visitations*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁶ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 130.

thirteen adopted from the Cistercian ideal for a small house, but more than the canonical minimum of six.¹⁴⁷

The Benedictine nuns in Chester were also more popular than the monks of Chester. In 1535 they were reported to distribute £10 3s in alms on Maundy Thursday; this was more than one tenth of the assessed annual income of the house, which amounted to £99 16s 2d.¹⁴⁸ A manuscript processional from the nunnery shows that Maundy Thursday was a day of great ceremonial.¹⁴⁹ Details of the prayers and anthems to accompany the ritual washing of the altars are set out for that day, from which it can be seen that there were thirteen altars, including five dedicated to women saints. The male saints' dedications included St Thomas - the nunnery owned the girdle of St Thomas Becket.¹⁵⁰ The phrase in the manuscript relating to the procession 'To seynt thomas' was 'struck through with a black line', probably following the proclamation of November 1538, which provided that his name was to be erased from all liturgical books.¹⁵¹ This suggests that the nuns were aware of and concerned to comply with changes in liturgical practice, although as the name was merely crossed through this may suggest a somewhat token conformity. At the 1521 visitation there were eleven nuns, including the prioress, and one novice.¹⁵² The house was visited again in 1524, when Nicholas Darington preached the sermon. On the whole the visitation reports indicate that the conduct of the nuns of Chester was a great deal better than that of many

¹⁴⁷ Heath (ed.), *Blythe's Visitations*, p. xxxv; J. E. Oxley, *The Reformation in Essex to the Death of Mary* (Manchester, 1965), p.46.

¹⁴⁸ *Valor*, v, p. 206; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 149

¹⁴⁹ The manuscript has been partly transcribed and printed; *The Processional of the Nuns of Chester*, ed. J. Wickham Legg (Henry Bradshaw Society, 18, 1899).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.* pp. 6-9, 37; LP x, 364.

¹⁵¹ *The Processional of the Nuns of Chester*, p. 2; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (paperback second edition New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 410-2.

¹⁵² *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 149; Heath (ed.), *Blythe's Visitations*, pp. 44, 52

and they seem to have retained a certain affection and respect in the city. They also continued to attract recruits into the sixteenth century unlike, for example, the Benedictine nunnery at Polesworth in Warwickshire which acknowledged a lack of numbers in 1518 and 1521.¹⁵³

The two Cistercian houses of Cheshire were the substantial foundation of Vale Royal, in the centre of the county about three miles from the market town of Northwich, and the smaller house of Combermere, near the county's southern border with Shropshire. Vale Royal, as its name suggests, was a royal foundation, originally intended for one hundred monks, although the grandeur of the original foundation was subsequently modified. An ambitious programme of building continued, however, and the abbey church was the longest Cistercian church in England.¹⁵⁴ By 1509 there were only nineteen monks, and by the time the abbey was dissolved in 1538 there were only fifteen.¹⁵⁵

The election of a new abbot in the summer of 1535 gives clear evidence of the interaction of several important groups which interfered in the abbey's administration. Both William Brereton and one of his rivals for power in Cheshire, Sir Piers Dutton, put forward candidates. Dutton's candidate offered Cromwell £100 and to 'do him further as large pleasure as any man'.¹⁵⁶ Anne Boleyn herself also intervened in support of another of the candidates. The king, however, granted a free election and it was John Harware, the candidate favoured by Adam Beconsall and Thomas Legh, the monastic

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. xxxv. When the nunnery at Chester was dissolved in 1540 pensions were assigned to three novices, *LP* xv, 93.

¹⁵⁴ John Brownbill (ed.), *The Ledger-book of Vale Royal Abbey*, (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 68, 1914), pp. vii-viii, ix, 2-3; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 156.

¹⁵⁵ *The Ledger-book of Vale Royal Abbey*, p. 191; *Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, viii, App. II, p. 46.

¹⁵⁶ *LP* vii, 868.

visitor, who triumphed.¹⁵⁷ Legh, however, took a bribe of £15 plus ‘a reward’ and his costs of £6 for the election.¹⁵⁸ Thornton saw this as a serious problem for Brereton and it certainly indicates that he was not always able to prevail, although despite the defeat of his preferred candidate he managed to secure an annual pension of £20 ‘for terme off lyff’ from the new abbot.¹⁵⁹ Potentially a bigger problem for Harware following his election was the appointment of Cromwell as steward of the abbey.¹⁶⁰

The other Cistercian house in Cheshire, Combermere, was not such an ambitious foundation as Vale Royal although there were thirteen monks there at the time of its surrender in 1538.¹⁶¹ From the fourteenth century, the history of Combermere was dominated by financial problems due, it was claimed, to the mismanagement of successive abbots, and the financial administration of the monastery was on various occasions placed under the control of the crown or the escheator of Chester. In 1414 the abbot was accused of counterfeiting gold coins, perhaps in an attempt to resolve his financial difficulties.¹⁶² Problems at Combermere were also caused by indiscipline and disorder sometimes involving the local populace. The reputation of the house was so bad that in 1520 the abbot tried to conceal the murder of one of the monks by a servant because the abbey ‘is allredy in an evyll name for usyng of mysrule’ and he feared that if word of the murder got out ‘the abbey should be undone for ever.’ All present were sworn to secrecy and it was claimed that the murderer was kept concealed at the abbey

¹⁵⁷ *LP* viii, 1056 (letter from Anne Boleyn who thought that the abbey was in Lincolnshire); *LP* vii, 1094.

¹⁵⁸ Shaw, ‘*The Compendium Compertorum*’, p. 77; *LP*, ix, 622.

¹⁵⁹ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 162; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 206-7; *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas*, pp. 255, 258, 263, 271, 278.

¹⁶⁰ *LP* xiii (2), 153; *LP* xiv (2), 782.

¹⁶¹ *Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, viii, App. II, p. 17.

¹⁶² Ormerod, iii, p. 404; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, i, p. 49; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 154.

for more than six months.¹⁶³ In 1528 Thomas Cromwell was advised of the behaviour of the abbot and advised to replace him with ‘a discreet head’.¹⁶⁴

The one house of Augustinian canons in the county, the Abbey of Norton, was dedicated to St Mary and a cross there was said to work miracles.¹⁶⁵ The original endowments had been generous, and included a number of advowsons of churches in several counties, but an ambitious building programme had led to a financial crisis and in an attempt to increase revenues some patronage had been sold and papal agreement had been received to appoint canons of the house to the parishes of Great Budworth and Runcorn in Cheshire. Despite the earlier extensive building programme which had entailed financial difficulties for the abbey, by the time of a visitation in 1524 the buildings were falling into disrepair, and the visitation that year had to be held ‘*in oratorio abbatis*’ as the chapter house was too dilapidated. However, the house was reported to be free from debt and apart from a lack of numbers and insufficient enclosure, all was reported to be in order.¹⁶⁶ The situation had been very different two years earlier when Bishop Blythe himself visited Norton in April and May 1522. It seems that personal animosity between the prior, William Hardware, and the abbot at

¹⁶³ R. Stewart-Brown (ed.) *Lancashire and Cheshire Cases in the Court of Star Chamber* (part I) (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 71, 1916-17), pp. 129-30.

¹⁶⁴ *LP* v, 227.

¹⁶⁵ ‘*Loquela per 5 annos amissa reddita est uni et visus alteri per virtutem sanctae crucis de Northon*’ (speech lost for five years restored to one man and sight to another through the miraculous power of the holy cross of Norton) quoted in Miss M. V. Taylor, ‘The 16th Century Abbots of St. Werburgh’s, Chester; Some Notes on Documents Relating to the Abbey and Other Religious Houses of Cheshire; and a Medieval Guide book to Chester’, *Journal of the Chester Antiquarian Society*, new series, 19 (ii) (1913), p. 187.

¹⁶⁶ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 167; Heath (ed.), *Blythe's Visitations*, pp. 126-7.

that time had led to accusations of maladministration and scandal and during one quarrel Hardware had threatened the abbot with a knife.¹⁶⁷

The only houses of friars in the county were in Chester where friars were regularly before the city courts, accused of assaults on the monks of St Werburgh's, on men of the town and on other friars.¹⁶⁸ George Palmer, prior of the Carmelites, was also accused, with one of his friars, of breaking into the parish church of Frodsham and stealing some of the plate. In court they pleaded benefit of clergy.¹⁶⁹ This evidence of disorder, particularly among the Carmelites, has been seen as a sign of spiritual decline but despite this all the orders of friars remained popular. While the monks of St Werburgh's aimed to discourage the laity from using the abbey church, for example by moving the parishioners of St Oswald's to a chapel in the corner of the precinct, the friars seem to have encouraged public use of their church buildings. The Dominican church served occasionally as a venue for arbitrations, and the nave and aisles of the Franciscan church were used by merchants and sailors to store sails and tools in return for their assistance in repairing the nave in the early sixteenth century. The preaching mission of the Dominicans and Franciscans is indicated by the size of the nave and aisles of their churches, and in the fifteenth century three or four Franciscan friars were licensed to hear confessions.¹⁷⁰

The most popular pious bequest revealed by surviving Chester wills of the period from 1400 to 1540 was to the friars, with many testators leaving something to each of

¹⁶⁷ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 168; Heath (ed.), *Blythe's Visitations*, pp. 90-5, 107-9. William Hardware was the vicar of Great Budworth whom Adam Beconsall accused in 1535 of having kept a woman in his house for seven years and of fathering several children (*LP* viii, 496).

¹⁶⁸ J. H. E. Bennett, 'The White Friars of Chester', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, new series, 31, p. 17; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 177; *CALS ZS/B/4*, ff. 119-22; *ZM/B/5*, f. 74; *ZM/B/7*, f. 171; *ZM/B/8*, f. 40v; *ZS/B/4*, ff. 51v, 110.

¹⁶⁹ Bennett, 'The White Friars of Chester', p. 21.

¹⁷⁰ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 177; Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, p. 101-2.

the orders. In 1518, for example, Nicholas Dekyn of Chester made a bequest 'to every of the iij orders of freeres for iij trentals of masses'.¹⁷¹ This was in line with trends elsewhere, and Claire Cross has found that friaries were also more popular than monasteries with Yorkshire testators in the period from 1520 to 1535.¹⁷² The Carmelites were the most popular order in Cheshire and the number of bequests to them in the early sixteenth century almost equalled the total of bequests to the two other orders. This may have been a function of the popularity of their church for burials.¹⁷³ In his will of 1520 Peter Stanley of Ewloe Castle in Flint bequeathed the half gilt silver salt and twelve spoons currently in the keeping of the prior of the White friars to the prior and his house in return for prayers.¹⁷⁴ In 1527 Thomas Sparke, doctor of canon law, requested burial in the chancel of the Carmelite church for a payment of 13s 4d and left funds and his missal for a priest to sing mass 'with in the white frers at the hyght alter'. He also left 10s to each of the three orders of friars plus 3s 4d for repairs to their premises.¹⁷⁵

Friars were not universally popular, however. At Nantwich parochial chapel, misericords were installed in the fifteenth century; these include two figures of foxes in friars' habits, possibly reflecting monastic resentment of the mendicant orders since the Abbey of Combermere owned the church (see Figure 9 below).¹⁷⁶ Friars also seem to have acquired a lasting local reputation as heavy drinkers. In a 1568 Chester defamation

¹⁷¹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xiv, pp. 8-9.

¹⁷² Claire Cross, 'Monasticism and Society in the Diocese of York 1520-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 38 (1988), p. 132.

¹⁷³ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, pp. 96-7.

¹⁷⁴ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxvii, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷⁵ Piccope (First Portion), pp. 16-18.

¹⁷⁶ Leaflets available in St Mary's church, Nantwich (25 May 2007); Ormerod, iii, p. 443.

case the defendant was reported to have said of the plaintiff that he would 'rather haue seen him hanged like a bottle nosed frier'.¹⁷⁷



Figure 9 – Nantwich misericords depicting rapacious friars.¹⁷⁸

Photographs copyright Patricia Cox 2013.

Some of the laity were attracted to the spiritual benefits afforded by the regular clergy, however, and sought closer association with religious communities by admission to brotherhood. In his will of 1518 Nicholas Deakin offered 15s to the Abbey of Chester 'to be brother of their Chaptre.'¹⁷⁹ Confraternity could also be attained before death and in 1518 Philip Legh and his wife, Elizabeth, acquired the right to participate, both in life and in death, in all religious observance of the provincial chapter of Augustinian canons.

The grant did not require their physical presence at the abbey in order for them to

¹⁷⁷ CALS EDC 2/8, f. 147.

¹⁷⁸ On the left, a fox in friar's habit with a bird in one hand and hare hanging from a stick in the other; on the right, a fox in friar's habit armed with bow and arrows for hunting and carrying a flask; R. E. Pritchard, *The Choir and Misericords of St Mary's, Nantwich* (Nantwich, 2009), pp. 11-12.

¹⁷⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xiv, p.8-9.

participate and receive the spiritual benefits of worship there.¹⁸⁰ Letters of confraternity were also sometimes mass-produced for sale, suggesting the existence of a significant market, but only for those with sufficient funds.¹⁸¹

By the early decades of the sixteenth century there were only nine surviving foundations of regular clergy in Cheshire, mostly concentrated on the northern and southern borders of the county, with one, Vale Royal, almost in the centre of the county.¹⁸² The numbers at the largest monasteries in Cheshire such as the twenty-eight at St Werburgh's in Chester and fifteen at Vale Royal at the time of the dissolution may be compared with Evesham, a house of 'medium rank' with between thirty and forty monks from the early thirteenth century onwards.¹⁸³ Haigh found that while in general the population of monasteries was falling in the years before their suppression; in Lancashire they were able to attract new recruits until the 1530s.¹⁸⁴ The situation seems to have been roughly similar in Cheshire. Although recruitment there had declined and there were sometimes complaints at visitations about the fall in numbers at individual foundations, on the whole most managed to maintain at least the canonical minimum and to attract novices. However, the majority of the population of the county must rarely have encountered any of the county's regular clergy and their importance as employers,

¹⁸⁰ Simon Harris, 'The Legh of Booths Muniments (c.1280-1808): the Study of a Cheshire Family through its Archive' (PhD thesis, University of Keele, 1999), pp. 1589-90.

¹⁸¹ J. H. E. Bennett, 'A Letter of Confraternity of the Grey Friars, Chester', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 28 (ii) (1929), pp. 211-215.

¹⁸² Four additional foundations were either short-lived or moved out of the county. These comprised the only foundation in the east of the county which was an Augustinian priory at Mobberley, soon annexed by Rocester abbey in Staffordshire; a house of Premonstratensian canons at Warburton in the north, which failed and two Cistercian houses on the Wirral, one at Poulton which moved to Dieulacres in Staffordshire, and one at Stanlow, which was largely moved to Whalley in Lancashire, leaving a cell to continue; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 124.

¹⁸³ Burne, *Monks of Chester*, p. 179, he gives the number at Waltham as eighteen, Malmesbury as twenty-two, Gloucester as thirty-two, Evesham as thirty-four, Peterborough as thirty-eight and Bury as forty-two; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, pp. 144, 163; *The Letter Book of Robert Joseph*, p. xvii.

¹⁸⁴ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 73.

landlords and dispensers of charity and hospitality must have been insignificant outside the city of Chester.

The over-riding impression of monastic life in the county prior to the dissolution is of the damaging effect of local gentry feuds on their finances and administration. In particular, disputes between William Brereton and his various rivals for power in Cheshire resulted in the diverting of assets and cash from St Werburgh's and Vale Royal in bribes and pensions. There is no extant evidence to suggest that gentry interference extended to the friaries, which may be due to the poverty which was an ideal of their original foundations. Certainly, when the friaries were dissolved their assets were worth very little and when the furnishings of the church and buildings belonging to the Franciscan friars were sold in 1538 the proceeds did not cover their debts.¹⁸⁵

The Laity

'Reconstructing the piety of the ordinary inhabitants of late medieval England has become a major historical enterprise', both in an attempt to examine the extent and appeal of religious dissent and to observe the changing character of religious orthodoxy.¹⁸⁶ Needless to say, such an enterprise presents enormous difficulties, not least of which is the dearth of relevant evidence. Wills are one documentary source which has been used extensively by historians in this connection. A major objection to wills as a source is that they are not representative of the population as a whole; in general it was wealthy men who felt the need to draw up a will. A further important

¹⁸⁵ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 173.

¹⁸⁶ Robert Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety*, (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2006), p. 5. For his critical summary of the recent historiography of late medieval piety see Chapter 1 *passim*.

problem is methodology. A. G. Dickens first popularised the analysis of the religious preambles of wills in his attempt to chart the progress of the Reformation and, in particular, the impact and spread of reformist ideas.¹⁸⁷ His methodology attracted criticism as it was pointed out that many influences were brought to bear upon testators especially in relation to the soul bequest, notably that of scribes, so that the sentiments expressed in a formulaic preamble may well not have been genuinely those of the will maker.¹⁸⁸ It is now generally accepted that a statistical analysis of preambles in isolation is of little value and can give rise to anomalous results.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, Clive Burgess has shown that ‘wills ... were documents made to govern only part of what was to be done after death’ but were ‘useful for taking care of details.’ He found that, in the case of Bristol, some ‘testators ... established their most costly and intricate *post obit* services before death’.¹⁹⁰ In the light of this type of evidence Robert Lutton, for example, calls for ‘a more sensible and integrated approach’.¹⁹¹

I have located only 116 wills of Cheshire lay people for the period from 1408 to 1535 of which either the original or a seemingly-complete copy has survived.¹⁹² This

¹⁸⁷ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (second edition, London, 1989), pp. 214-5.

¹⁸⁸ For example in the work of Margaret Spufford and her group, see for instance Margaret Spufford, ‘The Scribes of Villagers’ Wills in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries and their Influence’, *Local Population Studies*, 7 (1971), pp. 28-43. See also J. D. Alsop, ‘Religious Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1) (1989), pp. 19-27. For a valuable discussion of the methodological problems arising from the use of will preambles and a note of relevant references see Alec Ryrie, ‘Counting Sheep, Counting Shepherds: the Problems of Allegiance in the English Reformation’, in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (eds), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 86-7.

¹⁸⁹ M. L. Zell, ‘The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), p. 248; Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion*, p. 13.

¹⁹⁰ Clive Burgess, ‘Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered’, in Michael Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 30, 16.

¹⁹¹ Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion*, p. 12.

¹⁹² Some of the wills included in the analysis are for men apparently or known to be of Cheshire origin who had moved away from the county, usually to London, but who made bequests involving property in Cheshire. The main sources for Cheshire wills are CALS WS and WC series and EDA 2/1 and TNA: PRO

may be compared with the seventy-nine wills covering just two years to 1540 consulted by A. G. Dickens for Yorkshire and Nottinghamshire, admittedly a much bigger area, or 1,804 wills from the city of Norwich covering the period from 1370 to 1532 which Norman Tanner analysed.¹⁹³ Adopting the approach advocated by Lutton, I have looked in detail at the pious provision, not confined to wills, made by four men from the north-east of Cheshire who had made their careers in London to show how they used their wealth to endow religious and educational foundations back in their home county and what this may reveal about their personal piety.

Chronologically first is Sir Edmund Shaw from Duckinfield, a small town on the north-eastern border of Cheshire, who made his will in 1488.¹⁹⁴ Dukinfield was a detached part of the parish of Stockport, surrounded by the parish of Mottram in Longdendale. Shaw had amassed a huge fortune in London as Prime Warden of the Goldsmiths' Company and had been mayor of London in 1482.¹⁹⁵ During his lifetime he had founded one chantry chapel at Woodhead in Longdendale, seven miles from the parish church at Mottram, thereby providing a place of worship for parishioners in an outlying part of the parish.¹⁹⁶ In his will he founded another at Stockport, employing one priest. In addition to his duties as chantrist 'the same connyng Preest was to kepe a

PROB 11 series. The three volumes of Piccope and *Cheshire Sheaf* provide some printed copies not available elsewhere, as do W. F. Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills not now to be Found in any Probate Registry, 1301-1752* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 30, 1896) and J. P. Earwaker (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories at Chester, with an Appendix of Abstracts of Wills now Lost or Destroyed Transcribed by the Late Rev. G. J. Piccope* (Chetham Society, new series, 3, 1884).

¹⁹³ Dickens, *The English Reformation*, pp. 214-5; Norman Tanner, *The Church in Late Medieval Norwich 1370-1532* (Toronto, 1984), p. 114.

¹⁹⁴ TNA; PRO PROB 11/8/187 Sir Edmond Shaa; R. C. Shaw, 'Two Fifteenth-century Kinsmen John Shaw of Dukinfield, Mercer, and William Shaw of Heath Charnock, Surgeon', *THSLC*, 110 (1959 for 1958), p. 20.

¹⁹⁵ P. Tucker, 'Shaw, Sir Edmund (d. 1488)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 3 August 2009).

¹⁹⁶ Raymond Richards, 'The Lesser Chapels of Cheshire, part II', *THSLC*, 104 (1953 for 1952), pp. 110-15.

gramer scole contynually'. Both of these foundations combined the provision of *post obit* prayers for Shaw and his family, friends and patrons with charitable purposes.

Shaw's 'cosen' and one of his executors was Geoffrey Downes, from the parish of Prestbury.¹⁹⁷ He had probably been head of the household of Dame Joan (or Jane) Ingoldsthorp, widowed sister of John Tiptoft, earl of Worcester.¹⁹⁸ He built or refurbished the chapel at Pott, one of the thirty-two townships of Prestbury parish, over a long period and by the time he made his will in 1492 he had already funded two priests there.¹⁹⁹ The Downes family archive reveals evidence of lifetime pious gifts by Geoffrey Downes which are not reflected in the will. In 1472 he had leased out twenty sheep, the rents were to be paid 'to the service of Our Lady of Dovnes Schapell in Pott'.²⁰⁰ The importance to him of *post mortem* prayer is illustrated by an indenture from 1495 which set up a trust comprising 100 cows, each cow was to be hired to 'a pore howse holder beyng in necessete' these poor men and women 'nothyng payng ne yeldyng for the hyre of the same cowe but oonly to pray for the sowle of jane and Geffrey & for all the fowlkes in the paynyes of purgatory & all that god wold haue prayd for'.²⁰¹

The construction and endowment of the chapel was the culmination of his life's pious and charitable work, however, and he made meticulous arrangements for the method of appointment and character of the additional priest appointed under his will to

¹⁹⁷ The exact relationship is moot, but it has been suggested that Sir Edmund Shaw's mother was a Downes; Shaw, 'Two Fifteenth-century Kinsmen', p. 19.

¹⁹⁸ Ormerod, iii, pp. 772,774; Earwaker, ii, pp.316, 319, 325; J. McN. Dodgson, 'A Library at Pott Chapel (Pott Shrigley, Cheshire), c. 1493', *The Library*, 5th Series, 15 (1) (1960), p. 49; Colin Richmond, 'The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500', in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 121, 125.

¹⁹⁹ Fred H. Crossley, 'The Renaissance of Cheshire Church Building in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society*, new series, 34(2) (1940), p. 135; CALS EDA 2/6, f. 12; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, pp. 46-8; 51-2; Earwaker, ii, pp. 325-7.

²⁰⁰ CALS DDS 3/37; Richmond, 'The English Gentry and Religion', p. 123.

²⁰¹ CALS DDS 11/3; Richmond, 'The English Gentry and Religion', p. 122.

serve the fraternity of Our Lady and of Jesus at the chapel.²⁰² This foundation was jointly funded by him and Dame Joan Ingoldsthorp, who had also joined with him in funding a chantry priest at Taxal, a parish adjoining Macclesfield chapelry to the east.²⁰³ This indicates that such pious endowment was not restricted to men. Liturgy was also of such significance to the founders of Pott chapel that Downes specified in detail what masses were to be celebrated daily by the fraternity priest. Normally this should be either the mass of Our Lady or of Jesus, although if he preferred occasionally to say some other mass, such as a requiem, he should still say ‘a Memory of our Lady or else of Ihs’.²⁰⁴ Another proviso in the will concerns the books which he had left to the chapel and the loan of books to copy was one of the incentives for this donation or bequest.²⁰⁵ One of the books intended for the chapel was a Wycliffite-glossed copy of the Gospels of St Matthew and St Mark.²⁰⁶ In addition there were nine books, other than service books and the ‘boke of the brother hode’, recording details of the chapel fraternity which Downes also founded. These nine books included a copy of *Dives and Pauper*,

²⁰² *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, p. 47.

²⁰³ Richmond, ‘The English Gentry and Religion’, pp. 121-2; BM Harley 2515, f. 45 (where her name is given as ‘Johanna’); CALS DDS 15/5. The will firstly confirms details of the foundation to finance two priests at the chapel and then specifies the employment of a third priest to serve the brotherhood. Confusingly, later in the will there is reference to ‘either’ fraternity priest. Colin Richmond felt that the fraternity employed two priests and that the involvement of Jane Ingoldsthorp was critical, although he doesn’t say in what way he considers it to have been so important. It is not, however, clear whether she was involved in the arrangements to fund all three priests or just the fraternity priest. This lady’s first name is given in Downes’s will as Jane and she may be the ‘jane’ for whose soul the prayers of the beneficiaries of the cow charity were to be offered. See also Askey, ‘Chantry Foundations’, p. 11. It may be noted that ‘my good lady Ingaldesthorp in whose tender deuocion I haue great confidence’ was remembered in the will of Sir Edmund Shaw, kinsman of Geoffrey Downes.

²⁰⁴ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, p. 47; Dodgson, ‘A Library at Pott Chapel’, p. 48, points out that there are transcription errors both in *Cheshire Sheaf* and in Earwaker notably ‘*Ihu* and *Ihs*’ being regularly printed as *John* and *Jno*: respectively.’

²⁰⁵ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, p. 52. Lending books was also important in the spread of Lollard ideas. Evidence given at Lollard trials in Coventry in 1511 shows that some of those tried had been born in Cheshire and had acquired some of their ideas from borrowed books. There is no suggestion that any of these Cheshire men, Thomas Acton, Ralph Lye and Thomas Abell, had lived in the county for some years before their arrest, however; Shannon McSheffrey and Norman Tanner (eds), *Lollards of Coventry, 1486-1522*, Camden Society, 5th series, 23 (2003), pp. 150-1, 174-5, 182-4.

²⁰⁶ Dodgson, ‘A Library at Pott Chapel’, pp. 47, 49.

only recently published when the library was set up.²⁰⁷ ‘It is a library providing edifying but popular reading, mostly in English, available for borrowing in a remote Cheshire village in the last decade of the fifteenth century’.²⁰⁸ There was clearly a keen interest in a variety of devotional literature, even in remote areas of the county, and new ideas were shared and discussed - even ideas bordering on the heretical.

Sir John Percival, who was born near Macclesfield, wrote his will in March 1503, and had already endowed a school at Macclesfield under a separate deed.²⁰⁹ Although the school was to be free, it was intended for the sons of gentlemen and ‘other good menes Children’ who might ‘for lak of such techyng & draught in conyng fall to Idelenes And so consequently live disolately all their daies.’ The chapel at Macclesfield had close ties to the Savage family, and in this deed Percival records the assistance of Thomas Savage, archbishop of York and previously bishop of London, in setting up his school.²¹⁰

Like Sir Edmund Shaw, Percival had made his fortune as a member of one of the London livery companies, in his case the Tailors’ Company, and was elected mayor of

²⁰⁷ CALS DDS 2/12; Dodgson, ‘A Library at Pott Chapel’, pp. 49-52; R. N. Swanson, ‘Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England’, *The English Historical Review*, 105 (417) (1990), p. 850. Swanson feels that although the author of *Dives and Pauper* was critical of various aspects of conventional religion and although his orthodoxy may have been questioned it ‘seems in the end to be undeniable’. The presence of the book in the chapel library was thus not necessarily evidence of religious heterodoxy, but rather of an interest in developments in religious debate.

²⁰⁸ Dodgson, ‘A Library at Pott Chapel’, p. 52.

²⁰⁹ TNA: PRO PROB 11/13/464 Sir John Pereyvale or Pryvale. The grammar school foundation deed is partly printed in Earwaker, ii, pp. 512-3. This provides for the lands settled on the school to be held by seventeen feoffees, one of whom was Thomas Hyde of Norbury whose name was enrolled in the fraternity at Pott. Another was Roger Legh of the Ridge who was married to the daughter of Sir Richard Sutton (see below) plus John Sutton, father of Sir Richard Sutton, and John his eldest son.

²¹⁰ Jane Laughton, *The Church in the Market Place: A History of the Church of St Michael and All Angels in Macclesfield c.1220-1901* (Macclesfield: Open Door Project, 2003), p. 23.

London in 1498.²¹¹ One of the executors of Percival's will was John Shaw who had been executor of Sir Edmund Shaw. Percival gave meticulous instructions for his funeral in his will. He arranged for twenty-four poor men, if possible tailors, to act as torch-bearers wearing

xxiiij gownes of russett of the price of ijs iiijd euery yerde and xxiiij hoodes to the same to be made of blak lynnyng and euery gowne to be made an lyned with fryse or with other goode lynnyng ... and vpon the right sleve of euery gowne within the space of a spanne from the hande the blissed name of Jhu to be kytte owte and made in lettres of white wollen cloth.²¹²

Only five of the torches were to be lit during his requiem mass and dirige, 'in the worship of the v woundes of our lorde'; two at his head, one at his feet and two at his sides. A further five poor men were to have similar russet gowns and black hoods, with 'the name of Jhu' on the right sleeve. These men were to hold lighted tapers in memory of the 'v Joyes of our lady'. He also made provision for the purchase of fabric to be made into gowns for as many men and women as possible; all were to have 'the blessed name of Jhu' in white cloth on the right sleeve 'within a spanne of the hande that they may turne vp the sleve'.²¹³

The last of these four wills is that of Sir Richard Sutton, also born near Macclesfield, who made his money in London as a lawyer. In addition to the lands provided for his chantry foundation in Cheshire, Sutton was a benefactor of Brasenose

²¹¹ Sir John Percival was a member of the Tailors' Company and Sir Edmund Shaw's father was a mercer in Stockport; Shaw, 'Two Fifteenth-century Kinsmen', p. 18. Matthew Davies, 'Percyvale, Thomasine (d. 1512)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 3 August 2009). Sir John Percival was Thomasine's third husband.

²¹² TNA: PRO PROB 11/13/464 Sir John Pereyvale or Pryvale.

²¹³ Not only were all these garments to be embroidered with the sacred trigram but Percival also left a bequest of 'two of my basons of siluer parcell gilt ... In the botom wherof the holy name of Jhu is graven.'

College, Oxford and is regarded as one of the founders of the college.²¹⁴ He also settled lands on the 'fashionable' Bridgettine monastery of Syon in Middlesex, and by 1513 was steward of the monastery.²¹⁵ 'A man of conspicuous piety', within a few years he had become a permanent resident of Syon Abbey and in 1519 helped to fund the publication of *The Orcharde of Syon*, a devotional text based on the works of St Catherine of Siena.²¹⁶ One of his kinsmen was William Sutton, at one time principal of Brasenose Hall who was, with Geoffrey Downes, executor of the will of Dame Joan Ingoldsthorp.²¹⁷

Sir Richard Sutton's will was written in 1524 and sets out how the perpetual chantry he had already endowed in Cheshire was to be organised. 'A vertuose priest' was to say the following masses 'on munday of the Annuncyacon of our blessyd lady on Wednesday of the fyve woundes of our lord Jhu on Fryday of Jhu ... & all other dayes schall say masse of the daye.' Very unusually he also appointed lands to pay for a priest to teach women, albeit only those women who intended to be professed at Syon. His executors included his nephew, John Sutton, and his son-in-law, Roger Legh of the Ridge both of whom were also trustees of Sir John Percival.²¹⁸

²¹⁴ James G. Clark, 'Sutton, Sir Richard (c.1460-1524)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 23 August 2009); Ralph Churton, *The Lives of William Smyth Bishop of Lincoln and Sir Richard Sutton Knight, Founders of Brasen Nose College* (Oxford, 1800). Clark suggests that Sutton may have been educated at Macclesfield grammar school, this is unlikely in view of the date of foundation of the school, it may also be noted that the school's founder commended Sutton for his advice when it was set up.

²¹⁵ Churton, *Lives*, p. 415; Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (paperback edition) (Oxford, 1993), p. 25.

²¹⁶ Churton, *Lives*, p. 417; Clark, 'Sutton'; J. T. Rhodes, 'Syon Abbey and its Religious Publications in the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1) (1993), p. 16.

²¹⁷ TNA: PRO PROB 11/10/189 Joan Ingaldethorp.

²¹⁸ Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills*, pp. 41-46; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xvii, pp. 89-90. Although Irvine must have thought that no probate copy of Sutton's will existed, there is a copy at The National Archives TNA: PRO PROB 11/21/459 Sir Richard Sutton.

These four men were closely connected by ties of patronage, kinship, friendship and business. Their wills indicate that were men of great personal piety who clearly believed in the power of *post mortem* prayer for the health of the soul and remission of time in purgatory, thus revealing a traditional Catholic faith. This belief in the power of prayer was combined with a humanist belief in the value of education to keep children from idleness and enable them to realise their potential.²¹⁹ All four testators required their priests to be of good moral character and provided for their dismissal if they did not live up to the ideal, the power of appointment and dismissal was devolved to lay trustees. Swanson found that chantry foundation deeds often made this type of stipulation as to the character and behaviour of priests intended as incumbents and considered that this reflected an ‘idealization of the priesthood in personal terms’.²²⁰ Detailed instructions were left, setting out exactly how these testators wanted their wishes to be carried out. Colin Richmond wonders how ‘such pedantry’ is to be interpreted. ‘Is it more or less devout to be thinking of everything?’²²¹ I suggest, however, that such precision is likely to be a reflection of their experience as men of business. They had made detailed plans of how they thought it best to arrange matters on earth so as to speed their way through purgatory and were not prepared to delegate the arrangements.

Allied to the conventional belief in the power of prayer, however, was a keen interest in the most modern devotional literature and liturgy, notably in the fashionable

²¹⁹ Although Geoffrey Downes left no separate endowment for a school, one of the duties of his chantry priest was to teach children. Sir Richard Sutton assisted Sir John Percival with the foundation of his school and his endowment of a priest to teach women was made with a view to enabling them to have a career as nuns.

²²⁰ Swanson, ‘Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England’, p. 849.

²²¹ Richmond, ‘The English Gentry and Religion’, p. 127.

devotion to the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, 'a very "Catholic" cult, with an emphasis upon correct liturgical procedure'.²²² The feast of the Name of Jesus had only been added to the English liturgical calendar in 1488-9.²²³

Emphasis on liturgy is evident in all four of these wills, demonstrated by the stipulation of which masses were to be said, and upon which day.²²⁴ The use of the trigram 'Jhu' or 'Ihu' is also indicative of devotion to the cult of the Holy Name.²²⁵ There is evidence that the cult spread in Cheshire beyond the deanery of Macclesfield and enjoyed enduring popularity. There was still a Jesus Service at Macclesfield church at the time of the dissolution of the chantries.²²⁶ By 1520 the Trafford family had founded a Jesus chantry chapel on the north side of Wilmslow parish church and the first chantrist was buried in the 'Jesus Ile'.²²⁷ There was also a Jesus Chapel in Bowdon parish church, in Frodsham deanery, mentioned in the will of George Booth, written in 1531.²²⁸

Other evidence of devotion to the cult across the county comes from documents such as wills and letters which are either headed with the name of Jesus or begin by

²²² H. Blake, G. Egan, J. Hurst and E. New, 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival in England: the Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus and the Reformation', in D. Gaimster and R. Gilchrist (eds), *The Archaeology of Reformation, 1480-1580* (Leeds, 2003), p. 188.

²²³ R. W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England* (Oxford, 1970) pp. 73, 77; Blake *et al.*, 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival', p. 177.

²²⁴ E. G. C. F. Atchley, 'Jesus Mass and Anthem', *Transactions of the St Paul's Ecclesiological Society*, 5 (1905), pp. 163-9; Elizabeth Anne New, 'The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus in Late Medieval England, with Special Reference to the Fraternity in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, c.1450 – 1558', (PhD thesis, University of London, 1999), p. 45.

²²⁵ New concluded that there was an 'apparent absence (or late establishment) of popular devotion to the Holy Name in northern England ... [which] appears to be markedly different from other parts of the country'. This is, however, contradicted by the evidence of the foundation of the Guild of Our Lady and of Jesus at Pott by Geoffrey Downes before he made his will in 1492 and which does not appear on her distribution map of Jesus Guild foundations between 1460 and 1560; New, 'The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus', p. 79. Blake *et al* also suggested that the cult was almost unknown in the north of England; 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival', p. 177

²²⁶ TNA: PRO E 301/8/21; Laughton, *The Church in the Market Place*, p. 43.

²²⁷ BL Harley 2151, f. 75v; T. F. Askey, 'Chantry Foundations', p. 26.

²²⁸ Piccope (First Portion), p. 94.

invoking Him.²²⁹ In 1504 Robert Redich of Grappenhall in Frodsham Deanery on the northern border of the county began his will ‘In the name of our maker & sauior Jhucrist amen’.²³⁰ Laurence Downes, a kinsman of Geoffrey, headed a letter probably written in 1531 with the word ‘Jesus’.²³¹ Evidence of continuing usage comes from a letter written by Philip Egerton in March 1557, which he headed with the trigram. This was probably his normal practice, since it is a business letter relating to his work as a justice of the peace.²³²

The evolving nature of religious devotion in Cheshire can be seen from changes in the type of masses requested in wills. Prior to about 1520 testators did not generally request named masses, but the series of thirty masses, the traditional trental was popular, often to be said by one or more orders of friars. By 1500 the going rate was 10s, as it was in Norwich.²³³ After about 1520 it became more common to ask for one of the more fashionable masses such as Mass of the Five Wounds, or of Jesus.²³⁴ The books belonging to the parish church of Holy Trinity in Chester, listed in 1532, include ‘2 boks of parchment wryttyn of festes of the names of Jhu and the vycytatyon of oure Lady.’²³⁵

²²⁹ New, ‘The Cult of the Holy Name of Jesus’, p. 57-8; Blake *et al.*, ‘From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival’, pp. 184-5.

²³⁰ TNA: PRO PROB 11/19/76 Robert Redich; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xlii, p. 90.

²³¹ CALS DDS 14/10 no.1. The letter is in poor condition and the date is torn. Laurence was the son of Roger Downes, nephew of Geoffrey, he died in 1564.

²³² TNA: PRO CHES 5/6 3 & 4 Philip and Mary, April. The letter, which appears to have been hurriedly scrawled, is written on an unpaginated slip inserted between bound pages and relates to the taking of sureties. Philip Egerton had property at Egerton in Malpas parish in the south of Cheshire and at Oulton in Over parish in mid-Cheshire, the letter was written from Oulton.

²³³ For example the will of Ralph Davenport of Chester, 1505, left 10s to each order of friars for a trental, *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxiii, p. 37; Tanner, *The Church in Norwich*, p. 102.

²³⁴ For example, Sir Piers Legh of Lyme ‘knyght and prest’ requested one hundred priests to say one hundred masses on one day including twenty of ‘Ihs’ and twenty of ‘the fyve wounds’; Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills*, pp. 34-5.

²³⁵ Rev. J. R. Beresford, ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532 to 1633’, *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), p. 107.

Elizabeth New has also noted a Trinitarian bias in the wills of some members of the Fraternity of the Holy Name of Jesus in St Paul's in London. Sir Richard Sutton bequeathed his soul to 'the blyssid Trynite throgh the meke prayer of the most pure & mekest vyrgyn the mother of Jhu cryste'.²³⁶ The cult of the Holy Name of Jesus was closely associated with the Virgin Mary, as seen in Sutton's will and one of the very few original surviving Cheshire wills of this early period, that of Robert Middleton of Chester from 1530, has the heading 'Ihs Maria'.²³⁷ This association emphasises the orthodox nature of the cult and, indeed, may help to explain the apparent enthusiasm with which it was received in Cheshire, where Marian devotion was strong. Of the twenty-two bequests in surviving early wills to lights, images or altars dedicated to specific saints, fifteen were dedicated to St Mary. It has been argued, however, that despite its orthodox emphasis, many of the early evangelicals were attracted to the Christocentric spirituality of the Name of Jesus and the trigram proved to be an enduring symbol of spirituality.²³⁸

Duffy has described how the cult of saints permeated many aspects of life throughout England in the fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries.²³⁹ The same is no less true of Cheshire, where attachment to specific saints also reflected changing fashion. Many churches had several altars dedicated to different saints. At the church of St Mary on the Hill at Chester there was an altar dedicated to St Stephen and in 1497 Thomas

²³⁶ Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills*, p. 41.

²³⁷ Blake *et al.*, 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival', p. 188; BL Harley 2067, f. 212.

²³⁸ Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 169. However, Blake *et al.* feel that while 'some scholars have linked the cult of the Holy Name to proto-Protestant groups and individuals' the emphasis of the cult on correct liturgical procedure, the adoption of statues of Jesus and close association with the Virgin Mary argue against this; Blake *et al.*, 'From Popular Devotion to Resistance and Revival', p. 188.

²³⁹ Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, Chapter 5.

Dedwood left rents in trust to fund a chantry there for seven years.²⁴⁰ There was also an image of St Katherine in the same church, before which William Milne asked to be buried in 1520, and he left 2s for prayers at her altar. In other areas of the country the popularity of St Stephen was waning while St Katherine retained her appeal.²⁴¹

As the popularity of some saints diminished, so other new cults developed and among the newly-fashionable saints was St George.²⁴² A number of altars and chapels were dedicated to him, including that of the Guild of St George in St Peter's church, Chester.²⁴³ A fragment of a wall painting depicting a St George story-cycle survives at St Mary's church at Astbury. This illustrated the story of St Mary giving St George his suit of armour and probably dates from around 1500. The patron may have chosen this particular story because of the cult of St Mary which attracted pilgrims to the church.²⁴⁴ The painting unites the existing cult of St Mary with the new cult of St George. Miriam Gill considers also that the 'prominence of royal emblems in the original scheme of polychromy suggests that the patron was eager to stress his loyalty to the current king, and he may well have chosen St George because he was Henry VII's personal patron'.²⁴⁵ This conclusion is reinforced by the discovery of a fresco of the arms of Henry VII in the church uncovered during Victorian restoration.²⁴⁶

During the period from about 1470 to 1540 work was carried out to extend and renovate a number of parish churches in Cheshire. Throughout England at this time such

²⁴⁰ BL Harley 213, f. 205.

²⁴¹ CALS EDA 2/1, f. 30. Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion*, pp. 85, 89.

²⁴² Richard Marks, *Image and Devotion in Late Medieval England* (Stroud, 2004), p. 114

²⁴³ Jones, *The Church in Chester*, p. 65; legacy in will of Nicholas Southworth, 1489, *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xix, p. 4.

²⁴⁴ TNA: PRO C 1/730/6.

²⁴⁵ Miriam Gill, "'Now help, St George, oure lady knyght ... to strengthe our Kyng and England ryght'". Rare Scenes of Saint George in a Wall Painting at Astbury, Cheshire', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 91 (1997), p. 102.

²⁴⁶ Rev. J. E. G. Cartlidge, *Newbold Astbury and its History* ((paperback reprint, Congleton, 2004), p. 40.

‘ostentatious programmes of church rebuilding and embellishment testify both to competence and to a vitality bordering on exuberance in many parish communities.’²⁴⁷

The reconstruction work also presented an opportunity for the foundation of new chantry chapels. In Cheshire these were often created by closing off church aisles at their eastern end with timber screens. In some cases, however, this type of chapel had already been in existence for some centuries such as that of the Worths of Tytherington in Prestbury church, constructed about 1350 and dedicated to St Nicholas.²⁴⁸ Of the new chantry chapels one at Bunbury was endowed in 1527, ones at Northenden and Cheadle in 1529 and at Malpas in 1542.²⁴⁹ Haigh felt that in Lancashire this was an indication of religious conservatism as ‘the endowment of chantries on a large scale was clearly a thing of the past in most parts of England’; subsequent work by Alan Kreider, however, has found a general ‘surge’ of chantry foundations in the early decades of the sixteenth century.²⁵⁰

The religious life of the laity of Cheshire in the early decades of the sixteenth century showed how adaptable ‘traditional’ religion was. New ideas and cults were popular and developed alongside orthodox piety, as was the case throughout England. At the same time there was awareness in the county of heterodox ideas, such as those of John Wycliffe, and an appreciation of education and literature which characterised humanist philosophy. In both Lancashire and Cheshire the sustained belief in the power and importance of prayer meant that the foundation of chantries continued well into the

²⁴⁷ Clive Burgess and Beat Kümin, ‘Penitential Bequests and Parish Regimes in Late Medieval England’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), pp. 610, 628.

²⁴⁸ Booklet available in the church 8 July 2009.

²⁴⁹ Crossley, ‘The Renaissance of Cheshire Church Building’, p. 68; Fred H. Crossley, ‘The Church Screens of Cheshire’, *THSLC*, 69 (1917), pp. 10-11. Some wooden screens survive in part at Cheadle, Wilmslow, Malpas, Barthomley, Tarvin, Northenden and Bunbury.

²⁵⁰ Kreider, *English Chantries*, p. 90.

sixteenth century. The evidence indicates that Cheshire people were well aware of fashionable developments in religious practice and were enthusiastic in accommodating new trends and changed priorities.

Conclusion

The structure of the pre-Reformation church in Cheshire was thus unusual in the degree of autonomy which successive archdeacons had been able to negotiate in a series of agreements. In turn they had devolved a great deal of power to the rural deans in return for payment. This situation was echoed in the parochial structure of the county as many of the parishes were so large that a number of chapelries at a distance from the mother church had achieved semi-independent status. This situation was not unique to Cheshire, however, since similar conditions obtained Lancashire, where the area south of the Ribble was also part of the archdeaconry of Chester. Despite this tradition of independence and despite reports from Adam Beconsall to Cromwell there is little evidence of corruption and neglect among the clergy of Cheshire.

Parochial patronage in the county was controlled by a combination of local gentry and local monasteries but as gentry interference in monastic affairs increased, they came to dominate parochial appointments. There was no powerful local magnate and as the Stanleys abandoned their attempt to extend their influence over the church in Cheshire a key difference between Lancashire and Cheshire was the pervasive influence of the Stanleys over church and society in Lancashire. Furthermore, the increasing number of chapel foundations, notably chantry foundations by merchants and lesser gentry, extended their sphere of influence over clerical appointments. In many cases

chantries or schools were set up with the power of appointment entrusted to groups of laymen. To them the character, behaviour and ability of their priests was of paramount importance. This suggests not such much a withdrawal from parish religion by these elite groups as a desire to extend the provision of corporate religion to areas previously not well served by the parish system.

Among some groups of the gentry and merchants, both in the towns and in the countryside, there is evidence of great personal piety and a genuine interest in the most modern devotional literature and liturgy, as well as the study of the Bible in the vernacular. Unfortunately, there is little evidence of the extent to which these aspects of devotion extended into less elite groups of parishioners. The importance of individuals and networks is apparent in promoting the spread of these ideas, however, and indicates that this was by no means a backward area which was out of touch with fashionable trends in religious observance. Aspects of corporate religion in Cheshire, such as investment in parish church refurbishment and continued chantry endowment, were also noted by Haigh in Lancashire. In this respect Cheshire was no different from the rest of England and neither, it would seem, was Lancashire. The differing response of the two counties to the religious changes which lay ahead did not stem from any difference in ecclesiastical organisation or from variations in the popularity and vitality of pre-Reformation parish religion, but the influence of community leaders, notably the earl of Derby, was clearly to be of crucial importance.

3

THE HENRICIAN CHANGES

By the early 1530s two initiatives for religious reform were emerging in England – the political Reformation instigated by central government, which coincided with growing popular interest in the work of continental reformers; reformation from ‘above’ and ‘below’ in Christopher Haigh’s paradigm.¹ The imposition of change from the centre incorporated legislation, proclamations and injunctions involving both the physical and legal structures of the church in England. These structural changes derived from a succession of ‘twists and turns of religious policy’ which resulted in an ebb and flow of changing procedure and doctrine, all of which had to be disseminated to all parts of the country.² It was Haigh’s contention that in Lancashire efforts to impose religious reform at this time ‘met with little success’.³ Historians have often tended to lump Lancashire and Cheshire together, expecting a similar response from both. Elton, for example, felt that ‘[i]n general, Cheshire behaved more like northern counties: independent, backward, ill governed, it somewhat resembled Lancashire’.⁴ This chapter will examine the validity of this assertion in relation to the Henrician period, as we have already seen that the contention that Cheshire was backward and ill-governed is not borne out by earlier evidence. The reaction in Cheshire to the centrally-imposed changes of the reign of Henry VIII will be considered, partly by comparison with the response in Lancashire.

¹ Christopher Haigh, ‘The Recent Historiography of the English Reformation’, in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 19-21.

² Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (paperback second edition, London and New York, 2012), p. 50.

³ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), pp. 98-9.

⁴ G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 132.

Lay response to evangelical ideas will also be investigated, as far as the paucity of available evidence permits.

The Legal Framework

The series of seven parliamentary sessions held between November 1529 and 1536 has come to be identified by historians as ‘The Reformation Parliament’ because of the ecclesiastical legislation enacted during the various sittings.⁵ This legislation comprised acts of far-reaching importance for the church in England, including the Act in Restraint of Appeals of March 1533 and the Act of Supremacy of 1534. Stanford Lehmberg has pointed out, however, that a wide variety of other legislation was enacted during these sessions and reforming activity was not limited to religion but also embraced ‘economic regulation ... social conscience ... legal procedure ... administration and government finance.’⁶ Indeed, administrative changes enacted during these parliamentary sessions saw the first stages of the integration of Cheshire local government into the English national system with the introduction of Justices of the Peace and quarter sessions into the county in 1536.⁷ It was not until 1543, however, that the county was granted parliamentary representation, so there were no members of the House of Commons representing the shire or borough of Chester in the Reformation Parliament.⁸ During the course of the parliament Geoffrey Blythe, who had been bishop of Coventry and

⁵ Stanford E. Lehmberg, *The Reformation Parliament, 1529-1536* (Cambridge, 1970), p. 249, has dated the first common use of this description to the early twentieth century.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ 27 Henry VIII, c. 5. This legislation was part of a series of acts affecting the government of Wales culminating in the ‘Act of Union’ in 1543, 34 & 35 Henry VIII, c. 26.

⁸ 34 & 35 Henry VIII, c. 13.

Lichfield since 1503, died, to be replaced after much rumour and speculation by Rowland Lee.⁹

The first session of the Reformation Parliament passed The Mortuaries Act in 1529, which provided for certain exemptions from payment of mortuaries together with a sliding scale of payments for those who were liable. No mortuaries were to be paid in Wales or the Marches unless payment was customary. However, the Welsh bishops and the archdeacon of Chester specifically reserved the right to customary mortuary payments from their clergy.¹⁰ Tim Thornton has stated that the proviso which protected customary practice showed ‘sensitivity towards the county’s special status’.¹¹ It was, however, not clear whether the laity of Cheshire were included in the exemption and this caused some local confusion. When George Booth of Bowdon made his will in October 1531 he left to the popular prior of Birkenhead, impropiator of the parish, his best horse ‘to praye for me in as much as yer is a statute made yt he can have no corse present’.¹² In the 1540s several testators specified that a mortuary was to be paid in accordance with the statute, indicating both that they preferred that the 1529 Act should apply and to avoid potential problems of implementation. For example, in 1541 William Davenport of Bramhall requested his executors to pay ‘my mortuarie according to the acte of Parliament therof made’.¹³

⁹ For example, in February 1533 it was rumoured that Edmund Bonner was to receive the preferment, ‘the saying is here by such as cumeth from london that doctor Bonar shalbe bisshop of chestre’; TNA: PRO SP 1/74, f. 178 (*LP* vi, 179).

¹⁰ 21 Henry VIII, c. 6.

¹¹ Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), p. 125.

¹² Piccope (First Portion), pp. 93-97.

¹³ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 153v-154; 200-202 (Piccope (First Portion), pp. 76-81). Other examples include the wills of John Starkey in 1542; CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 221v-223 and John Hinchcliffe in 1546; CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 353-353v.

Perhaps because of this type of uncertainty the government took a variety of measures to publicise and enforce the more radical religious legislation of the early 1530s. Following the passing of the Act in Restraint of Appeals in March 1533 copies of the act were printed and nailed to the door of each parish church.¹⁴ This act ‘doubtless the most important single piece of legislation to be enacted by the Reformation Parliament’ set out the first specific rejection of papal authority.¹⁵ In response, clergy from the universities organised a campaign of preaching in the north of England, including Cheshire, in support of the Pope and ‘diminishing the power of secular princes.’¹⁶ Subsequently, specific orders were issued for the proclamation of particular statutes, such as the writ of 22 May 1534 ordering the sheriff of Chester to proclaim ‘certain statutes and ordinances passed by the Parliament’.¹⁷

In June 1535 the king issued a circular letter ordering the clergy and justices of the peace to promulgate his policies and publicise the abolition of papal authority in churches and at assizes.¹⁸ This followed the passing of the Act of Supremacy and the Treason Act of November 1534 which, in effect, made it a treasonable offence to deny the royal supremacy.¹⁹ The effect of the second part of this decree must have been somewhat limited in Cheshire where there was, as yet, no commission of the peace. By far the most important method of disseminating the news of the abolition of papal

¹⁴ 24 Henry VIII, c. 12; Glanmor Williams, *Wales and the Reformation* (paperback edition, Cardiff, 1999), p. 60.

¹⁵ Lehmberg, *Reformation Parliament*, p. 175.

¹⁶ Strype, *Annals*, i, pp. 244-5. Strype names Dr Wilson and Dr Hubbardine ‘popular and ready preachers’.

¹⁷ *LP* vii, 700.

¹⁸ TNA: PRO SP 1/93, f. 134 (*LP* viii, 921).

¹⁹ 26 Henry VIII, c. 1 and 26 Henry VIII, c. 13. Lehmberg records, however, that the Treason Act was not passed without opposition in the Commons who insisted on the insertion of the word ‘maliciously’ [maliciously] before ‘to deprieve theym ... of the dignite title or name of their royall estates’, thus, they hoped, making the Act slightly less draconian, *Reformation Parliament*, pp. 204-5.

supremacy in the county, therefore, was preaching. In this respect, the choice of Rowland Lee as bishop of Coventry and Lichfield had been unfortunate. When he received the order from the king in June 1535 for ‘the declaracon and precheyng of the usurpyd and ambcios power of the bisscope of Rome’ he admitted ‘hitherto I was neuer in pulpitt’ but was prepared to take horse from Gloucester to his diocese ‘with all spede’ and both to preach in person and to instruct others to do so.²⁰ Rowland Lee had owed his election as bishop of Coventry and Lichfield in January 1534 to the patronage of Thomas Cromwell with whom he had been in the service of Wolsey.²¹ He had entered royal service as one of the king’s chaplains following Wolsey’s fall and was soon actively engaged in obtaining the surrender of smaller monasteries and in promoting the royal divorce.²² Nicholas Harpsfield recorded that it was Lee who performed a secret marriage in January 1533 between Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn, albeit reluctantly and not before he received assurances from the king that a licence had been granted by the pope.²³ Lee continued as a loyal promoter of the marriage to Anne Boleyn and in March or April 1534 he visited Fisher in an attempt to persuade him to swear the Oath of Succession.²⁴ Following his promotion to the see of Coventry and Lichfield, Lee was appointed president of the Council of the Marches and was very active in suppressing disorder in Wales and the Marches. He had scant regard for the language and traditions of Wales and was widely hated by the Welsh ‘ffor the Welshmen that be of the evill

²⁰ TNA: PRO SP 1/93, f. 29 (*LP* viii, 839). This holograph letter is headed with the sacred trigram Ihs. Lee’s letter appears to be a response to the circular letter instructing the clergy to preach against the power of the pope, although his letter is dated 7 June while the circular letter bears the date of 25 June.

²¹ This was the view of Stephen Vaughan, an agent in the Netherlands and a spy in Cromwell’s service, who considered that Cromwell had helped Lee to the post; TNA: PRO SP 1/80, f. 75 (*LP* vi, 1385).

²² Michael A. Jones, ‘Lee, Rowland (c.1487-1543)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 3 October 2009).

²³ Nicholas Harpsfield, *A Treatise of Marryage Occasioned by the Pretended Diuorce of King Henry the Eighth from Q. Catherine of Aragon*, ed. Nicholas Pocock, Camden Society, 2nd series, 21 (1878), pp. 234-5.

²⁴ *LP* vii, 498.

sorte' considered him to be a devil.²⁵ One Welsh chronicler reported that he had hanged 5,000 felons in six years.²⁶ The English, however, considered his tenure of the presidency of the Council to be a success and his methods were adopted as a model by future presidents.²⁷

Although there can be no doubt that his work on the Council took up the majority of Lee's time there is evidence that he was a popular choice as bishop and it was reported that he was welcomed to Lichfield by such a throng of 'gentilmen of the Cuntrey' that he 'fedeth dailie at leaste ij^c persons.' He 'was so moche the better biloued for his gentle dealinge with theime in the tyme of his chauncellorshipp there.'²⁸ Lee had presided over the consistory court at Lichfield from 1525 until sometime in 1527 and acted as Blythe's vicar-general until November 1528 so he was well known to many of the diocesan officials.²⁹ He was concerned for the spiritual condition of his diocese on his arrival there and reported to Cromwell that 'dayly I haue visited dyuers partes of my dioces and my Landes and Intend ... to doo moo god wyllyng ... forasmuche as it hathe been long senys eny chyl dren by absens of the bissoope where confirme ynd I haue had muche to doo'.³⁰ His subsequent preoccupation with his work in Wales meant that much of his diocesan administrative duties were carried out by others, however, in particular officials such as the chancellor, David Pole, and the receiver-general, Richard Strete. In 1537 he appointed the Carmelite John Bird, bishop of Penreth, as suffragan, which meant that Lee's work of administering the diocese was shared, although it is likely that

²⁵ TNA: PRO SP 1/125, f. 160 (*LP* xii (2), 896).

²⁶ Jones, 'Lee', referring to the chronicle of Elis Gruffudd.

²⁷ Caroline A. J. Skeel, *The Council in the Marches of Wales* (London, 1904), p. 80; Williams, *Wales and the Reformation*, p. 170.

²⁸ TNA: PRO SP 1/85, f. 56 (*LP* vii, 967).

²⁹ Jones, 'Lee'. James Gairdner, editor of *Letter and Papers*, reported, however, that Lee's name does not appear on the list of chancellors; *LP* vii, 967 footnote.

³⁰ TNA: PRO SP 1/85, f. 45 (*LP* vii, 968).

Bird also assisted in the bishopric of Llandaff.³¹ Bird was subsequently bishop of Bangor and first bishop of Chester when the new see was formed in 1541.

Despite his undoubted loyalty to the king and his assiduous work in promoting the divorce and royal supremacy, Lee's religious beliefs seem to have been conservative. When Stephen Vaughan, one of Cromwell's agents, heard of Lee's appointment as bishop he wrote to his master 'yow haue lately holpen an erthely beste a Molle and an eanemy to all godly lernyng into thoffyce of his dampnacon; a papiste an Idolater and a fleshely preste vnto a Busshopp of Chester'.³² Lee's deputies, Pole and Strete, were in trouble in September 1534 following a report that they 'favor and leyn to the busshope of rome and his wikide lawes and practizes'.³³ The complaint against them had been made following a dispute over the appointment of a new schoolmaster at Lichfield and, as Ethan Shagan has shown, the language of the new legislation of the early 1530s gave laymen a new weapon with which to attack the clergy in the course of a dispute.³⁴

It was, however, not just the clergy who were responsible for promulgating the new legislation. The absence of Justices of the Peace to publicise the royal supremacy in Cheshire meant that the loyalty of the sheriff was of paramount importance. In previous centuries the sheriff of the county had been appointed at pleasure or for life, but by the

³¹ Rev. F. Sanders, 'John Bird, DD, Bishop of Chester, 1541-1554', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 13 (1907), pp. 114-5. The location of 'Penreth' exercised nineteenth-century antiquarians and although they were not able to agree, Michael Jones in his article on Rowland Lee for *DNB* identifies it as 'probably Pen-tyrch near Llandaff'.

³² TNA: PRO SP 1/80, f. 75 (*LP* vi, 1385).

³³ TNA: PRO SP 1/85, f. 176 (*LP* vii, 1118).

³⁴ Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 133.

1520s the office had become an annual royal nomination.³⁵ In 1534 Sir Piers Dutton secured his first term as sheriff following consolidation of his power base in Cheshire after his success in the complicated inheritance case which followed the death of Lawrence Dutton in 1527.³⁶ In July 1533 the Privy Council had decreed that Sir Piers Dutton was the rightful heir to the Dutton lands and this ruling was subsequently enshrined in an Act of Parliament.³⁷ This had enabled him to strengthen his position in the county in opposition to the Brereton faction.

Dutton proved to be diligent in carrying out his duties as sheriff and in November 1535 Henry VIII took the unusual step of rejecting all three of the candidates offered and writing in Dutton's name as his choice. Dutton was chosen as sheriff again in 1536 thus temporarily ending the run of annual appointments.³⁸ He played his part in hunting out those accused of treason following the 1530s legislation. Dutton wrote to Cromwell that following an order that

I shuld take certen persons for suspect of treason amongst whom one John Heseham was named and specyfyed whiche John at that tyme fledd out of this Cuntrey that I cold not mete with hym ... therefore not only for that but also for dyuerse tretourous and sedicious wordes that he hath spoken whiche was, That if the spirituall men had holden togeder the kyng cold not haue byn hed of the Churche, and also that the byship of Rochestre and Sir Thomas More died

³⁵ Dorothy J. Clayton, *The Administration of the County Palatine of Chester 1442-1485* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 35, 1990), pp. 172-7; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 153-5.

³⁶ Laurence Dutton was one of those whose character and morals were abhorred by Adam Beconsall, the archdeacon's official, in his report on the county in 1535; Laurence Dutton 'had dyuerse sunnys procuryd in baste and non odyrwyse and by reson of that came the londes of dutton to Sir Peter Dutton for [he] ... was sweche a beste in hys lyffing in euery poynte of nougtynes as neuer was in holl reame'; TNA: SP 1/91, f. 167 (*LP* viii, 496).

³⁷ *LP* vi, 818 followed by 27 Henry VIII, c. 43.

³⁸ *LP* ix, 914(22); *LP* xi, 1217(23). Dutton boasted of the high esteem in which he was held by the king and council, citing his third term as sheriff as evidence; *LP* xii (2), 58(2).

martirs in the quarell aforsaid, I haue takyn hym and comytted hym to the Casell of Chestre.³⁹

This letter reveals that the prisoner reportedly showed a degree of sophistication in his thinking and also that Dutton acknowledged that his views were treasonable and was tenacious in his pursuit of Heseham after he had fled the county.⁴⁰

The early 1530s saw the introduction of the legislation enacting the break with Rome and the Royal Supremacy. It has been shown that a relatively minor statute such as the Mortuaries Act could cause a confused response and the government therefore went to some trouble to ensure that the more important religious changes were publicised from the pulpit and by the secular authorities. In Cheshire the success of the preaching campaign may have been limited by reluctance on the part of a conservative-minded church hierarchy at diocesan level. At the same time, however, ambitious local gentry were able to extend their influence in Cheshire by supporting the religious changes thus demonstrating loyalty to the central regime. As Ethan Shagan has convincingly argued, by condemning opposition as treason, rather than heresy, the Royal Supremacy was defined as a political rather than a religious change.⁴¹ It was not until the religious changes began to have a more practical effect from 1536 with the

³⁹ TNA: PRO SP 1/106, f. 19 (*LP* xi, 486). The letter is dated 23 September but Dutton does not usually enter the year when dating his letters and Gardiner in *Letters and Papers* dates the letter to 1536. It might, however, have been written in 1535, following the execution of More and Fisher that summer and may explain why Henry VIII personally chose him as sheriff again in November 1535.

⁴⁰ It is probable that Heseham was John Heysham, the abbot of Norton's smith, who had fled at the time of the arrest of others from the abbey on coining charges in 1535; an example of Sir Piers Dutton's exploitation of religious legislation to further his own ends; J. Patrick Greene, *Norton Priory* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 70; *LP* ix, 183.

⁴¹ Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp. 59-60.

abrogation of saints' days and the suppression of the monasteries that there was a focus for popular discontent.

The Dissolution of the First Two of the County's Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace

By the end of 1534 the break with Rome was complete and Henry VIII was head of the English church. As the practical effects of the implementation of religious changes concomitant upon the legislation became increasingly apparent, however, there was widespread popular discontent and the king faced the most serious challenge of his reign in the autumn of 1536 with the outbreak of the Pilgrimage of Grace. This was, in effect, a series of linked uprisings which began in Lincolnshire, spreading rapidly northwards to Yorkshire, westwards to the Lake Counties and south from there into Lancashire, Cheshire's neighbour. Although the rebels themselves had a variety of stated grievances, a common underlying cause was opposition to the recent religious changes, notably the dissolution of the monasteries and the abrogation of saints' days.⁴² To date, there has been no serious attempt to examine why the rebellion did not spread from Lancashire into Cheshire. For many, both contemporaries and later historians, this should have been a logical progression. In order to understand why Cheshire did not join the rebellion it is necessary to consider both the potential for popular support for the Pilgrimage and the position of the gentry.

A complicating factor in Cheshire in 1536 was the upset of the balance of power in the county occasioned by the execution of William Brereton on 17 May, accused with

⁴² Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 55.

others of adultery with Anne Boleyn.⁴³ The rivalry between the Breretons and other local families, notably the Egertons and the Duttons had been a dominant feature of local political life for more two decades.⁴⁴ As Eric Ives has put it, prior to his fall William Brereton had been ‘master in Cheshire and North Wales’, his position largely derived from his court connections, and the scramble for lands and offices which followed his death exacerbated local rivalries.⁴⁵ By the autumn of 1536 the attention of the leading county families was absorbed by this power struggle in which for the leading protagonists the retention of the goodwill of the king was paramount.

The composition of commissions such as the one responsible for producing the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in 1535 suggests that support from the centre favoured neither party at that time and may, indeed, have been aimed at striking a balance of power.⁴⁶ Of

⁴³ E. W. Ives, ‘Brereton, William (c.1487x90–1536)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 11 July 2009); E. W. Ives, ‘Court and County Palatine in the Reign of Henry VIII: the Career of William Brereton of Malpas’, *THSLC*, 123 (1972 for 1971), pp. 32-3. It is unlikely that Brereton was guilty of the charges brought against him and Ives has suggested that Thomas Cromwell exploited the situation in the spring of 1536 to remove ‘a potential obstacle to his plans for Wales’ (*DNB*). Brereton’s school friend, George Constantine, credibly declared that ‘yf any of them was innocent, it was he’: T. Amyot, (ed.) ‘Transcript of an Original Manuscript, Containing a Memorial from George Constantyne to Thomas Lord Cromwell’, *Archaeologia*, 23 (January 1830), p. 65 (*LP* xiv(2), 400). George Bernard, however, while not apportioning any guilt to Brereton has adopted a more phlegmatic approach. ‘What we do know is that Anne knew Brereton; and it is just conceivable that their relationship was more intimate than was prudent.’ G. W. Bernard, *Anne Boleyn: Fatal Attractions* (New Haven and London, 2010), p. 180. It may be noted here that following the execution of the courtier, William Brereton of Malpas, leadership of the Brereton faction in Cheshire passed to Sir William Brereton of Brereton, a distant relation.

⁴⁴ E. W. Ives, ‘Patronage at the Court of Henry VIII: the Case of Sir Ralph Egerton of Ridley’, *Bulletin of John Rylands Library*, 52 (2) (1970), pp. 365-9; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 214-6.

⁴⁵ Ives, ‘Court and County Palatine’, pp. 22, 33-4, c.f. Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 214-6, where Thornton has stated that this is an exaggeration of Brereton’s influence. Thornton’s view is not, however, supported by a contemporary description of him as ‘a man wiche in the sayd countye of Chester had all the holle rewle and governaunce under owre sovereign lord the kings grace’, quoted in E. W. Ives (ed.), *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 116, 1976), p. 2; S. J. Gunn, *Early Tudor Government, 1485-1558*, p. 36.

⁴⁶ *LP* viii, 149(35); for the Cheshire commissioners *LP* viii, 149(70). The commissioners were William Brereton, Sir Piers Dutton (sheriff in 1534 to 1537 and 1542), Urian (mistranscribed as Brian) Brereton, Sir Thomas Fouleshurst of Crewe in Nantwich deanery (sheriff in 1528), Sir Edward Fitton of Gawsworth in Macclesfield deanery (sheriff in 1531 and 1543), Sir William Stanley of Hooton in Wirral deanery, Sir John Holford of Holford in Frodsham deanery (sheriff in 1541), Sir John Done of Utkinton in Chester deanery (sheriff 1529 and 1530), John Carrington of Carrington in Frodsham deanery, William Venables

the seventeen valuation commissioners for Cheshire, those named first were William Brereton and Sir Piers Dutton. Eight of the county's other leading gentry were included, among them supporters of both Brereton and Dutton. The commission also included five lawyers and other palatine officials from Chester, together with two auditors. The personnel of the Cheshire commission may be compared with the commissioners for Lancashire where the county was surveyed by two different commissions because the work was divided by diocese. The commission for the northern area of Lancashire, in the diocese of York, included only three laymen, none of them local. Although Joyce Youings observed that each county's commission normally comprised the bishop and local gentlemen, this was not always the case since the Cheshire commission included no clergy at all.⁴⁷

It has been pointed out that a comparison with other valuations of monastic income carried out around the same time for different purposes shows that the valuations of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* for the Southern Province were generally accurate.⁴⁸ In the case of Norton Priory in Cheshire, however, Patrick Greene has compared the valuation in *Valor Ecclesiasticus* with the Augmentation Office Ministers' Accounts and found a significant difference of 33% between the gross income of £258 11s 8d (£180 7s 6d net) in the *Valor* and £343 13s 7¼d in the

of Kinderton in Middlewich deanery (sheriff in 1526), John Birkenhead, Richard Hassall, Richard Sneyd, William Glaseor, Otwell Worsley and the two auditors, Henry Parker and Richard Hawkins.

⁴⁷ *LP* viii, 149(68); Christopher Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries and the Pilgrimage of Grace* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 17, 1969), pp. 37-8; Joyce Youings, *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, 1971), p. 36.

⁴⁸ David Knowles, *Bare Ruined Choirs* (Cambridge, 1976), p. 125. As Cheshire was in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield at that time it was part of the Southern Province.

Augmentation Office accounts.⁴⁹ Greene suggested that Sir Piers Dutton, as one of the assessors of Frodsham deanery where Norton was situated, may have deliberately arranged for the value to be falsified in order to reduce the net annual income below £200 thus bringing the monastery within the criteria for dissolution under the act of suppression.⁵⁰ This seems unlikely, however, since there was no talk of a national programme of dissolutions on the basis of their income until the end of February or early March 1536 and the valuations which formed the basis of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* were mostly submitted by the autumn of 1535.⁵¹

The Dutton family had a long connection with Norton and a large part of the abbey's lands had been gifted by them. By May 1536 rumours of the permanent disposal of monastic lands were circulating in the county and some local gentry were quick to seize the opportunity to lobby for available property. On 8 May Sir William Brereton wrote to Cromwell that he had been informed that 'certeyne howses of religion in Cheschyre' were to be suppressed and asking that he 'moue the kynges grace to haue me in remembraunce my seruyce done to his highnes in dyuerse isyues whiche haue byn to my great cost and charge and yf yt please his grace by your meanez to lok vppon me'.⁵² It is clear from this letter that Sir William Brereton looked on Cromwell as a patron.

⁴⁹ Greene, *Norton Priory*, pp. 17-19. Patrick Greene directed the excavation of Norton Priory in the 1970s in the course of which he carried out detailed research on the history and possessions of the house for which there is no surviving cartulary.

⁵⁰ J. Patrick Greene, 'The Impact of the Dissolution on Monasteries in Cheshire: The Case of Norton', in Alan T. Thacker (ed.), *Medieval Archaeology, Art and Architecture at Chester* (Leeds, 2000), p. 155; Youings, *Dissolution*, p. 36.

⁵¹ Lehmborg, *Reformation Parliament*, pp. 224-6.

⁵² TNA: PRO SP 1/103, f. 256 (LP x, 825). Sir William Brereton of Brereton, later lord justice of Ireland, had served in Ireland from 1534 to 1536 and it is probably this service to which he is referring in his letter; Mary Ann Lyons, 'Brereton, Sir William (d. 1541?)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 17 February 2008). It may also be noted Sir Piers Dutton was William Brereton's uncle, since his sister, Eleanor, had married Sir Randle Brereton of Malpas, William Brereton's father (Ormerod, ii, p. 796). This relatively close family relationship did not, however, inhibit the rivalry between the two men but is a further example of how the local gentry were connected by close ties of kinship.

Thornton has pointed out that the leaders of the two main factions in Cheshire had different patrons at court and so to some extent dominance in the county power struggle reflected shifts of influence at the centre. While Sir William Brereton reported to Cromwell, Sir Piers Dutton, who also spent time in London, sent his reports to the chancellor, Audley.⁵³ When Audley sent a commission for the appointment of Dutton to the Council in the Marches in October 1537 Rowland Lee who, as discussed above, was Cromwell's man, sent the commission on to Cromwell for corroboration.⁵⁴

Cromwell implemented a general visitation of the church from July 1535.⁵⁵ The majority of the surviving evidence from this general visitation, in the form of the *Compendium Compertorum* or summary of findings, relates only to reports of faults found in religious houses, however.⁵⁶ The visitors for Cheshire were Thomas Legh and Richard Layton and in June 1535 Layton had written to Cromwell requesting their appointment as commissioners in north because

ther ys nother monasterie sell priorie nor any other religieuse howse in the north but other Doctor lee or I haue familier acqwayntance within x or xij mylles of hit so that no knauerie can be hyde from us in that contre nor ther we cannot be ouerfayssede nore suffer any maner Iniuries, we knowe and haue experiens bothe of the fassion off the contre and the rudenes of the pepull.⁵⁷

⁵³ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 211.

⁵⁴ *LP* xii (2), 985, 993.

⁵⁵ Anthony N. Shaw, 'The *Compendium Compertorum* and the Making of the Suppression Act of 1536' (PhD Thesis, University of Warwick 2003), p. 24, gives the starting point as late July 1535 while Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 247-8, thought that the visitation had not started until September. Elton pointed out that the visitation covered the whole church although it is often treated by historians as though it applied only to the regular clergy.

⁵⁶ 25 Henry VIII, c. 21; Lehmborg, *Reformation Parliament*, p. 192. Almost nothing survives of the parochial visitation *detecta*.

⁵⁷ BL Cotton Cleopatra E IV, f. 13 (*LP* viii, 822). 'Rudeness' here used to denote ignorance and lack of refinement rather than ill-manners.

The royal visitors thus set out with a bias against both the religious of the north and the local population, even though both were northerners. Although Thomas Legh was probably from Cumberland he may have had relatives in Cheshire, as he is said to have been distantly related to the Legh family of Adlington.⁵⁸ From the reports submitted to Cromwell the key issues investigated were sexual crimes, apostasy, and the relics and assets of each house.⁵⁹ Their reports thus provided a variety of types of evidence which could be used in any concerted move against the monasteries.

The archdeaconry of Chester was visited in five days in February 1536, the last house to be visited in the circuit was Combermere, and the visitors were back in London by 29 February. Shaw has suggested that the inclusion of three secular colleges in this last, rushed, phase of the visitation demonstrates that 'that the purpose of the Visitation was largely about ensuring conformity with the Royal Supremacy amongst all bodies of clergy, not just religious.'⁶⁰ There is no evidence that the friaries in Chester were visited, although some houses of friars in other areas were visited.⁶¹ It is likely that Layton and Legh split up for most of this period in view of the speed with which this part of the visitation was carried out. Both men must have visited the important Abbey of Chester, however, as the abbot wrote of 'the Kinges moste dredde Iniuccions to me lately exhybyted by the worshipfull Doctor Layton and Doctor Leghe'.⁶² The visitors clearly

⁵⁸ Frank Renaud, 'Suppression of Religious Houses', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 7 (1890 for 1889), pp. 83-4; Anthony N. Shaw, 'Legh, Sir Thomas (d. 1545)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 13 June 2013). Legh was a cousin of Rowland Lee, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield.

⁵⁹ Shaw, 'The *Compendium Compertorum*', p. 93.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-40. The report on the Cheshire houses is to be found at TNA: PRO SP 1/102, f. 94, 94v, 100 (*LP* x, 364(4)). It does not include any information about Vale Royal, probably because the house had been visited in the summer of 1535 in connection with the election of the abbot; Shaw, 'The *Compendium Compertorum*', pp. 77-8, 192.

⁶¹ For example the Dominican Friars in Lancaster; *LP* ix, 1173 (ii).

⁶² Shaw, 'The *Compendium Compertorum*', pp. 239-40; TNA: PRO SP 1/104, f. 48 (*LP* x, 949).

left the abbot in no doubt that this visitation was being carried out at the command of the king.

The chosen criterion for wholesale dissolution was financial, but presented as a moral decision; ‘forasmuche as manifest synne, vicious carnall and abhominable lyvyng, is dayly used and comytred amonges the lytell and smale Abbeyes Pryoryes and other Relygyous Houses’, those which had clear income of less than £200 per annum were to be suppressed.⁶³ The foundations selected for suppression in Cheshire were Birkenhead Priory, Norton Priory and the house of Benedictine nuns in Chester. Birkenhead Priory was quickly suppressed in May or June 1536.⁶⁴ Although it had always been a poor foundation, the nunnery in Chester purchased its exemption from suppression for £160.⁶⁵ The dissolution of Norton Priory was delayed until early October 1536.⁶⁶

The suppression of monasteries in other areas of England was one of the triggers for the outbreak of the Pilgrimage of Grace in the autumn of 1536.⁶⁷ Dispute, sometimes acrimonious, continues among historians about many aspects of the Pilgrimage, including the causes of the uprising, the sections of society which were actively involved in promoting the unrest and whether there were significant regional variations

⁶³ 27 Henry VIII, c. 28.

⁶⁴ R. Stewart Brown, *Birkenhead Priory and the Mersey Ferry* (Liverpool, 1925), p. 94; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 131.

⁶⁵ *LP* xii (1), 311(39); *LP* xiii (2) i(ii)(3); *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 149.

⁶⁶ TNA: PRO SP 1/108, f.14 (*LP* xi, 681).

⁶⁷ For many years, and arguably to this day, the standard narrative work on the Pilgrimage of Grace was M. H. and R. Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace 1536-7 and the Exeter Conspiracy, 1538* (2 vols. Cambridge, 1915). Recent studies of the Pilgrimage include Michael Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace; a Study of the Rebel Armies of October 1536* (Manchester, 1996); R. W. Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace and the Politics of the 1530s* (Oxford, 2001); Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Pilgrimage of Grace: The Rebellion that Shook Henry VIII's Throne* (paperback edition, London, 2003). Other historians have considered the Pilgrimage in the context of the early Reformation, for example Shagan, *Popular Politics*, chapter 3; G. W. Bernard, *The King's Reformation; Henry VIII and the Remaking of the English Church* (paperback edition New Haven and London, 2007), chapter 4. For a discussion of the causes and summary of the progress of the rebellion see Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions* (revised fifth edition, Harlow, 2008), chapter 4.

in the underlying causes of discontent.⁶⁸ It is, however, indisputable that a number of religious changes had given rise to alarm among the commons amid rumours that the entire fabric of parish life was under threat with concerns about the amalgamation of parishes, the suppression of some churches and confiscation of church goods. As George Bernard has persuasively argued, these fears were not irrational in the face of the physical evidence of confiscation of property when the smaller monasteries were dissolved following the 1536 act and he considers that the dissolution was ‘a central cause in the rebellion’.⁶⁹ There was also generally quite understandable concern about the fate of churches previously served by monks from the suppressed monasteries.⁷⁰ Thus, the dissolution of the smaller monasteries *en masse* has been seen by some historians as the one key event which sparked the uprisings.

Haigh certainly felt that the suppression was crucial in the Lancashire uprising, as evidenced by the restriction of disorder to the north of the county where the monasteries were still influential, while in the south ‘the houses had ceased to play a significant part’.⁷¹ Thus the commons restored the canons of Cartmel and Conishead in north Lancashire while in the south the suppression of the priories of Holland and Burscough was not resisted.⁷² Following the Pilgrimage of Grace, Robert Aske made a lengthy deposition in which, among other things, he attempted to explain why he felt

⁶⁸ See, for example, the review by R. W. Hoyle of Michael Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace* in *American Historical Review*, 103 (3) (June 1998), pp. 879-80 and Michael Bush’s response *American Historical Review*, 103 (5) (December 1998), p. 1763.

⁶⁹ Bernard, *King’s Reformation*, pp. 297, 314.

⁷⁰ C. S. L. Davies, ‘The Pilgrimage of Grace Reconsidered’, *Past and Present*, 41 (1968), pp. 54-76; C. S. L. Davies, ‘Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace’, in Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (eds), *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 58-91.

⁷¹ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 58-9.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 53. Haigh notes, however, that the earl of Derby was reluctant to remove the lead and bells from Burscough as he thought that it might provoke a riot, *ibid.*, p. 55.

that the monasteries were so important to the north of England.⁷³ Haigh's analysis of his deposition indicated that while he felt that Aske had overstated his case, 'there is a solid basis of fact for Lancashire for most of the points he made.'⁷⁴

Aske regretted the loss of abbeys because 'the abbeys in the north partes gaf great almons to pour men' as well as educating the children of the gentry.⁷⁵ In Cheshire, however, there is evidence that responsibility both for the poor and for education was gradually being assumed by the laity by the early sixteenth century. The establishment of grammar schools in the market towns of Stockport, Macclesfield and Malpas under wills and by settlement between 1487 and 1527 has been described above. There had been grammar schools and a song school in Chester from the late fourteenth century, associated with St John's College and St Mary's church rather than the abbey.⁷⁶ Provision for the poor included a 1508 bequest by a former sheriff of Chester, Roger Smith, who left his house to be converted into almshouses for city aldermen or common councilmen 'as ben fallen in decay and necessitie' and the foundation was augmented by further bequests. Although the beneficiaries of this bequest were a very restricted group, there was no requirement that the almsmen were to pray for their benefactor.⁷⁷ The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* shows that Cheshire monasteries were not liberal in their charity. St Werburgh's in Chester claimed a tax-deductible distribution of only 1.3 per cent of its gross income of £1,073 17s 7½d in alms.⁷⁸ Combermere was rather more generous,

⁷³ Mary Bateson (ed.), 'Aske's Examination', *The English Historical Review*, 5 (19) (1890), pp. 550-73.

⁷⁴ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 53-9.

⁷⁵ Bateson (ed.), 'Aske's Examination', pp. 561-2.

⁷⁶ Jane Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City: Chester 1275-1520* (Oxford, 2008), pp. 180-1.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 74; TNA: PRO PROB 11/16/221, Roger Smyth. The foundation of the almshouse at Malpas by Sir Randle Brereton has also been mentioned.

⁷⁸ *Valor*, v, p. 206.

distributing annually £12 13s 4d, being 4.65 per cent of their gross income.⁷⁹ The nuns of Chester were much more charitable than any of the monks, however, as they distributed £10 3s on Maundy Thursday, representing more than 10 per cent of their gross income.⁸⁰ This was still considerably less in percentage terms than Haigh calculated for several of the Lancashire houses, for example, the alms distributed by Whalley were as much as 21 per cent of gross income.⁸¹

Aske's next two points concerned the provision of religious services and the hospitality provided by the monasteries.⁸² In Cheshire some monks did undertake religious duties for the laity and in 1583 it was remembered that the abbot of Norton used to preach near a yew tree in the yard of Poolsea, a chapel of ease of Runcorn, a parish wholly appropriated to the abbey.⁸³ The *Valor Ecclesiasticus* named two monks officiating in parishes; these were canons from Norton serving Great Budworth and Runcorn who had both been repeatedly censured for their sexual immorality.⁸⁴ The proportion of Cheshire parishes wholly appropriated by monasteries varied throughout the county. The deanery of Wirral which included Birkenhead Priory comprised fifteen parishes of which three, plus one moiety of Wallasey, were wholly appropriated by monasteries.⁸⁵ In Macclesfield deanery, however, where there were no monasteries, none of the ten parishes was wholly appropriated. Apart from the two churches served

⁷⁹ *Valor*, v, pp. 216-7.

⁸⁰ *Valor*, v, pp. 206.

⁸¹ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 53-4. Martin Heale has calculated that by 1535 only two English monasteries gave more in alms than Whalley, as shown in *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, although it was far from being the third wealthiest house. Martin Heale, talk to The Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 3 July 2011.

⁸² Bateson (ed.), 'Aske's Examination', p. 561.

⁸³ 'Stray Notes', *THSLC*, 71 (1920 for 1919), p. 91; Ormerod, i, p. 399.

⁸⁴ TNA: PRO SP 1/91, f. 167 (LP viii, 496).

⁸⁵ The Wirral parishes wholly appropriated were Bidston and a moiety of Wallasey, by Birkenhead Priory; Bromborough and Shotwick, by St Werburgh's in Chester.

by canons of Norton all of the Cheshire parishes which were appropriated were served by secular clergy in 1533, unlike the position in Lancashire where Haigh has calculated that monks were in charge of twelve of the fifty-seven parishes of the county.⁸⁶

Claire Cross has also considered the accuracy of the claims in Aske's deposition using the evidence of wills from the diocese of York in an attempt to evaluate popular esteem for the monasteries. She examined just over five thousand wills for the twenty-year period from 1520 to 1540 and found that in making bequests the majority of testators owed their first allegiance to their parish church and only about one-eighth left money to a named monastery. She acknowledged that awareness of continuing monastic suppressions on the part of testators could have affected the scale of benefaction after 1535, but found that it had no significant effect.⁸⁷ The surviving wills for testators from Cheshire total only a small fraction of those examined by Professor Cross and I have located only 69 wills for the period from 1520 to 1540. These were mainly made by county gentry, leading citizens of Chester or clergy. Of the surviving wills, only six left anything to any monastery and of these six, four made bequests to St Werburgh's in Chester. These ranged from 10 shillings left by Ralph Lawton, rector of Bebington, for a dirige and requiem mass in 1531 to 'a gilt stondyng coppe of 28 ounces' left by Richard Hockenhull, who had been sheriff of Chester, for the use of their infirmary in 1528.⁸⁸ Only one testator left anything to any monastery after 1535; that was Thomas Baxter, rector of St Peter's church in Chester, who made several religious bequests in his will of

⁸⁶ This information is derived from the taxation list for 25 Henry VIII (1533-4) in BL Harley 594, ff. 146-154; Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 3.

⁸⁷ Claire Cross, 'Monasticism and Society in the Diocese of York 1520-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 38 (1988), pp. 131-45.

⁸⁸ Piccope (Second Portion), p. 51 (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xliv, p. 17).

1536, including ‘a cremysyn gowne with a hudde’ to St Werbergh’s.⁸⁹ In 1539, however, Ralph Rogers of Chester made a personal bequest to ‘my lorde Abbotte for a remembraunce my gold Rynge with the fyve woundes’.⁹⁰ Almost three-quarters (51) of the Cheshire wills from this period left no bequest to any religious house compared with half the wills for the same period for Yorkshire.⁹¹ Despite the small number of available Cheshire wills and the fact that the testators are not representative of the county as a whole, it is probably safe to assume that monasteries were less popular as recipients of charity in Cheshire than they were in Yorkshire. This may have been at least in part because testators perceived a diminution in spiritual life there, partially due to the influence of the gentry which pervaded Cheshire’s monasteries by the early sixteenth century, leading to intrigue and faction. There were no great reforming abbots in Cheshire of the calibre of Marmaduke Huby at Fountains Abbey in Yorkshire, for example.⁹² Haigh felt that this was also an important factor differentiating the response to the dissolution in Lancashire and in Wales; areas which he felt were equally reactionary in religion. There was no rising to oppose the suppression of the Welsh monasteries because they were already under lay control.⁹³

However, the restricted role of the monasteries is not sufficient explanation for Cheshire’s failure to rise in 1536. Haigh felt that in addition to the decline in importance of the monasteries in the south of Lancashire, the influence of Edward Stanley, earl of Derby was also significant in confining the uprising to the north of the county, where his

⁸⁹ Piccope (Third Portion), p. 47.

⁹⁰ TNA: PRO PROB 11/26/293, Ralph Rogers (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 99).

⁹¹ Cross, ‘Monasticism and Society in the Diocese of York’, p. 132.

⁹² Christopher Harper-Bill, ‘Huby, Marmaduke (c.1439–1526)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 11 July 2009).

⁹³ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 59; Williams, *Wales and the Reformation*, pp. 80-1.

authority was less pervasive and there were fewer loyal gentry.⁹⁴ Initially the rebels had expected him to join them and Haigh felt that Derby probably did not know which side to support, so he equivocated, but in the event he remained loyal to the crown.⁹⁵ The influence of the nobility and gentry as leaders of the Pilgrimage is the subject of some disagreement, not least among contemporaries many of whom found it inconceivable that the commons could have been entirely responsible for raising and organising the uprisings.⁹⁶ This discussion has mainly centred on nature of the leadership of the revolt, rather than the role of the gentry and nobility in hindering or encouraging their tenants. Steven Gunn has cited the example of Lords Clinton and Burgh in Lincolnshire. They ‘fled at the first sign of serious trouble, protesting that their tenants would not fight for them’.⁹⁷ It was, perhaps, fortunate for the earl of Derby that he was never required to engage the pilgrims in battle, as his men were reported to be reluctant to fight the rebels.⁹⁸

In 1536 the rebels in Yorkshire, even if only at the outset, considered Lancashire and Cheshire equally likely to rise in support of their cause.⁹⁹ News of the Pilgrimage of Grace reached Cheshire while events were still unfolding, as reported to a commission for the pacification of Lancashire which met at Warrington in February

⁹⁴ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 59; B. Coward, ‘A “Crisis of the Aristocracy” in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries? The Case of the Stanleys, Earls of Derby, 1504-1642’, *Northern History*, 18 (1982), p. 65.

⁹⁵ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 72-4; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 106, 129-36. A view shared by Barry Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley and Earls of Derby, 1385-1672* Chetham Society, 3rd series, 30, 1983), p. 164 and Louis A. Knafla, ‘Stanley, Edward, third earl of Derby (1509-1572)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 1 August 2010).

⁹⁶ M. E. James, ‘Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England: The Lincolnshire Rebellion 1536’, *Past and Present*, 48 (1970), p. 10; S. J. Gunn, ‘Peers, Commons and Gentry in the Lincolnshire Revolt of 1536’, *Past and Present*, 123 (1989), pp. 52-79; Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp. 446-7; Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, pp. 12-3; Shagan, *Popular Politics*, pp. 95-8, 110.

⁹⁷ Gunn, ‘Peers, Commons and Gentry’, p. 77.

⁹⁸ *LP* xii (1), 849 (8); Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 73.

⁹⁹ *LP* xii (1), 392; *LP* xii (1), 466.

1537. Evidence was given by two men from the parish of Bowdon in the north of Cheshire. They had been in Pontefract in Yorkshire on 2 December 1536 selling salt and herring and had seen the rebel host. They reported that the commons of Yorkshire were considering the response of other counties to the uprising and although the rebels may at one time have had hopes that Cheshire would join them they were now saying that they ‘care not for lancashir and Chesshir ... ij men Rule all Chesshyre which be sumthyng at varyance & can not Agree amongs theym selff that is to wete Sir William Brereton and Sir perys Dutton’. One of the Cheshire men was offered 12d to give names of ‘greate gentillmen’ of Lancashire to Robert Aske.¹⁰⁰ Thus although Aske may by then have given up hopes of the Cheshire gentry joining the Pilgrimage because they were preoccupied with their own disagreements; he still thought it worth canvassing the gentry of Lancashire.

The Pilgrimage must have been well known in Cheshire, however, as it impressed itself on the county’s collective memory as a key event which happened in a different part of England. In a Chester Exchequer deposition of 1566 relating to a case on the Wirral, one of the deponents referred to a gift of a chalice and vestments to his parish made ‘the yeare before the insurrection in the northe which to this deponentes knowledge is aboute xxxti yeares now past and more’.¹⁰¹

It is in the context of the potential spread of the uprisings to Cheshire that the report by Sir Piers Dutton of a disturbance at the time of the suppression of Norton Priory in Cheshire in early October 1536 is so important. The details were reported by

¹⁰⁰ TNA: PRO SP 1/112, f. 134 (*LP* xi, 1253); Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 88; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 23.

¹⁰¹ TNA: PRO E 134/8Eliz/East2, deposition of William Balle of Irby (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, pp. 5-6).

Dutton to Audeley on 12 October. The king's commissioners, Mr Combes and Mr Bolles

were lately at Norton ... for the suppressyng of Thabbey there and when they had packed vp suche Joels and other stuffe as they had ther and thoght upon the morrow after to depart thens Thabbot gedred a gret Company to geders to the nombre of two or thre hundred persons so that the seid Comysioners weare in feare of their lyves and weire faine to take a Towre there and thereupon sende a lettre vnto me ascerteinyng me what daunger they were in and desyred me to come to assiste them or elles they were neuer lyke to come thens whiche lettre came to me about ix of the Clokke in the nyght upon Sunday last and about two of the Clock in the same nyght I came thys with such of my lovers and tenautes as I hadde nere about me and found dyuers fyres made there aswell within the gates as without and the seid abbott hadd caused an oxe and other vitalles to be kylit and prepared for suche hise company as he hadde then there. And it was thoght in the morrowe after he hadde comforte to haue hadde a great nombre moo Notwithstandyng I vsed som polecy and came svdenly upon them so that the Companye that were there fledde and some of them toke Poles and waters and it was so darke that I colde not fynt them. And it was thoght if the matter hadde not byn quykly handlet it wolde haue growen to forther vnconveniutes to what daunger god knoth. How be it I toke the abbot and thre of his Canons and broght them to the kynges Castell of halton ... to be kept as the kynges Rebellyons.¹⁰²

¹⁰² TNA: PRO SP 1/108, f.14 (*LP* xi, 681). As always, Dutton does not give the year in the dating clause of his report, but as it clearly relates to the dissolution of the priory the year is indisputable.

Dutton's report is of a serious incident, with the potential to rally support for the monasteries and to spread unrest in the county; nipped in the bud by his own prompt and decisive action.

Some historians have seen this as an isolated incident.¹⁰³ Others have made a direct connection with insurrection at other religious houses arising from opposition by the commons to their suppression.¹⁰⁴ Bernard has drawn attention to the 'terrifying' response which resulted. The king responded that he had read Dutton's report, and that of Sir William Brereton to Cromwell, and gave them a joint commission to carry out the immediate execution of the traitorous abbot and canons and the subsequent display of their heads and quarters 'for the terrible exemple of all others'; as Bernard has pointed out, for Henry VIII, 'legal processes are no more than a conduit to punishment'.¹⁰⁵

There is, however, convincing evidence to demonstrate that the events described by Dutton never took place. Firstly, there are inconsistencies within the report itself. There is a claim that a messenger was sent to Dutton with a letter, rather than a message, indicating that the commissioners had had time to write a letter and arrange for the messenger to escape. If the commissioners were in fear of their lives they could presumably have used the same route as the messenger to leave the area of the abbey and effect their own escape. Furthermore, the report states that 'two or thre hundred persons' had gathered in support of the abbot; it seems unlikely that Dutton's forces managed to disperse the entire group in the dark and succeed in capturing the key

¹⁰³ See, for example, Elton, *Policy and Police*, pp. 321-4; Hoyle, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p. 49 (he unaccountably refers to Vale Royal rather than Norton at p. 48).

¹⁰⁴ For example Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, i, pp. 213-4.

¹⁰⁵ TNA: PRO SP 1/108, f.187 (LP xi, 787); Bernard, *King's Reformation*, p. 375. It has been noted above that Dutton reported to Audeley while Brereton corresponded with Cromwell.

insurgents while being unable to find any of the hundreds of others supposed to have been involved.

One contemporary who was dubious about Dutton's report was Sir Thomas Butler of Warrington in Lancashire, just across the Mersey from Norton. On 8 November he wrote to Cromwell asking him to intercede on behalf of the imprisoned canons of Norton 'wherof surely yf I hade any conyetture that they weare in any wise coulpable I wolde not then once move yor good lordship for theyre case ... but wolde to the vtterest of my power forther theyre execucion.'¹⁰⁶ Butler was one of the most important men in south Lancashire; he was sheriff in 1535 and was instrumental in the suppression of the Lancashire rebels and the subsequent implementation of government religious policy.¹⁰⁷ It may thus be assumed that he was no supporter of insurgents but he clearly did not think that the imprisoned canons were guilty. It was not only Butler but 'The commen fame of the Contrey doth in this behalf ymporte to theym no faut at all'. He also mentioned that Sir Piers Dutton intended their immediate execution 'without any manner examynacon at all'.¹⁰⁸ However, their summary execution was prevented by Sir William Brereton, who was jointly commissioned to examine them.¹⁰⁹

Brereton reported in a letter to Cromwell on 18 January 1537 that he was doing his best to arrange the joint enquiry into 'the supposed insurreccion' but despite numerous requests, Sir Piers Dutton refused to co-operate. He therefore suggested that the examination should be conducted by 'Comysson to other discrete & worshippfull

¹⁰⁶ TNA: PRO SP 1/111, f. 26 (*LP* xi, 1019).

¹⁰⁷ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, pp. 82-3; 88-9; 99-100; 136.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO SP 1/111, f. 26 (*LP* xi, 1019).

¹⁰⁹ TNA: PRO SP 1/112, f. 47 (*LP* xi, 1212).

men of the Shere'.¹¹⁰ No evidence of such an examination survives, but Brereton's intervention had saved the abbot since by 26 May 1537 Audeley, Dutton's patron, wrote to Cromwell that 'Sir William Brereton savyd the abbot of norton beyng I dare avowe a traytor'.¹¹¹ By 29 August Brereton reported on 'the discharge of the late abbot and Chanons of Norton and apon sufficient suerties by theym founde for theyre apparaunce I haue discharged theym accordingly'.¹¹² On 7 November 1537 the abbot was awarded an annual pension of £24 and in the following month he received his licence to become a secular priest.¹¹³ The references to a 'supposed' insurrection and Sir Thomas Butler's belief in the innocence of the canons supports the view that Dutton's report of the events was fabricated and given the ferocity of the king's response to the original report it is difficult to see how the hapless canons can otherwise have escaped execution. Contemporary doubts about the veracity of Dutton's report have been echoed by some later historians.¹¹⁴ Dutton's antipathy towards the abbot may have been motivated in part by his feud with the Brereton family. Although the Duttons were traditionally patrons of Norton, William Brereton had been granted an annuity of 53s 4d by the abbot and by 1535 Sir William Brereton was steward of the abbey, with an annual salary of 60s.¹¹⁵

The narrative of events surrounding the dissolution of Norton Priory, as set out by Dutton exaggerates local affection for the monasteries, and recognising this will help

¹¹⁰ TNA: PRO SP 1/114, f. 154 (*LP* xii (1), 130).

¹¹¹ TNA: PRO SP 1/120, f. 196v (*LP* xii (1), 1282).

¹¹² TNA: PRO SP 1/124, f. 122 (*LP* xii (2), 597).

¹¹³ *LP* xiii (1), p. 583; D. S. Chambers (ed.), *Faculty Office Registers, 1534-549: a Calendar of the first Two Registers of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Faculty Office* (Oxford), p. 72.

¹¹⁴ Geoffrey Chesters, 'The Dissolution of the Cheshire Monasteries', *Cheshire Round*, i/5 (1966) pp. 150-1; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 216: 'a disturbance allegedly occurred'.

¹¹⁵ Ives (ed.), *Letters and Accounts of William Brereton of Malpas*, pp. 216, 226, 255, 262, 270; *Valor*, v, p. 210.

to explain why the Pilgrimage of Grace did not spread to Cheshire. The claim that two or three hundred abbey tenants rallied to support the abbey is directly contrary to the situation at Vale Royal where some of the abbey's tenants supported the king in opposing the risings, thereby angering the abbot. The abbot's brother had told the abbey tenants, 'I can shoue to you goode tydynges, for the commyns be vp' and had said that the king 'did ouerpresse the poore commyns'. The abbot had told them that the king was not 'laufully maryed' and tried to prevent those who 'wolde goo in the kynges warres at the tyme of the insurreccion' with threats of dispossession. He would have imprisoned them had it not been for the intervention of Sir Piers Dutton and Hugh Starkey.¹¹⁶ This also indicates that the commons of Cheshire knew of the Pilgrimage as events unfolded.

It has often been repeated that there was support for the Pilgrimage of Grace in Cheshire and that John Hale (or Hall), a Chester merchant, was imprisoned in Chester Castle with the abbot of Norton and Randle Brereton, 'for complicity in the rising'.¹¹⁷ This derives from a conflation of two events caused by subsequent misdating of one of the reports by Sir Piers Dutton on two incidents involving the abbot and cannons of Norton. In 1535 the abbot and one of his bailiffs had been arrested on charges of coining.¹¹⁸ The report of the imprisonment of the abbot with John Hale and Randle Brereton is dated 3 August with no year given and it also refers to the vacancy at Vale

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO SP 1/144, ff. 200-200v (*LP* xiv (1), 639); Youings, *Dissolution*, p. 228.

¹¹⁷ For example Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 322; Simon Harrison, Annette M. Kennett, Elizabeth J. Shepherd and Eileen M. Willshaw, *Tudor Chester; a Study of Chester in the Reigns of the Tudor Monarchs* (Chester, 1986), p. 31 (not footnoted); Jenny Kermode, 'New Brooms in Early Tudor Chester?', in John C. Appleby and Paul Dalton (eds), *Government, Religion and Society in Northern England 1000-1700* (Stroud, 1997), p. 153, (this appears to refer to a forthcoming volume of *VCH Chester* which has now been published but I have not been able to verify the reference). The story of the arrest of supporters of the Pilgrimage of Grace probably derives from the way the episode was recorded by Rupert Morris, *Chester in the Plantagenet and Tudor Reigns* (Chester, 1894), p. 67, which was long considered to be the definitive history of the city of Chester. Morris presumed that the prisoners in Chester Castle were 'very possibly hanged', although they were not.

¹¹⁸ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp.207-9.

Royal Abbey following the death of the abbot. A new abbot had been elected by the end of August 1535, so the letter must date from 1535 rather than 1536, when there was no vacancy.¹¹⁹ Furthermore, the arrests on 3 August can only have pre-dated the dissolution of Norton in September or October 1536.¹²⁰

The Dodds sisters claimed that Cheshire was ‘in open rebellion’ in 1536, this view of the lawless state of the county at that time was endorsed by subsequent historians such as David Knowles.¹²¹ However, while it can be shown that the people of Cheshire were well aware of the uprisings, what has previously been adduced as evidence of support for the rebels is based on a series of misunderstandings. In Yorkshire initial hopes that Cheshire would join the uprising soon gave way to acknowledgement by the rebels that there was no point in looking to Cheshire for support, giving as the reason the preoccupation of the gentry with internecine rivalry. Thornton considered that this power struggle was the key to Cheshire’s reluctance to join the uprising, not because of intrinsic hostility to the cause but because their efforts were concentrated elsewhere. However, several Cheshire gentry showed their active support for the King by mustering their tenants and leading them into Lancashire in

¹¹⁹ Anonymous, *Memorials of the Duttons of Dutton in Cheshire with Notes Respecting the Sherborne Branch of the Family* (London and Chester, 1901), pp. 19-20 (facsimile of original letter between pp. 18 and 19) (*LP* vii, 1037 where the letter is dated to 1534); for the date of the election of the new abbot of Vale Royal see *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 162; *LP* vii, 1094 (date corrected from 1534 to 1535).

¹²⁰ Geoffrey Chesters, ‘Power Politics and Roguery in Tudor Cheshire’, *Cheshire Round*, i/2 (1962), p. 46.

¹²¹ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 216 quoting Dodds, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, map I; David Knowles, *The Religious Orders in England* (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 320-1. More recently Susan Guinn-Chipman has claimed that Cheshire joined the ‘military resistance’ to the dissolutions; *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London; Vermont, 2013), p. 15.

response to the commission granted to the earl of Derby, and in doing so they must have been confident of their tenants' support.¹²²

The gentry of Cheshire could not afford to alienate the government while the balance of power in the county was in question. There was not in Cheshire the anger against the king felt by the Percy brothers and their supporters in Northumberland which led them to support the rebels following the annexation of the Percy inheritance.¹²³ Neither is the attitude of the gentry entirely the reason why the Pilgrimage of Grace did not spread into Cheshire, as Thornton maintains, because gentry opposition did not hold back the commons in other areas.¹²⁴ The reason must lie in a combination of factors comprising both the attitude of the gentry and the viewpoint of the commons. The dissolution of two of the county's monasteries in 1536 cannot have been seen in Cheshire as a precursor to an attack on parish religion as it was elsewhere. Nor was the dissolution in itself a cause for resentment. The county was not heavily monasticised and, as in the south of Lancashire, the few monasteries had ceased to play a significant role. There was therefore no incentive for the commons to rise in their support.

The Dissolution of the Last Religious Houses and the Foundation of the New Diocese

Following the collapse of the Pilgrimage of Grace, the abbot of Furness in Lancashire had arranged for the voluntary surrender of his house in order 'to save his own skin'

¹²² Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 216; Coward, *The Stanleys*, p. 98, has tabulated the origins of the men comprising the earl of Derby's army as set out in TNA: PRO SP 1/112 f. 131-133v (*LP* xi, 1251).

¹²³ Bush, *The Pilgrimage of Grace*, p.205.

¹²⁴ The relationship and leadership roles of the commons and gentry in the Pilgrimage is, however, problematic; James, 'Obedience and Dissent in Henrician England', *passim*.

following the involvement of the house in the insurrection.¹²⁵ It is probable that this had given the government the idea of encouraging other enforced surrenders and in 1539 further legislation was enacted legalising past and future voluntary monastic dissolutions, thus paving the way for the closure of the remaining religious houses.¹²⁶ Another statute of 1539 gave the king the power to erect new sees by letters patent ‘in stede of these foresaide Religious Houses’ and there were soon plans for a new bishopric based on the abbey in Chester.¹²⁷ Subsequently arrangements were made to dissolve some colleges, chantries and other religious establishments or organisations, such as guilds, by an act of 1545.¹²⁸ The Cheshire colleges at St John’s in Chester and at Bunbury survived this assault, although St John’s did not survive unscathed.

In Cheshire the abbeys of Combermere and Vale Royal surrendered in 1538.¹²⁹ The abbot of Vale Royal subsequently claimed that surrender of his house was accomplished by means of a fraud perpetrated by Thomas Holcroft, the royal commissioner, who was later granted the site of the abbey and most of the land in the vicinity. In a letter dated 9 September 1538, after the surrender deed had been signed on 7 September the abbot wrote to Cromwell claiming that he had not agreed to the surrender, but to no avail.¹³⁰ It has been noted that the abbot’s signature on the letter differs from that on the deed, suggesting that the surrender was indeed achieved by a forgery.¹³¹

¹²⁵ Haigh, *The Last Days of the Lancashire Monasteries*, p. 98.

¹²⁶ 31 Henry VIII, c. 13.

¹²⁷ 31 Henry VIII, c. 9; *LP* xiv (2), 428-30; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 6; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 12.

¹²⁸ 37 Henry VIII, c. 4.

¹²⁹ *Annual Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records*, viii (1847), App. II, pp. 17,46.

¹³⁰ Thomas Wright (ed.), *Letters Relating to the Suppressing of Monasteries* (Camden Society, 1st series, 26, 1843), pp. 244-5.

¹³¹ *LP* xiii (2), 96; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 163.

The three houses of friars in Chester surrendered to Richard Ingworth, suffragan bishop of Dover, on the same day, 15 August 1538.¹³² The majority of their assets were delivered to the mayor and certain aldermen of Chester, suggesting close collaboration of the civic authorities in the surrender.¹³³ The Franciscan friars had, however, had the foresight to grant ‘dyuers leasys the whyche the vysytar wolde nott allowe because ther was crafte in them & ware made off late & sore [sic] shulde be to the dyscommodity off hym yt shulde haue ye house’.¹³⁴ The recipients of these suspect leases are not named, but their grant does indicate that the friars were no longer as poor as they had been. The grant of long leases, sometimes with a high entry charge and low rent, was a common strategy of regular clergy anticipating the imminent dissolution of their houses. At least one of the leases granted by the abbot and convent of St Werburgh’s in Chester included the proviso that it would be void if the monastery were not dissolved and thus depended on goodwill between the parties for observance of its terms.¹³⁵

The last abbey in the county to be suppressed was St Werburgh’s in Chester on 20 January 1540, one of the last in England to be dissolved.¹³⁶ The abbot had sent a servant to London in November 1539 to find out ‘what is like to become of that monastery and in case it shalbe dissolued ... whether ... any sute maye serue to staye

¹³² *LP* xiii (1), 1298; *LP* xiii (2), 96. Ingworth was previously prior of the Dominican Priory of King’s Langley in Hertfordshire and had been rewarded for his services to Cromwell. In April 1534 he went on a visitation to the eastern counties to secure the acknowledgement by the friars of the king’s claim to be supreme head of the English Church. *VCH* online: ‘Friaries: King’s Langley priory’, *A History of the County of Hertford: Volume 4* (1971), pp. 446-451. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=37971>> (accessed 11 July 2009).

¹³³ The reason why the assets were delivered to the civic authorities is not specified, but may have been so that they could arrange for disposal.

¹³⁴ *CALS DDX* 43/54; J. H. E. Bennett, ‘The Grey Friars of Chester’, *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Archaeological and Historic Society*, new series 24 (1) (1921), pp. 31-2; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 173.

¹³⁵ Ormerod, i, pp. 274-6; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 143.

¹³⁶ R. V. H. Burne, ‘The Dissolution of S. Werburgh’s Abbey’, *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 37 (1) (1948), p. 6. The last English abbey to be dissolved was Waltham Abbey in Essex on 23 March 1540; David Knowles & R. Neville Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses England and Wales* (second edition, London, 1971), pp. 144, 178.

it'.¹³⁷ However, this was to no avail and the dissolution went ahead. The abbey precincts were adopted for use as the cathedral when the new diocese was formed in 1541. The dedication was changed from St Werburgh to Christ and the Blessed Virgin. The shrine of St Werburgh was probably destroyed but otherwise it is likely that the interior of the abbey church continued largely unchanged.¹³⁸ The monks of St Werburgh's were all either pensioned or joined the chapter of the new cathedral within a year of the foundation.¹³⁹ Thomas Clarke, abbot of Chester, was appointed dean of the new cathedral on 4 August 1541, but died the following month.¹⁴⁰ The nunnery at Chester was dissolved the day after St Werburgh's and the prioress, Elizabeth Grosvenor, was granted a pension of £20 *per annum*.¹⁴¹

A former friar was appointed as the first bishop of Chester; this was John Bird, a former Carmelite warden of Coventry, who is said to have been born in Cheshire. In 1540 he was a member of the commission which declared the marriage to Anne of Cleves to be null and void. It may have been as in recognition of this that he was translated from Bangor to the new see of Chester on 4 August 1541.¹⁴² Unlike Rowland Lee, Bird was an accomplished preacher, and preached for the king on the Wednesday of Easter week in 1537.¹⁴³ One of his first actions on becoming bishop was to write to Henry VIII about the lack of preaching clergy in his diocese. After thanking the king for his preferment, Bird reported on the condition of his diocese. 'For lack of Doctryne and

¹³⁷ TNA: PRO SP 1/154, f. 144 (*LP* xiv (2), 543).

¹³⁸ Alan Thacker, 'The Reuse of Monastic Buildings at Chester, 1540-1640', *THSLC*, 145 (1996 for 1995), p. 21.

¹³⁹ R. V. H. Burne, *The Monks of Chester: the History of St Werburgh's Abbey* (London, 1962), pp. 180-2.

¹⁴⁰ Burne, *Monks of Chester*, p. 181.

¹⁴¹ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 149 (*LP* xv, 93).

¹⁴² Richard Copsey, 'Bird, John (d. 1558)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 6 October 2007); Sanders, 'John Bird', pp. 115-6. Copsey does not refer to the article by Sanders, which contains some material not included in his biography.

¹⁴³ Copsey, 'Bird'; TNA: PRO SP 1/117, f. 117 (*LP* 12(1), 726).

preachyng yor graces subiectes ther be moche inferiour in the true knowledge of god and ther obedience to your maiestie and your lawes then your subiectes in the southe partes be.’¹⁴⁴ Deprived by Mary for marriage, he became vicar of Great Dunmow in Essex, where he died in October 1558. He spent part of the last few years of his life lodging with Edmund Bonner in London and was appointed his suffragan.¹⁴⁵ However, in later life his preaching skills deserted him. John Foxe, the martyrologist, described how Bird was deputed to give the sermon at Great Dunmow during an episcopal visitation. However, the sermon reportedly degenerated into a confused ramble, a ‘frutles bable’, to the discomfiture of Bonner.¹⁴⁶

According to Foxe, Bird claimed to have been married against his will ‘for bearing with ye tyme’ and although he repudiated his wife, this did not save him from deprivation. While he was vicar of Great Dunmow there were rumours in the parish about his relationship with the wife of his serving man ‘eyther ye voyce of ye paryshe lyed, ore els he loued her more than enough.’¹⁴⁷ As well as doubts about his personal morality, contemporaries expressed reservations about the nature of his personal religious convictions, as under Henry VIII he wrote in favour of the royal supremacy and against transubstantiation, but returned to Roman Catholicism under Mary. John Bale reported ‘*Audivi eum ad Papismi vomitum reversum*’.¹⁴⁸ John Bird, a conformer acting from self-interest rather than conviction, was therefore not the best choice as

¹⁴⁴ TNA: PRO SP 1/168, f. 6 (*LP* 16, 1377).

¹⁴⁵ This was after his deprivation for marriage and emphasises the close relationship of Bird and Bonner. While bishop of Chester, Bird had appointed Bonner’s half-brother, George Wilmesley, to be his chancellor.

¹⁴⁶ John Foxe *Miscellaneous Papers* BL Harley 421, f. 1-1v; Sanders, ‘John Bird’, pp. 121-2.

¹⁴⁷ BL Harley 421, f. 1.

¹⁴⁸ ‘I have heard that he had returned to the vomit of popery’; quoted in Sanders, ‘John Bird’, p. 126.

bishop of the new diocese, which he himself acknowledged was in need of guidance in religion.

The new see to which Bird was presented was created by joining the archdeaconry of Richmond with that of Chester to make a diocese which was still the



Figure 10 – Map showing the extent of the new diocese of Chester.

third largest in England (see Figure 10 above). The cathedral church was inconveniently located in Chester, near the south-west border of the diocese. The diocese measured 120 miles long at its longest point and 90 miles wide at its widest, covering over 5,200 square miles.¹⁴⁹ Although the diocese was so large, it was one of the poorest so that the combination of the size and poverty meant that the administrative problems of the archdeaconry of Chester while it had been part of Coventry and Lichfield diocese were exacerbated. By 1575 it was calculated that the taxable income of the bishop of Chester was £420 1s 8d and only three English bishops had a lower income. Haigh has described in detail how the financial difficulties of the new bishopric hampered any effort Bird may have wanted to attempt to establish an efficient diocesan administrative structure.¹⁵⁰

The bishop resorted to two main strategies to mitigate the poverty of the see. He raised money by entering into very long leases for high entry fees and low rents, much as the monasteries had done in anticipation of their dissolution. This led to invidious situations such as in the case of Castleton, in Derbyshire, where Bird's lease for ninety-nine years after the expiry of a lease by the abbot of Vale Royal for seventy years meant the alienation of the property until 1704.¹⁵¹ Secondly, he did not initially appoint archdeacons of Chester and Richmond, thus saving the annual stipend of £50 each.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 7.

¹⁵⁰ Strype, *Annals*, II(i), pp. 575-6; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 6-14; Christopher Haigh, 'Finance and Administration in a New Diocese: Chester, 1541-1641', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church of England, 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), pp. 145-66.

¹⁵¹ *Notitia Cestriensis*, p. 45; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 8-10; Haigh, 'Finance and Administration in a New Diocese', pp. 151-4.

¹⁵² CALS EDA 3/1, f. 35v; Haigh, 'Finance and Administration in a New Diocese', p. 147; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 13. *VCH* states that Bird never appointed archdeacons. However, John Hurleston had been appointed archdeacon of Richmond before 1554 but seems to have been deprived for marriage and was restored during the 1559 Royal Visitation; 'Archdeacons: Richmond', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man dioceses (2004), pp. 47-49. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35847>> (accessed 14 June 2013); TNA: PRO SP 12/10, ff. 74-74v. Following his restitution Hurleston sued Hanson in the Chester Exchequer,

Saving the £100 on these two stipends almost halved his outgoings. In the absence of archdeacons the chancellor of the diocese exercised many archidiaconal functions and held much of their power, with the balance of their authority being vested in the rural deans. This devolution of power weakened the bishop's authority and the autonomy exercised by the rural deans was also a potential threat to his authority.

Bird devolved much of the power and many of the duties of the diocese onto his chancellor, George Wilmesley, who exercised the combined duties of commissary, chancellor, vicar-general and official principal. Wilmesley was an illegitimate half-brother of Edmund Bonner, and it was probably to this connection that Bird owed his employment by Bonner following his deprivation. Haigh considered Wilmesley to have been an able administrator, but he exploited his position to amass great wealth, including a number of leases from the diocese which he bequeathed to his numerous offspring, both legitimate and illegitimate.¹⁵³ Bird himself seems to have had little to do with the administration of the diocese, and during his fourteen years as bishop probably held only one visitation, in 1548.¹⁵⁴ There was a royal visitation in 1547 when the churchwardens of St Mary's, Chester, paid 13d 'for puttyng in owr bylls to the kynges vysyters'.¹⁵⁵ Bird did, however, participate in the Ecclesiastical Commission which sat in June 1543 at Wigan in Lancashire. The surviving records of this Commission are probably not complete and most of the surviving cases are from Lancashire. In the one

presumably for recovery of income lost during the period of his deprivation; TNA: PRO CHES/29/272 m. 5.

¹⁵³ Christopher Haigh, 'A Mid-Tudor Ecclesiastical Official: the Curious Career of George Wilmesley', *THSLC*, 122 (1971 for 1970), pp. 7, 19-21.

¹⁵⁴ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 16.

¹⁵⁵ CALS P 20/13/1 (not paginated).

Cheshire case an attempt was made to settle the on-going problem of urgent repairs to the parish church of Stockport.¹⁵⁶

A list of clergy drawn up at the commencement of Bird's episcopate names seventy-seven parishes in Cheshire. Of these, only six were personally served by the incumbent and none of the resident clergy had completed a university education.¹⁵⁷ However, the importance of a university degree to a parish clergyman at this time is debateable, as many clergy who were graduates held degrees which were not relevant to the work of a parish incumbent.¹⁵⁸ Many of the clergy serving the county's churches and chapels were remunerated by parishioners, local gentry or served as chantry priests although it is not possible to ascertain from the list the precise nature of the role of each man.

The last decade of the reign of Henry VIII saw major changes in the church as an institution in Cheshire with the dissolution of the last monasteries and the friaries and the formation of the new diocese. From the inception of the diocese of Chester the central authorities had been warned of the existence of a reactionary element and of the need for preachers to educate the population if 'Popish idolatry' was to be extirpated.¹⁵⁹ However, any attempt that the new bishop may have wished to make to remedy the situation and to administer his diocese efficiently was severely hampered by lack of resources. At parochial level, the dissolution of the monasteries resulted in the wholesale transfer of patronage either to the dean and chapter or to the bishop. This could have

¹⁵⁶ CALS EDA 12/1, ff. 19-21.

¹⁵⁷ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 16; W. F. Irvine (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester, 1541-2; Together with a List of the Tenths and Subsidy Payable in the Deaneries of the Archdeaconry of Chester', *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 3 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 33, 1896), pp. 1-11.

¹⁵⁸ Douglas Jones, *The Church in Chester 1300-1540* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 7, 1957), pp. 27-30.

¹⁵⁹ TNA: PRO SP 1/168, f. 6 (*LP* 16, 1377).

enabled the new diocesan administration to address the problem of the largely non-resident parochial clergy and to arrange the appointment of men congenial to the Henrician religious changes. This opportunity was lost, however, due to the combination of panic leasing in the closing years of the monasteries with further alienations associated with the bishop's financial difficulties.¹⁶⁰ The erection of the new diocese of Chester merely replaced one enormous diocese and its associated administrative problems with another.

Some Lay Responses

It has been argued above that the laity of late medieval Cheshire showed a keen interest in the most modern devotional literature and in liturgical fashions. However, Elton's view that the county was 'backward' and hence conservative in religion has proved enduring.¹⁶¹ As recently as 2003 the editors of the Chester volumes of the *Victoria History* of the county found 'little indication of enthusiasm for new doctrines in Chester, which contained no notable protestant laymen, and whose overseas trade was not with ports where protestantism was entrenched.'¹⁶² However, there is evidence that at least one important layman did attempt to introduce moral and social reform in Chester through city assembly orders. This was Henry Gee, who enjoyed two terms as mayor in 1533-4 and 1539-40. It would be premature to view these reforms as the expression of the type of godly magistracy so beloved of later Puritans, and at least one commentator

¹⁶⁰ Burne, *Monks of Chester*, p. 171.

¹⁶¹ Elton, *Policy and Police*, p. 132.

¹⁶² *VCH* online 'Early Modern Chester 1550-1762: Religion, 1550-1642', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 109-112. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19196>> (accessed 14 June 2013). This quotation comes from the chapter which discusses religious developments for the rather later period of 1550-1642.

has pointed out that such moral reforms were ‘central issues for Catholic, humanist and early Protestant thinkers’.¹⁶³ However, a study of the exact nature of the orders promulgated by Henry Gee, together with a consideration of other areas of his life, give a clearer impression of the philosophy underlying his reforms which may well have been prompted by evangelical religious beliefs. It is also unreasonable to suggest that it was only overseas trade which might have exposed the merchants of Cheshire, and particularly Chester, to the influence of reformed religion. Indeed, language would have been a barrier to such an exchange of ideas for many travellers, as in the case of five sailors from Hull who had acquired an English Bible in Germany in 1528 but who had been unable to understand the sermons they heard there.¹⁶⁴ From the 1490s Chester had enjoyed regular trade contacts with the Basque region and much of this trade was carried out via Bristol; merchants regularly moved between the two cities and many Chester ships called at Bristol on their way south.¹⁶⁵ Visitors to Bristol in the 1530s would have had the opportunity of hearing sermons by the evangelical Hugh Latimer and the Scots reformer George Wishart which resulted in many conversions.¹⁶⁶ Nor were contacts with

¹⁶³ Kermode, ‘New Brooms’, p. 145.

¹⁶⁴ Claire Cross, *Urban Magistrates and Ministers: Religion in Hull and Leeds from the Reformation to the Civil War* (York, 1985), pp. 4-5.

¹⁶⁵ Janet E. Hollinshead, ‘Chester, Liverpool and the Basque Region in the Sixteenth Century’, *The Mariner’s Mirror*, 85 (4) (1999), p. 387; the Basque region straddled the western Pyrenees and covered an area of northern Spain and south-west France. Jenny Kermode, ‘The Trade of Late Medieval Chester, 1500-1550’, in Richard Britnell and John Hatcher (eds), *Progress and Problems in Medieval England: Essays in Honour of Edward Miller* (Cambridge, 1996), p. 296. J. Vane, *The Ledger of John Smythe 1538-1550*, Bristol Record Society, 28, 1975, pp. 3-12, indicates that Smythe traded regularly in Manchester cottons which may have been transported via Chester and he was heavily involved in the Gascon wine trade. His great-granddaughter later married Sir Thomas Smith of Cheshire; J. H. Bettey, (ed.), *Calendar of the Correspondence of the Smyth Family of Ashton Court 1548-1642*, Bristol Record Society, 35, 1982, p. xxiv. Members of some families moved regularly between the Chester area and Bristol, for example, the Barrow family of Tarvin, as indicated by the will of John Barrow of Bristol who made his will there in 1537 leaving a number of bequests to family members in Cheshire; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xvi, pp. 56-7.

¹⁶⁶ Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 83, 129; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (second edition, London, 1989), pp. 216, 328. It must be noted,

other areas of England restricted to trade links and by the 1530s Cheshire had experienced the influx of considerable numbers of troops bound for the Irish wars through Chester. Furthermore, many of the county's young men left the county for educational and social reasons. For example, by 1536 Christopher Goodman, later to be famous as a radical protestant thinker, had left his home town of Chester to study at Oxford, where he was part of the circle of Peter Martyr.¹⁶⁷ Correspondence between this son of a wealthy Chester wine merchant and John Knox indicates that not only did Goodman return home for visits, but that on at least one occasion Knox accompanied him.¹⁶⁸ Therefore, while it is true that the overseas trade connections of Chester were mainly with countries little affected by the Lutheran movements of northern Europe, the city had many other links through trade and other media with areas of England where radical ideas were circulating by the early 1530s.

By 1500 Chester had been a chartered borough for two centuries.¹⁶⁹ There was no impediment to the development of complete lay domination of municipal government in Chester as there was, for example, in Bury St Edmunds, dominated as it was by the abbey.¹⁷⁰ Although there had been some conflicts between the Chester assembly and St Werburgh's Abbey, notably over court jurisdiction, the Abbey was

however, that radical preachers encountered opposition in Bristol and their ideas were refuted in later sermons in the city; Wabuda, *Preaching*, p. 114.

¹⁶⁷ Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Goodman, Christopher (1521/2-1603)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 7 December 2007).

¹⁶⁸ Jane Dawson and Lionel K. J. Glassey, 'Some Unpublished Letters from John Knox to Christopher Goodman', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 84 (2), (2005), p. 174.

¹⁶⁹ Laughton, *Life in a Late Medieval City*, pp. 109-11; *VCH* online: 'Later Medieval Chester 1230-1550: City Government, 1230-1350', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 38-44. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19186>> (accessed 14 June 2013); 'Later medieval Chester 1230-1550: City government and politics, 1350-1550', *ibid.*, pp. 58-64. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19189>> (accessed 14 June 2013); Robert Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns in England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), Table I, p. 345.

¹⁷⁰ Robert S. Gottfried, *Bury St. Edmunds and the Urban Crisis; 1290-1539* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 250-1.

never in a position to dominate. Additionally, the grant of a revised borough charter to Chester in 1506 meant that the city rulers were empowered to manage their own economic and social affairs from an early date, unlike many other towns which were obliged to seek incorporation in order, for example, to acquire and hold the lands of dissolved monastic institutions often in the face of pressing economic problems.¹⁷¹

However, few of the surviving civic records of Chester antedate the mid-sixteenth century.¹⁷² The first section of the earliest City Assembly Book was probably written up about 1567-8 from loose papers.¹⁷³ David Mills considered it highly likely that the impetus for bringing order to the city's record-keeping by collating surviving early documents came from Henry Gee.¹⁷⁴ Gee probably began the collection of key mayoral decrees which were later copied into the front of the Assembly Book.¹⁷⁵ In

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 87-96.

¹⁷² Laurence M. Clopper (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama; Chester* (Manchester, 1979), p. xi.

¹⁷³ CALS ZAB/1. Chester City Record Office amalgamated with Cheshire Record Office in April 2000. Many of the old Chester City manuscripts were renumbered at that time by prefixing the old reference with the letter Z. Thus anything written prior to April 2000 refers to the first Assembly Book as Chester City Record Office or Chester City Archives AB/1. The probable dating of the first part of the book is discussed by Clopper (ed.), *REED: Chester*, p. xii.

¹⁷⁴ David Mills, 'Chester Ceremonial: Re-creation and Recreation in the English "medieval" Town', *Urban History Yearbook*, 18 (1991), p. 5 and footnote 21 where Mills states that the 'ascription of initiative to Gee must ... remain circumstantial, though strongly urged.' However, it is stated explicitly in the book that Henry Gee was responsible for the record of the city boundaries and the rental of city-owned property which are incorporated in the early pages of the Assembly Book. It is highly unlikely that it was Henry Gee's clerk who began to write up this section of the book during his first period as mayor in 1533 as stated by Robert Tittler. This is both because of the uniformity of handwriting with the list of mayors to 1567-8 and because later decrees are interspersed with those from Gee's two periods as mayor; Tittler, *The Reformation and the Towns*, p. 217. By this time the mayors were the pre-eminent local officials. They were chosen by freemen of the town and their term of office generally ran for one year from the Friday after the feast of St Denis (9 October): *VCH* online 'Later Medieval Chester 1230-1550: City Government and Politics, 1350-1550', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 58-64. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19189>> (accessed 14 June 2013); *VCH* online 'Mayors and Sheriffs of Chester', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 305-321. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57341>> (accessed 14 June 2013).

¹⁷⁵ Thus CALS ZAB/1, f. 63 includes an order of William Lilley (mayor 1466-7) and f. 68v includes an order of William Beswick (mayor 1542-3). The orders of earlier and later mayors are interspersed apparently haphazardly with those of Henry Gee, although by far the greatest number of any mayor in this early part of the book date from his second period in office.

attributing the incentive for this process of record-keeping to Henry Gee it has not before been noted that when he was churchwarden of Holy Trinity church in Chester he and his fellow warden began the book of churchwardens' accounts on St George's Day 1532 with lists of church plate, vestments and books and a record of the lands belonging to the parish, reflecting Gee's enthusiasm for making lists and keeping records.¹⁷⁶

The orders ascribed to Henry Gee cover a variety of subjects, and the majority were 'ordred by Henry Gee Maire of the Citie of chester the Sheriffs Aldermen and Comon counsell of the same Citie at an Assemble Houlden in the pentice': thus he did not act alone.¹⁷⁷ A major concern was the protection of the position of freemen of the city.¹⁷⁸ The interests of the population of the city as a whole were also protected, with a ban on pigs running loose in the streets and the regulation of the sale of various commodities such as corn and fish, together with the establishment of a price structure for different types of ale.¹⁷⁹ Where Henry Gee's orders depart from what appears to be the recording of established practice is in the area of public morality, with orders aimed at curbing excess (particularly in relation to certain aspects of the conduct of women) and in the field of social control by regulating the behaviour of children and organising the dispensation of charity. Two of these orders refer directly to requirements laid down by legislation, so were not unique to Chester. The order relating to the relief of poverty recognised that want and destitution are to the 'greate displeasure of allmyghtye god and contrarye to good concyence' but noted that requirements for administering the

¹⁷⁶ Rev. J. R. Beresford (ed.), 'The Churchwarden's Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532 to 1633', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), pp.106-8.

¹⁷⁷ CALS ZAB/1, f. 70. The pentice was 'a timber lean-to structure, built against the front of St Peter's ... with shops on the ground floor and offices and court room above'; Roger Stephens, *The Wharnccliffe Companion to Chester: an A to Z of Local History* (Barnsley, 2006), p. 114.

¹⁷⁸ CALS ZAB/1, ff. 65, 68.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, ff. 58, 61v, 70.

distribution of alms are set out in the ‘housome statutes and Laues of our Souerigne Lorde the kinge’.¹⁸⁰ The arrangements for Chester made in 1539-40 followed the statutes in differentiating between ‘aged poore & impotent persones’ and ‘persones beyng hole & myghtie in body & able to laboure’. The organisation of begging licences for those unable to work was based on city wards, rather than parishes as laid down in the 1536 act, and the expectation was that voluntary alms-giving would be sufficient to support the first of these groups.¹⁸¹ The able-bodied were required to attend daily at the high cross and offer themselves for work. However, as in the legislation, there was no provision for how these people could find work if none was forthcoming, nor how they were to survive if they could not find work and were prohibited from begging.¹⁸²

The other reference to legislation in a municipal decree comes in the second part of a long and detailed order of 21 November 1539. The first section provides that

For asmoche as ... Idlenes is the rote of all vice ... euery chylde or chydryn being of the age of vj yeres or aboue vpon euery wourkeday shalbe set to the schoule to learne ther belefe & other deuotions prayers & learning or els to sum other good and uertuus laboure craft or occupacyon.¹⁸³

However, as Jenny Kermode has pointed out, ‘late-medieval social ethics also equated idleness with loose living’ and this rationale is very similar to that of Sir John Percival in setting up his school in Macclesfield in 1503.¹⁸⁴ Where Gee’s order refers to legislation is in relation to requirements for the boys’ activity on Sundays and holy days when, after church, they were to practice archery ‘according to the statute Latelye made

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, ff. 57-57v.

¹⁸¹ 22 Henry VIII, c. 12 and 27 Henry VIII, c. 25.

¹⁸² G. R. Elton, ‘An Early Tudor Poor Law’, *The Economic History Review*, 6 (1) (1953), p. 56.

¹⁸³ CALS ZAB/1, ff. 59-59v.

¹⁸⁴ TNA: PRO PROB 11/13/464 Sir John Pereyvale or Pryvale; Kermode, ‘New Brooms’, p. 145.

for the mayntening of shouting in longe boues' and 'allso that from hensforth No vnLaufull gaymes be vsed within the saide Citie'.¹⁸⁵ It was also with the stated aim of promoting archery and suppressing violent games that in January 1540 Gee and the Chester assembly passed what is probably their best-known order.¹⁸⁶ This replaced the annual football game with a foot race on the Roodee, for which the prize was six silver arrows. The same order also introduced a horse race, making Chester one of the oldest courses in England in continuous use for racing. The ostensible aim of this order was to encourage 'archari and shouting in Longe boues' and other healthy pursuits. However, as the only connection with archery was the prizes, the main objective of the ban on football was probably to curb disorder.¹⁸⁷

Gee's ordinances to limit the excesses of women's behaviour had three main stated aims. Firstly, to avoid any confusion which could arise where married women might be mistaken for single women; secondly, because women in other towns were thought to behave more discreetly the reputation of Chester might be sullied and thirdly,

¹⁸⁵ In 1539 the most recent statute relating to the practice of archery was 6 Henry VIII, c.2 which obliged boys above the age of 7 to practice shooting with the longbow on holy days and 'other tymes conveyent' and forbade unlawful games. This was a repetition of the provisions laid down in a number of earlier acts such as 19 Henry VII, c. 4 and 17 Edward IV, c. 3. The provisions of earlier acts were repeated and expanded at the petition of the bowyers and fletchers by 33 Henry VIII, c.9, enacted shortly after Henry Gee's order was promulgated. Even this did not oblige children as young as 6 to practice weekly, repeating that boys over the age of 7 should practice on holy days and at other convenient times.

¹⁸⁶ CALS ZAB/1, ff. 64-65. Folio 64 has now become detached from the book and the folio number is no longer legible. The whole order is transcribed in Clopper (ed.), *REED: Chester*, pp. 39-42 with commentary at pp. li-ii.

¹⁸⁷ *VCH* online: 'Leisure and Culture: Plays, Sports and Customs before 1700', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 247-255; <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57329>> (accessed 14 June 2013). The Roodee is a flat area by the side of the River Dee, created by the river silting up, and still popular with Cestrians for games and horse-racing. The cross which gave the area its name was still shown on a map of 1581; Stephens, *The Wharnccliffe Companion to Chester*, p. 128. It is an irony that Henry Gee whose orders show a concern for the restriction of excess in consumption and in female dress is popularly remembered as the founder of Chester Races. By the late twentieth century the race meetings had become renowned for conspicuous consumption and excess in female attire. It is also popularly supposed that the nickname for horses 'gee-gees' is derived from his name. See, for example, <<http://www.chesterwalls.info/races.html>> (accessed 30 August 2011).

because of the cost. All three of these reasons were used to justify the regulations about hats under which single women were forbidden to wear a cap and all women were forbidden to wear ‘any hatt of blacke or other Coloure’ except when riding, or if they were ill.¹⁸⁸ It was also thought that all the city’s taverns kept by young women, ‘wherof all strangers Resorting hither greatly marvill’ because this was not the case elsewhere. This led to ‘prouocations of wantonrys braules frays & other inconueyents’. One of Gee’s orders therefore prohibited women between the ages of fourteen and forty from keeping alehouses.¹⁸⁹ Another order directed specifically at women addressed the ‘gret excesse and Superfluose costes and charges ... by reson of costly disses mete and drynke broght vnto women Lying in childebed and ... in lyke wise ... at ther churchinges’. This trend was so severely taxing the resources of the poorer townspeople that they were unable to afford necessities. At the time of churching, no one other than female relatives was to enter the house of the new mother.¹⁹⁰

Taken as a whole, the orders regulating behaviour made while Henry Gee was mayor present a picture of a city which was pre-occupied with how it appeared to outsiders and which was also concerned to ensure that everyone who was able to do so followed a productive life free from excess and that those unable to work were supported by the community. Some of Gee’s initiatives are not as radical or individualistic as they may appear, however, when it is noted that the regulations concerning the licensing of beggars and the practice of archery at the expense of unlawful games are directly derived from statute. Additionally, contemporary philosophy urged the importance of educating the youth of towns in useful crafts as a

¹⁸⁸ CALS ZAB/1, f. 69v.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, f. 67.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 67v.

route out of poverty.¹⁹¹ It is in the field of personal behaviour where his ordinances reveal a coercive approach which is redolent of what was known both to contemporaries and later historians as ‘reformation of manners’, more particularly associated with late Elizabethan and early Stuart England.¹⁹² Ronald Hutton has pointed out, however, that several studies have indicated that such reform initiatives were not restricted to religious radicals of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but socio-economic forces during the Middle Ages had also resulted in similar efforts to control behaviour.¹⁹³ In the case of Chester in 1540, during Henry Gee’s second term as mayor, there may well have been social problems following the closure of both the town’s monastery and nunnery in January of that year. It has been noted above that the monks of St Werburgh’s were not generous to the poor, although the nuns distributed a large proportion of their meagre income in alms. However, the loss of both institutions must, in the short term at least, have led to problems for the poorest in the city. Fear of social unrest resulting from this loss of charity may have been the impetus for the mayoral

¹⁹¹ Robert Tittler, ‘The Emergence of Urban Policy, 1536-58’, in Jennifer Loach and Robert Tittler (eds), *The Mid-Tudor Polity, c.1540-1560* (Basingstoke, 1980), p. 79. It may be noted that Tittler is here discussing the political theory of Thomas Starkey, a Cheshire man by origin; Thomas F. Mayer, *Thomas Starkey and the Commonwealth: Humanist Politics in the Reign of Henry VIII* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 14-17, 279.

¹⁹² The term is defined and discussed by Martin Ingram in ‘Reformation of Manners in Early Modern England’, in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 51-55. ‘Manners’ here relates to a way of doing things, rather than socially-acceptable behaviour. The recent historiography of the reformation of manners has been reviewed by Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), p. 112, and Steve Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, 1550-1640* (paperback edition Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 176-7.

¹⁹³ Hutton cites here the work of Margaret Spufford and Marjorie McIntosh; *Merry England*, p. 112. Conversely Hutton points out that Cynthia Herrup’s work on Sussex indicates that although it was an area of strong evangelical protestantism it was also an area of relative wealth and social stability and underwent virtually no ‘reformation of manners’ in the early modern period, thus suggesting a strong link between fears of social unrest and attempts to reform manners; Cynthia B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 33-35.

ordinance for the regulation of the distribution of alms which bears no precise date but must have been drawn up between 10 October 1539 and 21 April 1540.¹⁹⁴

Palliser saw Gee as ‘the most influential citizen of his generation’ and David Mills described him as ‘a man of enlightened Protestant belief’ while the *Victoria County History* saw him as ‘[b]oth puritan and reforming’.¹⁹⁵ While it would be premature to define Gee’s approach as ‘puritan’, his attempts to regulate behaviour in Chester are certainly reminiscent of later Puritan patterns of social control; it has been observed that ‘a Puritan who minds his own business is a contradiction in terms’.¹⁹⁶ One key factor in the legislation regulating personal conduct supported or promoted by Puritan members of the House of Commons in the late Elizabethan and early Stuart period is that much of their debate referred to the potential sinfulness of the conduct being regulated or to the fact that such behaviour would cause dishonour or displeasure to God.¹⁹⁷ None of Gee’s surviving ordinances specifically refers to sinfulness, and only one directly attributes the need for reform to offence caused to God.¹⁹⁸ There is thus little internal evidence within the ordinances of Henry Gee that a philosophy

¹⁹⁴ CALS ZAB/1, ff. 57-57v; dated ‘*Tempore Henrici Gee maiore Ciuitatits cestr’ Anno Regni Regis henrici octauī xxxi^{mo}*’.

¹⁹⁵ D. M. Palliser quoted in Mills, ‘Chester Ceremonial’, p. 5; Mills, *ibid.* p. 5; *VCH* online: ‘Later Medieval Chester 1230-1550: City Government and Politics, 1350-1550’, A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 58-64. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19189>> (accessed 14 June 2013). It may be noted that elsewhere the *VCH* stated that there were ‘no notable protestant laymen’ by 1550.

¹⁹⁶ William Hunt, ‘The Puritan Movement. The Coming of Revolution in an English County’, quoted in Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 145. Peter Marshall considers that when discussing the religious views of the first generation of Henrician ‘evangelicals’ this descriptive label, rather than ‘Protestants’ ‘is now becoming normative in historical writing’; Peter Marshall, *Religious Identities in Henry VIII’s England* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 5, 171; Peter Marshall, ‘The Naming of Protestant England’, *Past and Present*, 214 (1) (2012), pp. 87-128. At this time the term ‘Protestant’ was generally applied by contemporaries to German Lutherans.

¹⁹⁷ Joan Kent, ‘Attitudes of Members of the House of Commons to the Regulation of “Personal Conduct” in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 46 (113) (1973), p. 43.

¹⁹⁸ CALS ZAB/1 f. 57 ‘Forasmoche as ... the ... greate ... multitude of valiant idell persons and vacabonds which be strong and able to serue and Labour ... go on beggyng ... to the greate displeasure of allmyghtye god’.

informed by evangelical religious views underlay the reform agenda of his second period as mayor.

There is, however, other evidence to show that he did have evangelical views, notably his will which survives as a copy in the Consistory Court act book. Although only the copy survives, it is recorded that he wrote his will with his 'oune hand' so that it is reasonable to assume that the sentiments expressed are his own.¹⁹⁹ The will was written on 2 September 1545 and the solifidian belief revealed by his soul bequest was unusual at the time, as was the lack of concern with funeral pomp in his burial instructions. '[F]irst & principalie I commend my soule vnto christ Jesue my maker & redemer in whome I [sic] by ye merytes of whos blessed passion is all my whole trust & clene remyssion & forgenes of my sinnes. And my bodie to be buried where god shall dispose it.' The rest of his will is concerned with the disposition of his extensive property. While it is true that he does not specifically use the word 'only' in relation to his hopes for remission of his sins through Christ's passion, his trust that forgiveness will be based entirely on that agency must be a statement of belief in justification through faith alone.²⁰⁰ Thus, the statement in the *Victoria History* of Cheshire that there was 'little indication of enthusiasm for new doctrines in Chester, which contained no notable protestant laymen' is problematic.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 188-189 (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, pp. 93-95).

²⁰⁰ Christopher Marsh has highlighted the need for caution in the use of will preambles to chart the progress of reformist beliefs following Duffy's scepticism about recent analyses; see Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 130-4; Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (paperback second edition, New Haven and London, 2005), Chapter 15.

²⁰¹ *VCH* online: 'Early Modern Chester 1550-1762: Religion, 1550-1642', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 109-112 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19196> > (accessed 14 June 2013).

There is no evidence of when or how Gee developed his reforming beliefs, but it is notable that the majority of the surviving orders in his name date from his second period as mayor suggesting that he may have undergone a conversion experience during the 1530s. His will can usefully be compared with those of his contemporaries in Cheshire. In twelve of the thirty-nine surviving Cheshire wills of the period from 1536 to 1547 testators left bequests for a clerk to sing or pray for them or their soul. As late as 1547, Elizabeth Sherington commended her soul to ‘god almyghty besechyng your [sic] blessed lady virgin & all saintes in heven to pray for me’; it may be noted that her will was written by the local curate.²⁰²

As mentioned above, Henry Gee was a parishioner and churchwarden of Holy Trinity in Chester, where he was buried following his death in 1545.²⁰³ The churchwardens’ accounts do not present evidence of anything other than traditional religious practice at Holy Trinity at that time, and the first record of the acquisition of a Bible by the wardens was not until 1542, in response to the royal proclamation threatening to fine those wardens who had not obtained one following the 1538 injunction.²⁰⁴

Yet Gee was probably not alone in his opinions at this time, as he was able to carry the rest of the civic elite with him in his social reforms. As will also be demonstrated below, by the end of the reign of Edward VI other members of Chester’s leading families were deeply unhappy to see the return of Catholicism under Mary. This

²⁰² CALS WS 1547, Elizabeth Sherynton. Her will was written by Reginald Stephenson, curate of Nantwich.

²⁰³ Ormerod, i, p. 198; Beresford (ed.), ‘Churchwardens Accounts of Holy Trinity’, pp. 106-8.

²⁰⁴ Beresford (ed.), ‘Churchwardens Accounts of Holy Trinity’, pp. 106-7, 110; Paul Hughes and James Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations* (New Haven, 1964-1969), i, no. 200; Ronald Hutton, ‘The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations’, in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, New York, 1997), p. 145.

is not to say, however, that there were not conservative elements in the city of Chester in the closing years of Henry VIII's reign. The staffing of the new cathedral with monks of St Werburgh's Abbey and the 'preservation of a relatively undisturbed semi-monastic regime' meant that some traditional practices and rituals persisted, as revealed by the cathedral treasurer's accounts.²⁰⁵ Some processions continued to start from the cathedral. On Palm Sunday, for example, the sacrament was carried under a canopy while a boy dressed as a prophet chanted texts. Expenditure is recorded in 1544 in connection with this ceremony, although a proclamation of 1541 had prohibited the custom of dressing children as prelates or saints to take part in certain feasts.²⁰⁶ The cathedral accounts also record regular payments for the observance of Corpus Christi day.²⁰⁷ The play cycle traditionally performed by the city guilds had moved from then to Whitsun by the early sixteenth century but the Corpus Christi Day procession, which started at the parish church of St Mary on the Hill and terminated at St John's, continued to be observed.²⁰⁸ The churchwardens' accounts for Holy Trinity indicate that this was not the only procession to continue as they record the following payments in 1547

for caring the baners in the Crosse weeke xijd

for carring the cope on Corpus Christi Day Id

²⁰⁵ VCH online: 'Later Medieval Chester 1230-1550: Religion, 1230-1550', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 80-89 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19191>> (accessed 14 June 2013); Thacker, 'The Reuse of Monastic Buildings', pp. 21-3.

²⁰⁶ R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), p. 17; Hughes and Larkin (eds), *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, i, no. 202; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 430-1; Hutton, 'Local Impact', p. 146. Although this prohibition is most closely associated with the ban on Boy Bishops on St Nicholas' Day, it also extended to dressing children as saints and prelates at other festivals.

²⁰⁷ Thacker, 'The Reuse of Monastic Buildings', p. 25

²⁰⁸ VCH online: 'Leisure and Culture: Plays, Sports and Customs before 1700', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 247-255 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57329>> (accessed 14 June 2013); Clopper (ed.), *REED: Chester*, p. liii.

for carringe the baners on the gen' p'cession day vd.²⁰⁹

As Ronald Hutton has pointed out, the feast of Corpus Christi was a prime target for early Protestants, and it was excluded from the 1549 Prayer Book, to be revived by Mary in 1554.²¹⁰

Where churchwardens' accounts survive they are of paramount importance in tracking the impact of reform initiatives at local level. For the period prior to 1547 only one original set of Cheshire accounts survives, for the parish of St Mary on the Hill in Chester. These accounts record what appears to be a complete annual list of income and expenditure from Easter 1536. The accounts for Holy Trinity in Chester survive only in a later abstract and are not complete for the earliest period from 1532.²¹¹ Both sets of accounts show that it was not only traditional processions which continued much as before. At St Mary's there was annual expenditure on the Easter sepulchre from 1536 until 1545.²¹² As Eamon Duffy has argued, 'the Easter sepulchre and its accompanying ceremonial constitute something of an interpretative crux for any proper understanding of late medieval English religion' and the general abolition of lights and prohibition of other Holy Week ceremonies were considered by Cranmer to imply condemnation of sepulchre ceremonies.²¹³

The 1538 injunctions forbade the burning of candles before images and the effect on St Mary's church was immediate. 'Seynt stevyn leghte' had long been maintained in the church but the last specific collection for the light was in 1537, and there was no

²⁰⁹ Beresford (ed.), 'Churchwardens Accounts of Holy Trinity', p. 112.

²¹⁰ Ronald Hutton, *The Stations of the Sun: A History of the Ritual Year in Britain* (paperback edition Oxford, 1996), pp. 308-9.

²¹¹ The criteria for selection of entries of the abstracts from the accounts of Holy Trinity are unknown. The accounts for St Mary's run annually from Easter so references to a given year in the subsequent analyses refer to the year beginning at Easter, rather than January. The account book is not paginated.

²¹² CALS P20/13/1; there is, however, no expenditure of this type in 1543 or 1544.

²¹³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 31, 461.

further specific expenditure on lights for the saint after 1537, although collections on St Stephen's Day continued in 1538, 1542 and 1543. Haigh has plausibly suggested that there was general immediate compliance with this injunction in order to placate the authorities so that the images themselves would be spared.²¹⁴ This pragmatic approach also meant that, in common with many parishes, the parishioners of St Mary's took advantage of the opportunities offered by the dissolution to embellish their own church buildings. In 1536 the parish acquired the choir stalls from the dissolved abbey of Basingwerk in North Wales and erected them in the church as part of what seems to have been a general refurbishment scheme.²¹⁵ The church refurbishment included a painting of Adam and Eve 'with a paxe' in 1538 and in 1539 money was raised to demolish and rebuild the high altar, the following year 4d was spent on entertaining 'our neburs at the Raysyng vp of the hye altur'. In addition, stone from the dissolved nunnery in Chester was used for the construction of a new porch.²¹⁶ Among the expenditure on the refurbishment in 1543 was 10s 10d for materials and labour in the construction of a new pulpit which was decorated with carvings of flowers in the following year. It does, therefore, seem that provision was being made for regular sermons, although it is not clear whether the pulpit was an entirely new part of the church furnishings, or a renewal of an existing structure. The wardens of St Mary's were slower than those of Holy Trinity in providing a Bible, which should have been purchased in 1538, as it was not until 1544 that there is the first reference to any such expenditure at St Mary's, being the

²¹⁴ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (paperback edition, Oxford, 1993), pp. 156-9; Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 56-7. Hutton comments on the 'striking' general acquiescence with the injunction in the absence of coercion, Hutton, 'Local Impact', p. 145.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144; J. P. Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill Chester* (London, 1898), p. 211.

²¹⁶ CALS P20/13/1.

purchase of a chain for it. The outlay on the Bible itself is not recorded, and may have been met by a parishioner since individuals seem to have subsidised the acquisition of some items. In the same year 1s 8d was spent on new procession books, this is likely to have been the new English processional, and Hutton records that this was purchased by most of the parishes in his sample between 1542 and 1545.²¹⁷

The evidence from St Mary's in Chester is, therefore, that parish life continued much as before and that enthusiasm for the scheme of refurbishing the church had not been curtailed by any religious changes by the 1540s. Services continued relatively unchanged, probably until 1544, when the new English processional and Bible came into use. The most notable interruption was the sudden removal of St Stephen's light, but other lights continued in the church, although possibly on a slightly reduced scale. The seasons were still marked with the traditional ceremonies and decorations at Easter and Christmas. It would seem from the churchwardens' accounts that change came gradually to St Mary's.

There is, unfortunately, much less evidence about the effect of Henrician changes on parochial religion in the rest of the county in the absence of any contemporary churchwardens' accounts. Schemes of building work continued at some parish churches, in some cases utilising materials made available by the dissolution. At Weaverham the ceiling of the north aisle is said to have come from Vale Royal.²¹⁸ The

²¹⁷ Hutton, 'Local Impact', p. 145. He does not mention St Mary's, Chester perhaps because the accounts do not mention specifically that it was the English version.

²¹⁸ Leaflet available in the church 4 October 2008. There is no supporting evidence for this claim although Crossley, the leading historian of Cheshire churches, considered it 'an excellent piece of carpenters work' and Pevsner described it as 'a good panelled roof'; Fred H. Crossley, 'The Renaissance of Cheshire Church Building in the Late Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries', *Journal of the Chester Architectural, Archaeological and Historical Society*, new series, 34 (2) (1940), p. 146; Niklaus Pevsner and Edward Hubbard, *The Buildings of England – Cheshire* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, 1971), p. 378.

north aisle ceiling at Astbury is also said to have come from a Cistercian abbey, in that case from Dieulacres, near Leek, in Staffordshire, some eleven miles away.²¹⁹

There can be no doubt, however, that some Cheshire gentry came into contact with religious reformers in London, particularly at court. Prominent among these were the Breretons. However, court careers were not confined to the gentry. Men of yeoman status such as Richard Colley, a relative by marriage of William Brereton by an illegitimate half-brother, became a servant of Sir Thomas Heneage, who succeeded Henry Norris as Groom of the Stool. Several other members of the Colley family also obtained positions at court.²²⁰ The experience of religious reform did not inevitably lead to the personal adoption of evangelical ideas, however. Sir Hugh Calveley, returned as MP for Cheshire, was one of two MPs who, in 1546, denounced George Blage for his evangelical views on the mass. As a result of this Blage was condemned to death and was only saved by the personal intervention of the king.²²¹

Even though so few wills survive for the last decade of the reign of Henry VIII, there is evidence to suggest that a network of people with evangelical views, connections of Henry Gee, was forming in Cheshire. In 1544 Thomas Croxton of Ravenscroft, in the parish of Middlewich, made his will in anticipation of a journey to

²¹⁹ Rev. J. E. G. Cartlidge, *Newbold Astbury and its History* (paperback reprint, Congleton, 2004), p. 30.

²²⁰ Robert Colley, 'By a Winding Stair – a Yeoman Family at the Tudor Court', *Cheshire History*, (44), (2004-5), p. 27-37.

²²¹ Charles Wriothesley, *A Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors from A.D. 1485 to 1559*, ed. William Douglas Hamilton, i, (Camden Society, new series, 11 (1875)), pp. 169-70; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 234; Alec Ryrie, 'Blage, Sir George (c.1512–1551)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 1 October 2011); S.T. Bindoff (ed.), *The House of Commons 1509-1558*, i, (London, 1982), p. 567, 'Sir Hugh Calverley'. Thornton says of Blage that 'his family origins and continuing ties in Cheshire can be seen in the fact that his accusers were Sir Henry [sic] Calveley and Edward Littleton', however in *DNB* Alec Ryrie states that Blage was from Somerset and Wriothesley's *Chronicle* states that his accusers claimed to have heard his heretical statements uttered at St Paul's Church in London. I can find no evidence of any Cheshire connection of Blage.

France to serve 'or soveraigne Lord the kinge in his graces warres in Fraunce'.²²² After setting out the arrangements which he had made to put his property in trust for his 'manie smale Children', he turned to other matters leaving his soul 'to almightie god desiringe hym of forgyvenes trustinge that by the merites of his passion and shedinge of his precious blud to be washed from the filthines of Sinne and to attaine and have the lief everlastinge'. His will mentions no saints and he made no bequests other than to family members. These factors combined with his trust that he would attain everlasting life through the merits of Christ's passion suggest that he was an evangelical. He appointed as supervisor John Leigh of Knutsford Booths, who was married to the sister of Henry Gee's wife.²²³

The other will from this period which shows evangelical tendencies is that of Richard Legh of High Legh, who was distantly related to John Leigh of Knutsford Booths.²²⁴ Richard Legh wrote his will in 1541 and commended his soul 'vnto chryste Jesu my maker and redemer in whom and by the merytes off whose passion and blood is all my hole trust off cleane remission and fforgevenes off all my sinnes.' He asked to be buried with 'no superffluvsse Funerall pompe at my buryng otherweys than ys convenient according to my degree and substance.'²²⁵ His other bequests were to family members and while he appointed a cleric as his supervisor, this was Roger Legh, rector of a moiety of Lymm, who was his uncle. While neither his soul bequest nor his desire

²²² CALS EDA 2/1, f.132-133v.

²²³ Henry Gee's second wife was Elizabeth Sneyd whose sister, Jane, was married to John Leigh; Ormerod, i, p. 498; iii, 492. The dating clause of Thomas Croxton's will acknowledges the king as head of the Church of England.

²²⁴ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 278-279v.

²²⁵ Although this disapproval of excess at funerals later became associated with Puritanism, by this time it was becoming more general throughout Western Europe for testators to request a restriction of undue funeral display; David Hickman, 'From Catholic to Protestant: the Changing Meaning of Testamentary Religious Provisions in Elizabethan London', in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England's Long Reformation 1500-1800* (London, 1998), p. 122.

for burial without superfluous pomp is in itself conclusive evidence of evangelical beliefs, the combination of the two is indicative of progressive ideas. It may be noted that no Cheshire testator had left any bequest for sermons by 1547. The wills of Henry Gee and these two connections of his may be viewed as distinctive since the majority of testators of this period mentioned Mary and the saints or the holy company of heaven in their soul bequest (twenty three of the thirty one wills where the soul bequest survives).²²⁶ Furthermore, fourteen of the surviving thirty-nine wills, representing more than a third of testators, requested either a clerk or some other person to pray for their soul. As late as 1543 John Dutton left 6s 8d a year for seventeen years for an annual ‘mynynnynge’ or mind.²²⁷ Bequests to saints also continued to be popular into the 1540s; in 1546, for example, Matthew Ellis of Chester made bequests to St Mary’s service and St Katherine’s service.²²⁸

Thus the evidence of wills and churchwardens’ accounts suggests that the majority of the people of Cheshire retained traditional beliefs in the efficacy of prayers for the dead and the intercession of saints. However, some influential members of the county’s elite were beginning to adopt evangelical beliefs. There were a number of ways in which they could have come into contact with reformist views, notably trading links with Bristol and London together with social, business, legal and educational links with the capital and the universities. However, contact with reformist ideas did not necessarily lead to their adoption, as evidenced by Sir Hugh Calveley. Haigh has

²²⁶ This represents almost 75%.

²²⁷ CALS EDA 2/1, f. 152v (Piccope (First Portion), p. 67) (mind = The commemoration of a deceased person on the date of the death or funeral in any month or year following, originally by a requiem mass, and (in later use) more usually by prayers (*OED* online edition accessed 28 April 2013)). The annual 6s 8d was to be divided as half to ‘poor folks’ and the other half to ‘the pryestes and clarkes and for bread and drynke.’ John Dutton was one of the illegitimate children of Laurence Dutton whose lands were eventually acquired by Sir Piers Dutton following the long dispute and an Act of Parliament.

²²⁸ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 143v-144.

pointed out that the small number of those reported for reactionary views in Lancashire reflects not so much the absence of outspoken conservatism as the inadequacy of the machinery for detection of disaffection.²²⁹ The diocesan administration was, of course, the same in Cheshire as it was in Lancashire after 1541. While Haigh's dating of the advent of popular evangelical religion in the area to the reign of Edward VI has become influential, there is definite evidence that such ideas were gaining ground in Cheshire a decade or so earlier.²³⁰ Although the number of Cheshire evangelicals was small by the end of the reign of Henry VIII it included people of influence with links to wider networks outside the county.

Conclusion

Throughout England the population were faced with fundamental religious changes during the last period of Henry VIII's reign from 1536 to his death in January 1547. Cheshire was, of course, potentially affected by these changes as much as any other area. While, arguably, the 'fundamental rhythms of religious life for most people were relatively undisturbed' there were very obvious structural changes to the church as an institution.²³¹ One particular structural change which affected Cheshire was the foundation of the new bishopric in 1541. The choice of Bird as the first bishop was not particularly opportune for any regime intent on enforcing change, as he was inclined 'to flatter with ye tyme' and advised others to follow suit; after his deprivation for marriage in Mary's reign he advised the young Protestant martyr, Thomas Haukes, to 'learne of

²²⁹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 138.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 11; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 234.

²³¹ The quotation is from Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 60.

your elders to beare somewhat.²³² He was, however, handicapped by the poverty of his new see which inhibited the vigorous administrative reforms which Bird acknowledged that the diocese needed.

Another important structural change was the dissolution of the monasteries and friaries, a process which was supported and assisted by the civil authorities. In this they were not faced by the popular opposition which erupted elsewhere in the Pilgrimage of Grace. The failure of the risings to spread to Cheshire illustrates the importance of gentry influence in two ways. Firstly, they were disinclined to challenge central authority. Although the importance of gentry involvement in the Pilgrimage is problematic, the concern of the Cheshire gentry not to alienate the government in the wake of the execution of Brereton and the resulting power struggle was a significant factor in the failure of the rising to spread south from Lancashire. Secondly, there was little popular support for Cheshire's monasteries as religious institutions because they were already largely under lay control.

Because there were so few monastic institutions in the county there were relatively few regular clergy dispossessed at the dissolution. However, the elements of continuity between the personnel of the monastery of St Werburgh's and the new cathedral in Chester created the potential for a persistent conservative strand within the cathedral chapter which had retained the advowsons of a number of local parishes. This was a particularly significant factor in the deanery of Wirral where they retained, at least temporarily, the right of presentation to eight of the fifteen parishes. The alienation by

²³² John Foxe Miscellaneous Papers BL Harley 421, f. 1-1v; Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England Under Mary Tudor* (New Haven and London, 2009), p. 106.

lease of many of these rights both before and after the dissolution of the house dissipated the authority of the chapter, however, and further extended gentry influence.

The imposition of change from the centre was hampered in Cheshire because of the initial lack of an organised commission of the peace which the government relied on elsewhere to supervise and publicise change. This was to some extent remedied by a campaign of preaching, although not always in favour of the latest legislation. The evidence from the surviving Chester churchwardens' accounts, however, suggests that there was parochial compliance with new rules, albeit gradual. While surviving wills indicate that most Cheshire testators continued to favour traditional religious observances until the end of the reign of Henry VIII, there is also evidence of the emergence of a network of evangelicals even by 1547. The experience in Cheshire was thus of a combination of reform from above and below. The traditional view advanced by some eminent historians such as Elton, that Cheshire was remote and backward, is thus difficult to sustain. Such an enduring view of Cheshire as exhibiting similar characteristics to Lancashire, as a sort of poor relation, is perhaps reinforced by the inclusion of both counties in the same new diocese of Chester. However, as demonstrated above, Cheshire had its own dynamic informed by the internecine rivalry of the local gentry whose power struggle was of paramount importance and who attempted, not always with success, to manipulate the religious changes of Henry VIII's reign to fulfil their own agenda.

4

THE REIGN OF EDWARD VI

The religious changes of the 1530s did not encounter the opposition in Cheshire which was experienced elsewhere and there was none of the unrest which had affected other areas of the north. At the same time, a small section of the community had embraced evangelical religion and presumably welcomed the changes. However, the Edwardian regime's attack on the doctrine of purgatory and consequent dissolution of chantries had direct consequences for parish religion. Most of the county's parish churches incorporated at least one chantry chapel or service, which had also introduced an element of choice and variety into parish worship. Furthermore, the multi-township parish structure meant that endowed chantry chapels were enormously important in some areas. The loss of intercessory prayers consequent upon the suppression of purgatory and the introduction of the English prayer books had a much more fundamental effect on liturgy than any of the Henrician changes. Eamon Duffy has suggested that the abolition of the chantries was disastrous since the loss of the 'army of chaplains' which had assisted in the parishes was devastating in some areas.¹ In this chapter I will consider whether this was the case in Cheshire, where such an outcome might be expected in view of the proliferation of chantry chapels. Furthermore, in parts of England religious grievances have been seen as one contributory cause of further disorder from 1548. There has not been any detailed study of events in Cheshire at the

¹ Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (paperback second edition, New Haven and London, 2005), pp. 454-5.

time of these insurrections, although almost thirty counties were affected, so this chapter will also examine Cheshire's response.²

The Dissolution of the County's Chantries

The religious policy of the last years of the reign of Henry VIII was characterised by an 'eccentric mélange of religious opinions'.³ The new king, Edward VI, was only nine years old at his accession in January 1547, so inevitably power was vested in the adults who surrounded him and initially they dictated the course of religious policy in a 'decisively evangelical' direction.⁴ Henry VIII's will had appointed a body of sixteen executors as a council of regency. However, the king's uncle, Edward Seymour, earl of Hertford and later duke of Somerset, rapidly assumed the position of Protector. This was contrived in part on the basis that obtaining a consensus for every action among such a relatively large and disparate group would make the process of government difficult, if not impossible.⁵ In late August 1547 Somerset's government launched an invasion of Scotland in an effort both to settle the long-running war and enforce the arrangement of a marriage between Edward VI and Mary, Queen of Scots.⁶ The resulting Scottish war and continuing hostilities in France proved to be expensive, and so finance was certainly a factor in the introduction of what became, in December 1547, the act

² Amanda Claire Jones, "'Commotion Time': The English Risings of 1549' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), pp. 290, 305.

³ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London, 1999), p. 57.

⁴ Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (paperback second edition, London and New York, 2012), p. 66.

⁵ W. K. Jordan, *Edward VI: The Young King* (London, 1968), pp. 54-9. For a historiographical review of recent assessments of Somerset's Protectorate see MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant*, pp. 41-4.

⁶ The troops from Cheshire who took part in this expedition felt that they had acquitted themselves well, vindicating themselves from accusations of cowardice at Flodden in an earlier Scottish campaign; Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), p. 233.

‘whereby certaine Chauntries Colleges Free Chappelles and the Possessions of the same be given to the Kinges Majestie’.⁷ Yet at the same time, the abolition of these institutions, which by their very nature argued for a belief in purgatory, was an important step in weakening traditional Catholic belief structures.⁸ Duffy has argued that some evangelicals, such as Cranmer, were concerned that ‘too rapid a progress towards Protestantism ... would be resisted by the people at large as the manipulation of the boy-king by a Protestant clique’ and that Cranmer’s opposition in the House of Lords to the Edwardian Chuntries Act may be a reflection of those concerns.⁹

In Cheshire, as elsewhere, a wide variety of intercessory foundations was liable for dissolution under the chantry legislation. These ranged from the wealthy and powerful college of St John the Baptist in Chester, with an income of just under £150 *per annum* in 1535, to the parish of Bebington on the Wirral, whose endowments, when valued in 1548, produced merely 8d a year to pay for a light in the church.¹⁰ Of particular importance in Cheshire, however, were the chantry chapels which had long acted as chapels of ease in some of the sprawling multi-township parishes, particularly in the Macclesfield and Frodsham deaneries. Furthermore, by a historical accident, several important market towns were chapelries and depended heavily on chantry

⁷ 1 Edward VI, c. 14; Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (paperback edition, Oxford, 1993), p. 171; Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 69. Peter Cunich has pointed out that during its passage through parliament the Act ‘seems to have been treated as a subsidy bill’; Peter Cunich, ‘The Dissolution of the Chantries’, in Patrick Collinson and John Craig (eds), *The Reformation in English Towns* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 159-60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 159-62. Cunich points out that monasteries, which had already been dissolved, were little more than very large chantries.

⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 448; Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer: a Life* (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 377; *LJ*, p. 308 (accessed 10 January 2012) records Cranmer’s vote against the fourth reading of the bill. For an account of the passage of the chantries bill through parliament see Alan Kreider, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge MA., 1979), pp. 189-192.

¹⁰ *VCH* online: ‘Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John’, A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (accessed 14 June 2013); *Valor v*, pp. 202-4; TNA: PRO E 301/8/4.

endowments for funding. Congleton, for example, was a chapelry of Astbury and boasted two chapels at this time. However, neither Congleton nor Astbury reported a chantry foundation in the 1548 survey.¹¹

Despite some opposition in parliament to the passage of the Edwardian Chantries Bill, it was in some ways merely an extension of the Henrician Chantries Act which had been passed in 1545, but which had lapsed with Henry's death.¹² Although no foundations in Cheshire were suppressed following the 1545 act, there is evidence that even before 1545 the government had made a concerted effort to challenge the position of St John's College in Chester. The prestige of the college was considerably undermined in 1539 by the removal of the Holy Rood, followed by the 'ordering' under instructions from Thomas Cromwell.¹³ The vicars choral had derived the majority of their income from offerings to the Rood and the reorganisation resulted in a reduction in their numbers from ten in 1535 to four, although the number of chantry priests increased from three to four.¹⁴ The college retained extensive assets, however, including the chantry endowments, and by the sixteenth century significant holdings of property, known as the obit lands, had been accumulated.¹⁵ Testators also continued to leave

¹¹ Robert Head, *Congleton Past and Present* (Congleton, 1807), pp. 165-178.

¹² 37 Henry VIII, c. 4; Kreider, *English Chantries*, p. 186.

¹³ TNA: PRO SP 1/143, f. 23 (LP xiv (1), 239); *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, pp. 27-8; Douglas Jones, *The Church in Chester 1300-1540* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 7, 1957), p. 57.

¹⁴ *Valor v*, pp. 202-4; Jones, *Church in Chester*, p. 57. In 1596 Thomas Greene deposed that before the dissolution 'there were that served in the same church to the number of vi persons vsuallie (as he remembreth) which were called vicars and served by courses there vnto whom the parishioners did paye offringes'; TNA: PRO E 134/38and39Eliz/Mich30. It therefore seems that the staffing of the college continued to evolve until its dissolution. Presumably 'by courses' means here 'in turn'; (course = a set of persons appointed to serve in their turn along with another set or sets; OED online accessed 2 January 2012).

¹⁵ VCH online: 'Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (accessed 14 June 2013).

bequests for temporary chantries and prayers.¹⁶ The college precinct housed not only the collegiate church, which also acted as a parish church, but also the fraternity of St Anne had its own chapel there and the Calvercroft chantry chapel was also probably a separate structure. Prior to the dissolution, the only daily service held in the Calvercroft chapel was a mass held at 4 a.m. ‘wherevnto the parishioners soe many as woudle did repaire’ and were accommodated on seats and benches. The tanners maintained a light in the chapel and a dirige and mass were said annually on St Clement’s Day for the Tanners Company. The chapel was also used for burials.¹⁷ The large chapel of St James and an anchorite’s cell, together with clergy houses, made up the extensive building complex.¹⁸ There was negotiation and agreement between the parishioners and the chapter of the college about some aspects of their respective roles, for example the agreed rights and duties of the parish clerk in relation to bell-ringing were listed on a brass plaque set into the wall of the steeple.¹⁹

The dean may have realised that the future survival of the college was uncertain and, with two of the prebendaries, David Pole and James Fowler, he was party to a number of long leases of college property from 1540.²⁰ However, a lesson must have

¹⁶ Temporary endowments included, for example, a bequest of 5s for masses to the vicars of St John’s by Alexander Standish, clerk, in 1538; TNA: PRO PROB 11/27/302, Alexander Standishe.

¹⁷ Depositions of Thomas Greene, alderman of the city of Chester; Richard Broster, tanner of the city of Chester and Richard Bird, tanner of the city of Chester in TNA: PRO E 134/38and39Eliz/Mich30. They also deposed that the chapel was used as a kiln following the dissolution.

¹⁸ *VCH* online: ‘Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John’, A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (accessed 14 June 2013).

¹⁹ Deposition of Hugh Janion, formerly vicar of St John’s in TNA: PRO E 134/38and39Eliz/Mich30.

²⁰ *VCH* online: ‘Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John’, A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (accessed 14 June 2013). Copies of some of these leases were made later by one of the Randle Holmes and some are in BL Harley 2046, f. 24 (dated 6 November 36 Henry VIII (1544) for 51 years); BL Harley 1994, f. 218v (dated 12 August 36 Henry VIII (1544) for 51 years); BL Harley 1994, f. 319 (dated 2 May 36 Henry VIII (1544) for 70 years). *LP* xix (1), 455 is a copy of a lease similar to this last one, dated 2 May 36 Henry VIII (1544), but

been learned from the disallowance of some leases granted by the friars immediately prior to the dissolution of the friaries in 1540, as surviving copies of college leases indicate that the new leases were granted with the rents unchanged. They were therefore not drawn up to provide a high entry fine followed by a low rental. There is, of course, no indication of whether the new tenants offered any financial inducements to the dean and chapter which were not recorded in the leases and it is also possible that the new tenants were chosen from those in a position to assist the college and its staff. Thus one grant was made to William Bird, a tanner from Chester.²¹ He may have been a relative of the bishop, John Bird, who is said to have come from a Chester family.²² The master, brethren and sisters of the fraternity of St Anne at St John's had also made a 99 year lease of some of its city property in 1541.²³ In 1543 the endowments of the petty canonry were leased to the founder's heir, Richard Brereton, brother of the pluralist and opportunist incumbent, Peter Brereton, who had been granted the benefice in 1525 by Sir William Brereton.²⁴

is for a period of 64 years and the source is stated to be BL Harley 2150, f. 56. A crown rental of 1559-60 lists twelve leases of 'prebends lands', in ten cases: surviving details show that they were granted for periods of 51 years or more in the period between 1540 and 1544; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxv, p. 72.

²¹ BL Harley 1994, f. 319; *LP* xix (1), 455.

²² Richard Copsey, 'Bird, John (d. 1558)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 6 October 2007).

²³ BL Harley 1994, f. 319. This lease was to 'William Beridd of Chester, baker' who may have been another member of the bishop's Bird family. At this time the master of the fraternity was a Chester alderman, William Davison, whereas prior to 1420 the masters were often clergy from St John's (*VCH* online: 'Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (accessed 14 June 2013). The appointment of William Davison may thus reflect increased lay influence in the hierarchy of the fraternity.

²⁴ Jones, *Church in Chester*, pp. 102-3; *VCH* online: 'Churches and Religious Bodies: The Collegiate Church of St John', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions (2005), pp. 125-133. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57316>> (14 June 2013). A copy of the grant to Peter Brereton '*cantarie beate marie vocat petycanon in ecclesia sancte Johannis cestr*' is at CALS DCH/DD/12. This alienation of the chantry foundation property led Jones to conclude that the chantry was 'entirely suppressed' in 1543, but as it was listed in the 1548 chantry certificate, with Peter Brereton as incumbent, this is unlikely.

The Henrician Chantries Act had provided for a national survey of chantry property which was carried out in the spring of 1546. For the purposes of the survey, England and Wales were divided into twenty-four districts, based on groups of counties.²⁵ This was rather different from the organisation of the commissions for the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* survey, which were based on a mixture of towns, counties, bishoprics and even, in the case of Richmond, on the archdeaconry.²⁶ The change in the organisation of the commissions reflects the procedure adopted by the first Court of Augmentations which was responsible for carrying out the 1546 survey. Their administrative structure was based on circuits, also comprising groups of counties which were managed by receivers and auditors with surveyors and local collectors answering to them.²⁷ The adoption of the Court of Augmentations model for organising the first chantry surveys arguably exemplifies the Henrician government's moves to reduce dependence on ecclesiastical administrative structure and to develop governmental bureaucracy in its place.²⁸

The commissioners for the counties of Cheshire and Lancashire and for Chester, which was also a county in its own right, were the bishop of Chester with Sir Thomas Holcroft, John Holcroft, Robert Tatton, John Kitchen and James Rokesby.²⁹ The lay

²⁵ *LP* xxi (1), 302 (30). The commissions were announced in February 1546.

²⁶ *LP* viii, 149 (35-84).

²⁷ W. C. Richardson, *The History of the Court of Augmentations – 1536-1554* (Baton Rouge, 1961), pp. 47-8; G. R. Elton, *The Tudor Revolution in Government* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 1969), p. 205; Sylvia Gill, 'Managing Change in the English Reformation: the 1548 Dissolution of the Chantries and Clergy of the Midland County Surveys' (PhD Thesis, University of Birmingham, 2010), pp. 96-7.

²⁸ In Elton's model, this was primarily the work of Thomas Cromwell, G. R. Elton, *Tudor Revolution in Government, passim*.

²⁹ *LP* xxi (1), 302 (30). The circuits allotted to each group of commissioners were not coterminous with the receiver's county groupings, however. As listed in the Court of Augmentations accounts there were sixteen groups in England and Wales, and Cheshire was grouped with Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire for this purpose. Richardson, *Court of Augmentations*, p. 50; Elton, *Tudor Revolution in Government*, p. 206. This may have been because responsibility for the administration of monastic and chantry property in Lancashire lay with the Duchy of Lancaster, rather than the Court of Augmentations.

members of the commissions were a mixture of local gentry and officers of the Court of Augmentations. Unlike the members of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* commission, however, only one, Robert Tatton of Wythenshawe, was from one of the elite county families identified by Tim Thorton.³⁰ However, Tatton probably owed his place on the commission to his position as baron of the Chester exchequer.³¹ He acted as a Justice of the Peace from 1542 but in 1564 he was reported not to be favourable to the Elizabethan religious settlement, and was not appointed to the Commission of the Peace thereafter.³² Thomas Holcroft and his brother John were born in Lancashire. Thomas Holcroft was a ruthless and ambitious officer of the royal household, soldier and diplomat who had profited greatly from the dissolution of the monasteries.³³ A contemporary reported that ‘if there is a good fee Holcroft will take it’.³⁴ In 1544 he acquired the site of Vale Royal Abbey in Cheshire following a possible forgery of the abbot’s signature and amassed a substantial estate in the area. John Holcroft was the older brother of Sir Thomas, but, lacking his ability, probably relied on his brother’s influence for his appointment to a number of local commissions in Lancashire and Cheshire. He was sheriff of Cheshire in 1546-7 and may have owed his place on the 1546 chantries commission to his tenure of

³⁰ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 30-31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 90, 153. Robert Tatton acted jointly with Randal Lloyd, but on 1 May 1543 had deputed Thomas Pyllyn to act for him.

³² Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, p. 236.; Mary Bateson (ed.), ‘A Collection of Original Letters from the Bishops to the Privy Council, 1564’, *Camden Miscellany*, IX, Camden Society, new series, 53 (1895), p. 75; Patricia J. Turner, ‘The Commission of the Peace in Cheshire’ (MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1974), p. 142.

³³ The biographical details for the Holcrofts are taken from S. T. Bindoff (ed.), *The House of Commons, 1509-1558* (London, 1982), vol. 2, pp. 372-5. They are also available online at <www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/holcroft-sir-thomas-15056-58> and <www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/holcroft-sir-john-1498-1560> (accessed 14 June 2013).

³⁴ Robert Southwell as quoted in Bindoff (ed.), *House of Commons*, vol. 2, p. 373.

that office. The last two members of the 1546 commission, Kitchen and Rokesby, were officials of the Court of Augmentations.³⁵

Although the 1548 chantries commission again combined Cheshire, Lancashire and the city of Chester in one circuit, it was rather different in composition.³⁶ The 1548 commission included no clergy and comprised nine men, rather than the six of 1546. The members were Sir Hugh Chomondeley, Sir William Brereton and James Starkey from Cheshire, with five other men who were officials of either the Court of Augmentations, the Duchy of Lancaster or held other crown appointments in the area.³⁷ The last member of the commission was Thomas Carew, probably a client of Sir Walter Mildmay, general surveyor of the Court of Augmentations.³⁸ Sir Hugh Cholmondeley and Sir William Brereton were members of the county elite and were successively appointed sheriffs of Cheshire in November 1547 and November 1548, and were members of parliament together for Cheshire in 1547. Cholmondeley had ‘a long, but colourless career’, holding a number of commissions in the county. He was a friend of Sir John Thynne, Somerset’s ‘right hand man’ and was knighted during the Scottish

³⁵ For Kitchen see < www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/kitchen-john-1507-62> (accessed 14 June 2013); for Rokesby see Richardson, *Court of Augmentations*, pp.54-5, 99-100.

³⁶ *CPR, Edward VI*, ii, 1548-9 (London, 1924), p. 135.

³⁷ The Court of Augmentations representatives were John Arscott and John Kitchen. Other members were William Layton, brother of the monastic visitor, Richard Layton, and surveyor of the woods of the Duchy of Lancaster; George Browne, an attorney of the Duchy of Lancaster and Thomas Fleetwood who was from a Lancashire family, but had moved south and held the office of auditor of crown lands for Cheshire and Flintshire. Arscott was also a surveyor of woods for the duchy of Lancaster. For the careers of these men see <www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/arscott-john-1517-58> (accessed 14 June 2013) for Arscott; <www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/kitchen-john-1507-62> (accessed 14 June 2013) for Kitchen; <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/layton-william-1514-5152>> (accessed 14 June 2013) for Layton; Sir Robert Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, i, 1265-1603 (London, 1953), pp. 483-4, for Browne, namesake of the M.P. for Berwick-upon-Tweed; <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/fleetwood-thomas-151718-70>> (accessed 14 June 2013) for Fleetwood.

³⁸ Sir Walter Mildmay wrote to Sir John Thynne on 1 September 1549 recommending Thomas Carew following the death of his brother, Sir Wymond, who had been a member of the household of Catherine Parr; Bindoff (ed.), *House of Commons*, vol. 1, p. 581.

campaign of 1544.³⁹ Brereton was also knighted during the same campaign and was appointed sheriff of Cheshire twice, but was removed from office on Mary's accession 'almost certainly for his religious sympathies'.⁴⁰ James Starkey was from a local gentry family, and presumably owed his place on the commission to his role as royal surveyor for Cheshire serving the Court of Augmentations.⁴¹

The two chantry commissions for Cheshire in 1546 and 1548 were thus much smaller and quite different in composition from the 1536 commission for the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.⁴² In 1536 gentry members of the two leading county factions had been appointed with local lawyers and other palatine officials from Chester, together with two auditors. The membership of both chantry commissions included officials of the Court of Augmentations and there was no effort to balance the interests of local factions, possibly because the chantry commissions were responsible for both Lancashire and Cheshire. Unfortunately, the 1546 survey for Cheshire has been lost,⁴³ but in other areas a considerable proportion of the chantries were successfully concealed from the first survey. In Lancashire more than a fifth of the surviving chantries were concealed and in Cornwall and Devonshire at least twenty foundations were uncovered following subsequent investigation.⁴⁴ This rate of success in concealing chantry foundations is hardly surprising as there were relatively few commissioners to cover wide areas, and some of the commissioners may not have known the areas for which they were

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 640-1. Thynne may thus be a connection between Thomas Carew and Sir Hugh Cholmondeley.

⁴⁰ Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 157, 239.

⁴¹ TNA: PRO E 117/14/10.

⁴² There were seventeen members of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* commission.

⁴³ Earwaker, ii, p. 62, reported in the late nineteenth century that 'every enquiry has been made at the Record Office ... but unfortunately it cannot now be found.'

⁴⁴ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 147; Nicholas Orme, 'The Dissolution of the Chantries in Devon, 1546-8', *Transactions of the Devonshire Association for the Advancement of Science*, 111 (1979), p. 80.

responsible. For example, John Arscott who served on the 1548 commission for Cheshire was a native of Devon and was a member of both the 1546 and 1548 commissions for Cornwall, Devon and Exeter.⁴⁵ In some cases descendants of the founders sought to annul settlements of property, as was the case at Disley in Cheshire. In other cases, such as at St John's in Chester, efforts were made in anticipation of dissolution to alienate property or rescind endowments to keep them out of the hands of the Crown agents. In such circumstances local knowledge was of paramount importance to the commissioners and use was sometimes made of informers.⁴⁶

No new valuation of the Disley chantry was made in the 1548 certificate, which repeated the 1546 valuation because 'oon Sir petre Leighe knight denyeth the kinges interest, therein and claymyth the same to be parcell of his inheritanis'.⁴⁷ Disley was a chantry in Stockport parish founded in 1495 by the grandfather of Sir Peter Legh of Lyme.⁴⁸ He successfully resisted the royal claim to the chantry lands, achieving a temporary restoration of the property in 1549 'untill such tyme as other better matter shall be showne for the Kinge in that behalf'.⁴⁹ Thirty years later an Elizabethan investigation into concealed lands re-examined this arrangement.⁵⁰ The Exchequer depositions at that time give an insight into how Disley chantry was staffed, organised and funded and how the chapel subsequently continued to operate after the dissolution

⁴⁵ <www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/arscott-john-1517-58> (accessed 14 June 2013); Orme, 'Dissolution of the Chantries in Devon', p. 79, 82.

⁴⁶ For example, information about the endowment of Disley chantry apparently came from 'John Calveley Esquier enformer for the king', Earwaker, ii, p. 95. This may have been John Calveley of Lea, later valet of Queen Mary; Ormerod, ii, p. 769.

⁴⁷ TNA: PRO E 301/8/27.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Jan Wood, 'Disley from Chantry to Parish: Sources for the History of Anglican Chapels', *THSLC*, 151 (2003 for 2002), p. 64; Earwaker, *East Cheshire*, ii, p. 95.

⁵⁰ Wood, 'Disley', p. 64.

of the chantries.⁵¹ In the interim it had been licensed as a parochial chapel, dedicated to the Virgin Mary, by the Marian bishop of Chester, Cuthbert Scot, on 23 July 1558.⁵²

In his deposition in 1579/80, William Woodruff, aged 80, recalled that for most of the time three priests had officiated at the chantry, assisted by three deacons which had been the intention of the founder.⁵³ There was a song school and ‘the fereste service in the countrie’, which he often attended. Every Sunday and holy day the names of the benefactors were read out from a bede roll a yard and a half long.⁵⁴ The names of the benefactors of the chantry were ‘graven’ on a brass plate set into the north wall of the chapel.⁵⁵ This organisation is similar to that set out in the foundation deeds of the Downes chantry at Pott, about ten miles from Disley, where endowments funded three priests.⁵⁶ Other, younger, deponents all recalled eight curates who served at the chapel; the first they named had been there about 42 years before (about 1538). Each used the phrase ‘after him’ when listing them.⁵⁷ This strongly suggests that within a few decades of the foundation the complement of clergy was reduced to one. By 1548 there was only one priest named in the chantry certificate for Disley, whereas there were still three

⁵¹ *Ibid.*; TNA: PRO E 134/21and22Eliz/Mich6; TNA: PRO E 134/22Eliz/East2; E 134/22Eliz/Trin8.

⁵² Wood, ‘Disley’, pp. 64-5; CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 92-3.

⁵³ Earwaker, ii, pp. 92-3.

⁵⁴ TNA: PRO E 134/22Eliz/Trin8; Wood, ‘Disley’, p. 83.

⁵⁵ TNA: PRO E 134/22Eliz/East2; depositions of John Etchells of Disley and Elizabeth Moore of Horwich, Derbyshire. None of the deponents admitted to knowing what had happened to the brass after the dissolution, similarly at St John’s the fate of the brass plate was apparently not known to later deponents.

⁵⁶ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, pp. 46-7; T. F. Askey, ‘Chantry Foundations and Lay Piety in the Deanery of Macclesfield (1485 to 1558)’ (MA thesis, University of Manchester, 1981), p. 11.

⁵⁷ TNA: PRO E 134/22Eliz/Trin8; depositions of Raffie Swyndells of Disley aged 53; Robert Stanley of Disley Stanley aged 66 and Edward Higginbottom of Disley Stanley aged 63. Presumably these deponents had collaborated in preparing their testimony since all gave the same names in the same order beginning at the same time (c. 1538). However, their memories seem to have been faulty as the second curate they all named, Thomas Davenport, had been at the chapel at the time of the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* in 1535; *Valor*, v, p. 216.

priests at Pott.⁵⁸ The reasons why the size of the establishment at Disley had reduced can only be conjectural, but may have been the result of family disputes about the lands to be included in the endowment.⁵⁹ It is clear, however, that not all chantry establishments had survived in the form originally intended.

The surviving 1548 list for Cheshire is an abbreviated certificate.⁶⁰ The abbreviated chantry certificates were made to help in the assessment of pensions and so were intended to record the names and ages of the incumbents, with the value of each chantry, service, college, fraternity, guild and free chapel in each parish.⁶¹ The Cheshire certificate lists 74 clergy in 21 of the county's 82 parishes.⁶² Thus only about one quarter of parishes reported an endowment which funded a priest. According to Alan Kreider's figures, however, the proportion of parishes with a greater intercessory institution, able to support at least one priest, was almost one half. He calculated that 32 of the 65 parishes which he thought existed in Cheshire at the time included such an endowment. The chantry certificate names chapelries as well as parishes where institutions were located, and Kreider may not have distinguished between the two. Kreider's observation that in 'Cheshire ... where half of the parishes ... contained institutions capable of supporting priests, the effects of the dissolution of the chantries would be widespread indeed' therefore requires some modification.⁶³ Of the 74 clergy

⁵⁸ TNA: PRO E 301/8/27; TNA: PRO E 301/8/29.

⁵⁹ Wood, 'Disley', pp. 62-3.

⁶⁰ TNA: PRO E 301/8.

⁶¹ C. J. Kitching, 'The Chantries of the East Riding of Yorkshire at the Dissolution in 1548', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 44 (1972), pp. 178-9. The pension awards for Cheshire are at TNA: PRO SC 6/EDWVI/686. The sexton and parish clerk of St John's were also awarded pensions, but they have been excluded from the following discussion, as there is no evidence that they had been ordained.

⁶² One man, Richard Alcock, is named twice at St George's and St Anne's fraternities in Chester but he has only been included once in the following discussion.

⁶³ Kreider, *English Chantries*, pp. 15-18.

named, 21 served the two colleges and a further 11 were stipendiaries.⁶⁴ The remainder, comprising just over half of the clergy listed were identified as chantry or fraternity priests.⁶⁵

Of this group, after five years almost half continued to serve the same parish (see Table 3 below). These included Thomas Tassie, who had been a monk at

Table 3 – Employment by 1554 of priests named in the 1548 certificate.⁶⁶

	Prebendaries	Vicars choral	Brethren at Bunbury	Chantry priests	Stipendiaries	Total
Continued in same parish		2	4	18	5	29
Moved to another parish			1	7	2	10
Career elsewhere	6			4		10
Died before 1554				1	1	2
Unknown	2	2	4	12	3	23
Total	8	4	9	42	11	74

Birkenhead Priory, and continued to serve at Wallasey. By 1563 he was described as ‘*inidoneus senex*’ (unsuitable, an old man), but was still serving the parish as curate in

⁶⁴ The terminology employed is somewhat confusing as some clergy are described as both incumbent and stipendiary; I have assumed that this means that they were chantry incumbents with a stipend. The 11 men considered here are those designated only as stipendiaries. Of these stipendiaries, five were still in the same parish six years later at the visitation of 1554. These were John Thompson at St Mary’s and Richard Lowther at St Bridget’s, both in Chester; Henry Cowper at Stoke; Randle Wright at Acton and Edmund Clay at Prestbury. One had died in the interim, ‘Sr Rich Stancliffe preist’, former stipendiary at St Mary’s in Chester was buried there on 5 April 1548; J. P. Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill Chester* (London, 1898), p. 108; in the chantry certificate his surname is given as ‘Stanley’.

⁶⁵ This remainder also includes the one man identified as incumbent of a free chapel, Richard Wright, at Nantwich.

⁶⁶ The details are drawn from the list of clergy as recorded at the visitation of 1554 at CALS EDV 1/1 ff. 16-30v. Four of the six prebendaries of St John’s who had other careers in the church which I have been able to identify held various positions, particularly in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield. Richard Walker, Dean of the College, was later Archdeacon of Stafford and Dean of Chester Cathedral (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, ii, p. 54); James Fowler was the student nephew of Rowland Lee; David Pole had been vicar-general of Coventry and Lichfield and was later bishop of Peterborough (T. F. Mayer, ‘Pole, David (d. 1568)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 17 February 2011)); Randle (wrongly named Thomas in the certificate) Sneyd was also vicar-general of the diocese (Tim Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 67). Richard Smith was probably the unpleasant pluralist rector of Wigan and Bury who was also commissary of the archdeaconry of Chester (Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 3) and Peter Mainwaring had been made a Canon of Chester in 1544 (R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), p. 18).

1579.⁶⁷ He died in 1582 and was buried at Wallasey.⁶⁸ Others moved to work in other parishes, Richard Falconer, one of the incumbents of Thornton's chantry at St John's, had moved to St Olave's in Chester by 1554 and Laurence Millington from Grene Chapel in Frodsham parish had probably moved to Guilden Sutton.⁶⁹ Chantry priests treated in Table 3 as having an existing career elsewhere in 1548 include Randle Green, who served the chantry at Chadkirk, and was probably the same man who had been incumbent of Prestbury since 1530, although the name was common in the area.⁷⁰ Peter Brereton held a number of livings in plurality over a long career and continued as rector of Heswall in Wirral Deanery until his death in 1553.⁷¹ Others who are not listed in the visitation of 1554 ended their days in the parishes where they had worked. Hugh Sylvester had served from 1519 at Woodhead chantry chapel, founded by Sir Edmund Shaw in 1488 in the parish of Mottram (see Figure 11 below).⁷² He may have been happy to retire on his pension of £4 and was buried at Mottram in 1579.⁷³ Robert Massey, former stipendiary at Mottram was also buried there in February 1571, although since his annual pension was only 7s he presumably took up some other employment.⁷⁴

A key role of chantry institutions in Cheshire was to act as chapels of ease in large parishes. The chantry certificate identified foundations at twelve chapelries which were potentially liable for dissolution under the 1548 Act. However, the majority

⁶⁷ CALS EDV 1/3, f. 27v. By 1579 he was curate of Wallasey aged 75; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 100.

⁶⁸ *Wirral Notes and Queries*, ii, p. 59.

⁶⁹ Positive identification is often difficult and while Richard Falconer's move within the city of Chester is plausible, the identification of Laurence Millington is more problematic. However, Grene Chapel was closed after 1548 and Guilden Sutton is the next-but-one parish to Frodsham. Guilden Sutton had been wholly impropriated to St John's before the dissolution.

⁷⁰ Earwaker, ii, p. 207.

⁷¹ Jones, *Church in Chester*, p. 166; his will is at CALS DCH/C/459.

⁷² Askey, 'Chantry foundations', p. 191; TNA: PRO E 101/75/5. His age in 1548 given as 50 so he would have been 21 in 1519.

⁷³ Earwaker, *East Cheshire*, ii, p. 121.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*



Figure 11 – St James's Chapel, Woodhead was a chantry chapel founded by Sir Edmund Shaw situated in a remote and sparsely-populated part of the county. It was one of the three Cheshire chapels known to have been dissolved under the 1548 Act.

(Photograph by Carl Rogerson <<http://www.carlscam.com>>)⁷⁵

survived due partly to the provision for continuation of 'any Chappell made or ordeyned for the ease of the people dwelling distaunt from the parishe churche'.⁷⁶ Additionally,

⁷⁵ Image reproduced by kind permission of Carl Rogerson.

⁷⁶ 1 Edward VI, c. 14; clause 15. The foundations liable for dissolution were: in Macclesfield deanery at Newton, Marton, Macclesfield and Pott in Prestbury parish; at Chadkirk and Disley in Stockport parish and at Woodhead in Mottram in Longdendale parish; in Frodsham deanery at Over Peover in Rostherne parish; at Northwich in Great Budworth parish and at Grene Chapel in Frodsham parish and in Nantwich deanery two foundations at Nantwich in Acton parish. Susan Guinn-Chipman also records the existence of a chapel at Gawsworth 'at Macclesfield' quite clearly relates to Macclesfield itself, which was a chapelry of Prestbury. 'The chapel of St James' at Gawsworth, which she describes as having been a chantry chapel where generations of the Fitton family are buried was a parish church by 1500; Raymond Richards, *Old Cheshire Churches* (Didsbury, 1973), pp. 160-4. She stated that Gawsworth was one of two places where Catholic gentry secured the continuation of chantry chapels which they had founded, the other was Disley. From this contention, she argued that this was part of 'resistant responses' with 'religious roots' by Catholic families. In view of her misunderstanding about Gawsworth, the validity of this argument must

however, some families managed to retain their ancestral foundations and also, in some cases, to recover endowments which had supported them. In Macclesfield deanery, none of the chantry chapels was dissolved, but Woodhead chapel (see Figure 11 above) passed out of use, and had become derelict by 1662.⁷⁷ The chapels at Newton, Chadkirk and Disley reverted to their patrons and continued in use, if only in the short term.⁷⁸ The chapel so carefully organised by Geoffrey Downes at Pott was recommended for continuance by the commissioners ‘having iiijc hoslyng people ... and ... distant for [sic] their parishe church thre mylis and is necary to haue a curet appointed to the same’.⁷⁹ At Marton the chapel was sold to the Davenport family, but a return by the churchwardens of Prestbury made about 1600 found that an allowance had been provided by the Court of Augmentations for the continuance of the chapel and payment of four marks in salary to the existing incumbent, James Whittackers.⁸⁰ The chapel at Macclesfield was a parochial chapel of Prestbury parish, and included the chantry chapel of Thomas Savage, archbishop of York. Five of the six clergy who had served Macclesfield at the time of the visitation in 1548 were still there in 1554, the sixth man had died and been replaced.⁸¹

be doubtful, especially when combined with the continuation of all but two of the county’s chantry chapels potentially liable to dissolution; Susan Guinn-Chipman, *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London; Vermont, 2013), pp. 51, 56-7.

⁷⁷ Askey, ‘Chantry foundations’, p. 182; *Notitia Cestriensis*, p. 280. The chapel was later brought back into use. It is possible that the building shown in Figure 11 is not the building in existence in 1548, but the remoteness of Woodhead is well illustrated by the picture.

⁷⁸ Askey, ‘Chantry foundations’, pp. 182-3; also for the recovery of Newton by the Newton family see Deborah Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536): An Early Tudor Gentleman* (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 131; for the recovery of Chadkirk by the family of Davenport of Henbury see BL Harley 605, f. 27; for the recovery of Disley by the Legh family see Wood, ‘Disley’, p. 64.

⁷⁹ TNA: PRO E 301/8/29.

⁸⁰ Earwaker, ii, p. 390.

⁸¹ Jane Laughton, *The Church in the Market Place: A History of the Church of St Michael and All Angels in Macclesfield c.1220-1901* (Macclesfield, 2003), pp. 13, 23-4; CALS EDV 2/3, f. 10; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 29.

Eamon Duffy has concluded that while '[t]he impact of the dissolutions certainly varied from region to region, and from community to community even within the regions ... in many places it is hard to see the measure as anything short of a disaster for lay religious life.' He dismissed as 'too bland an assessment by far' Christopher Kitching's conclusion that in the East Riding of Yorkshire the contribution of the chantries to parish life 'was not greatly missed'.⁸² Duffy's analysis suggests two major reasons why the dissolution was so disastrous, firstly, in abolishing the religious guilds and confiscating craft gild property devoted to religious purposes 'the Act destroyed the main form of organized lay religious activity' and robbed the parishes of 'intermediate structures' which played a vital role in funding them and in organising parish festivals. Secondly, the removal of the 'army of chaplains' which had assisted in the parishes was devastating in some areas.⁸³ The effect of the dissolution of the religious guilds will be considered later. For Cheshire, while it may, indeed, be too dismissive to say that the contribution of the chantries was 'not greatly missed'; the impact of the dissolution on clerical and liturgical provision in the county was minimal.

At most three chapels listed in the certificate were lost. Of these, the function of the free chapel of St Laurence and St James by the sixteenth century is not clear, but it was in the town of Nantwich not far from the town centre. Presumably, if it was still used for public services it would not have caused too much inconvenience for any congregation to attend the main town church. The chapel at Woodhead was situated in a sparsely-populated area and was brought back into use by the late sixteenth century. It was subsequently abandoned and re-opened again on at least one occasion and was

⁸² Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 454; Kitching, 'The Chantries of the East Riding of Yorkshire', p. 183.

⁸³ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 454-5.

therefore perhaps never viable.⁸⁴ Its closure must, however, have been a serious loss to the small number of people who used it, as it was eight miles from the parish church. Grene Chapel, which was also dissolved, was situated in Frodsham parish and no doubt its loss was also a problem for those who had frequented it.⁸⁵ However, the commissioners were careful to retain those chapels which were used by relatively large numbers of people, such as at Pott, which was also situated in remote country but was clearly used by a larger congregation than Woodhead. Furthermore, it was not unknown for other chapels which were not sustainable to fall into disuse at about this time. The chapel at Mottram was one such foundation. Arrangements had been made in 1504 for a priest to serve both there and at Newton, but it is not mentioned in the 1548 survey, by which time it seems to have decayed.⁸⁶ No doubt the closure of the three chapels lost in 1548 was a serious loss to those who had used them regularly, but it would be an exaggeration to describe their dissolution as ‘devastating’. It has also been noted that in other areas ‘chapels of ease came out of the reformation remarkably unscathed’.⁸⁷

The purported loss of an ‘army’ of parish chaplains, suggested by Duffy, did not happen in Cheshire. In the taxation assessment of 25 Henry VIII (1533-4) 312 clergy

⁸⁴ Earwaker, ii, pp. 136, 172.

⁸⁵ The exact location of this chapel is not now clear; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxii, p. 65 gives the location as ‘within the parish of Frodsham’ and Deborah Youngs said that it was at Millington: Youngs, *Humphrey Newton*, p. 129. However, the only township named Millington that I have been able to locate is in Rostherne parish; F. I. Dunn, *The Ancient Parishes, Townships and Chapelries of Cheshire* (Chester, 1987), p. 17. It is thus difficult to assess how far this chapel was from a parish church and thus what inconvenience its closure may have caused.

⁸⁶ Youngs, *Humphrey Newton*, pp. 126-7.

⁸⁷ The quotation is from C. Kitching, ‘Church and Chapelry in Sixteenth century England’, in D. Baker (ed.), *The Church in Town and Countryside*; Studies in Church History 16 (Oxford, 1979), p. 288; R. N. Swanson, ‘Fissures in the Bedrock: Parishes, Chapels, Parishioners and Chaplains in Pre-Reformation England’, in Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton (eds), *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England – Essays in Honour of Professor W. J. Sheils* (Farnham, 2012), p. 94.

had been liable for taxation in Cheshire.⁸⁸ These included staff at a number of establishments whose numbers had been curtailed before 1548. The 1533 assessment names nine vicars choral at St John's and this group had been reorganised by 1539, when their number was reduced to four.⁸⁹ The two clergy taxed at St Werburgh's in Chester had presumably left following the dissolution of the monastery in 1540. It is unlikely that the eight prebendaries or the four masters of hospitals played an active role in parish life, a total of nineteen names may thus be excluded from the 1533 list, reducing the effective number of what may be described as parochial clergy to 293 prior to the dissolution of the chantries. This level of staffing may be compared with the situation immediately after the dissolution. There was an episcopal visitation of Cheshire in 1548, for which a *liber clericorum* was prepared in May that year.⁹⁰ The dissolution was scheduled for Easter Sunday, 1 April 1548, and the May 1548 clergy lists record its effects on the county's clergy. At St John's College the vicars choral,

⁸⁸ BL Harley 594, ff. 146-154.

⁸⁹ TNA: PRO SP 1/143, f. 23 (*LP* xiv (1), 239); *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, pp. 27-8; Douglas Jones, *The Church in Chester 1300-1540* (Chetham Society 3rd series, 7, 1957), p. 57.

⁹⁰ The following details are drawn from three partial lists at CALS EDV 2/2; EDV 2/3 and EDV 2/4 which were repaired and collated by W. F. Irvine in the late-nineteenth century. None of these is a complete list for the whole county, Malpas deanery is included only in EDV 2/2 and Chester deanery appears only in EDV 2/4. EDV 2/3 is contemporaneously dated to May 1548 and parts of EDV 2/3 are repeated in EDV 2/2 and EDV 2/4. EDV 2/2 and EDV 2/4 are fair copies although there are some amendments to parts of both in a different hand. EDV 2/3 is very rough. The repeated parts are duplicated, in that the same parishes or chapelries appear in the same order but there are some amendments to the names of the clergy, although the duplicated names appear in the same order for each. In some instances a name in EDV 2/3 has been amended with a different location added or a name is crossed through or marked in other ways, for example, '*mortuus*', suggesting that EDV 2/3 was a working copy drawn up during the course of the visitation. The handwriting of the fair copies appears in part of the working copy, where it is often overwritten with amendments and the names of churchwardens and other sworn men have been added in spaces apparently left for the purpose. As EDV 2/3 appears to have been amended during the course of the visitation, the clergy details from that source have been used as the basis of the following discussion, where possible. Although only EDV 2/3 is dated, the similarities are such that Irvine's attribution of all three lists to 1548 is indisputable. It cannot, of course, be guaranteed that the 1548 *liber clericorum* was drawn up on exactly the same basis as the 1533 taxation list. However, as both were compiled at least in part for the purposes of taxation (the 1533 list for the imposition of one-fifteenth and the 1548 lists for the levy of procurations and synodals) it must be safe to assume that similar criteria were adopted.

chantry priests and fraternity clergy had been replaced by one vicar and his assistant and at Bunbury College only three clergy are listed.⁹¹ As the overall number of clergy listed in all the parishes of the county is 283, this represents a reduction of ten, or 3.4 per cent of the parochial clergy over the whole county since 1533. However, a total of fourteen clergy had been lost from the two colleges alone, so that over the rest of the county the number of clergy had actually increased from 274 in 1533/4 to 278 in May 1548.⁹² These, of course, were the employed parish clergy, and included taxable salaried curates as well as beneficed clergy. The element which may have been lost from the body of clergy was an indeterminate number of clerks with no permanent position who picked up odd pennies from casual work at funerals or obits, some of whom spent the intervening period gaming, drinking or fighting.⁹³ Kitching's conclusion that this group was not greatly missed seems entirely reasonable. As for the employed parish clergy, their numbers seem to have continued much as before.

Although elderly men like William Woodruff looking back over decades from the 1580s or 1590s may have been nostalgic for the lost days of the chantries, such an emotional response cannot be quantified. In any case, it does seem that services at Disley, which he so fondly remembered, may have been severely curtailed well before 1548. Additionally, the spiritual impact on the laity of the loss of intercessory prayers consequent upon the abolition of purgatory cannot be measured or inferred from the evidence. As far as can be quantified, however, the structural effect of the dissolution of

⁹¹ CALS EDV 2/4, f. 23, for St John's and CALS EDV 2/3, f. 4, and CALS EDV 2/4, f. 13, for Bunbury.

⁹² The 293 parochial clergy of 1533 include eleven at St John's and eight at Bunbury, excluding these men gives a total of 274 for the rest of the county. In May 1548 there were 283 clergy in total and discounting the two remaining at St John's and the three at Bunbury leaves a total of 278. In the chantry certificates nine clergy are named at St John's (excluding the prebendaries) and eleven at Bunbury so that their numbers had fluctuated over the period.

⁹³ Examples of prosecutions of clerks for this type of offence may be found at CALS ZS/B/6b, f.18v; ZS/B/5d, f. 63v; ZS/B/7a, f.13.

the chantries on Cheshire parishes was negligible. What quite clearly did change was the nature of parish religious life and in Cheshire this was due not to the loss of the chantries, but to the liturgical changes of the Edwardian government.

The Edwardian Clergy

The successful implementation of the Edwardian religious changes depended largely upon the co-operation of the parish clergy. However, throughout England the number of ordinands during Edward VI's reign was very much lower than had previously been the case. Robert Swanson has suggested that a surge in clerical recruitment by the end of the fifteenth century had reached a peak by about 1525.⁹⁴ Local studies also indicate that although numbers had been declining since the 1520s, in many dioceses ordinations declined rapidly or ceased altogether during Edward's brief reign.⁹⁵ This inevitably led to a reduction in the numbers of parochial clergy although the dissolution of the chantries in the early years of the reign did not result in any immediate decrease in the numbers of employed parish clergy in Cheshire. Haigh has considered the effects on the Lancashire clergy of the diminishing rate of ordination in the diocese of Chester, and I intend to compare the effect of this same decline in Cheshire. There is also very little extant evidence to indicate the personal views of individual clergy, but surviving

⁹⁴ R. N. Swanson, 'Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England', *The English Historical Review*, 105 (417) (1990), pp. 861-2.

⁹⁵ Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England*, iii, (London, 1954), p. 53n; Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 79; Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 93; Rosemary O'Day, *The English Clergy: the Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979), p. 3; Michael L. Zell, 'Economic Problems of the Parochial Clergy in the Sixteenth Century', in Rosemary O'Day and Felicity Heal (eds), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church, 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 22-3; Robert Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (paperback edition, Basingstoke and New York, 1998), p. 23; Margaret Bowker, 'The Henrician Reformation and the Parish Clergy', in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 78-9 (Lincoln Diocese); Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy*, pp. 30-1 (Coventry and Lichfield Diocese).

evidence will be examined, including the extent of support for clerical marriage. For Rosemary O'Day, the development of a clerical career structure was enhanced by the increase in numbers of graduate clergy during the later sixteenth century, although she identified this as taking place from the 1570s onwards. She felt that the impact of this 'educational revolution' was slower in 'backward dioceses such as Chester', and was not always of benefit to the parish since graduate clergy may not have resided in their benefices.⁹⁶ Yet I will show that there were already opportunities for career progression during the Edwardian period for some of those clergy lacking the family connections to facilitate their acquisition of a benefice. Much was made by Bishop Bird of the ignorance of the parish clergy of Chester diocese, and an anonymous report indicated that the situation had not improved by 1580, 'The Curates throughout the whole diocese of Chester for the most parte are vtterlie vnlearned.'⁹⁷ While there is little surviving evidence of educational standards, I will examine available evidence in an attempt to establish whether the assistant clergy were really as backward and ill-educated as such assessments suggest.

The earliest surviving ordination register of Chester Diocese begins in 1542, following the foundation of the new diocese. In the period from 1542 to 1547 the annual number of ordinands varied. The highest point was 48 in 1542 but tailed off to fourteen in 1547. After 1547 there were no further ordinations until 1555.⁹⁸ Haigh has noted that

⁹⁶ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, p. 6.

⁹⁷ TNA: PRO SP 15/27/2, f. 170v; R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642*, (Manchester, 1972), p. 3.

⁹⁸ CALS EDA 2/1; W. F. Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register of the Diocese of Chester, 1542-1558', *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 4 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 43, 1902), pp. 25-126. The register was repaired by W. F. Irvine in the late nineteenth century, and Haigh has considered the possibility that some folios dating from the Edwardian period could have been removed or lost at some time, but considered this to be unlikely as ordinations declined before the missing years, rather than coming to a sudden halt (*Reformation and Resistance*, p. 155n). It does appear,

this period also saw no ordinations in Durham, and very few at York.⁹⁹ While the reasons for this can now only be speculative, a contributing factor may have been confusion about titles to orders. In the medieval church it was a basic requirement that a clerk entering holy orders had a guarantee of financial support to maintain the dignity of his calling. By the fourteenth century the majority of such titles were provided by religious institutions, although it has been suggested that this system was based on a fiction.¹⁰⁰ However, the dissolution of the monasteries followed by the loss of chantries and guilds must have thrown the existing arrangement into confusion. This requirement for ordinands to demonstrate that they had financial support continued and the Chester ordination register records the titles of those ordained to the order of sub deacon and above. By 1542 most of the titles were supplied by local gentry. It is not clear, however, how ordinands went about acquiring a sponsor after the loss of so many religious institutions. Furthermore, it is clear that the clerical life was losing its appeal even before the controversial revision of the ordinal authorised in January 1550.¹⁰¹ The survival of clergy lists for Cheshire for 1548 and 1554 make it possible to compare the numbers of parish clergy at the beginning and end of Edward's reign. This comparison reveals that the decline in ordinations was reflected in a reduction in the number of parochial clergy during the period.

however, that the earliest pages of the register are missing as it begins 'abruptly' with the undated last part of the list of subdeacons ordained in Lent (or Easter) 1542 (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iv, pp. 90-2, which is the source of the statistical analysis. The total number ordained includes acolytes, subdeacons, deacons and priests, but is clearly not complete for 1542. It also includes a number of 'benets' = The third of the four lesser orders in the Roman Catholic Church, one of whose functions was the exorcizing of evil spirits (*OED* online edition accessed 14 June 2013)). It may also be noted that a number of ordinands came from other dioceses, in particular, St Asaph.

⁹⁹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 155.

¹⁰⁰ R. N Swanson, 'Titles to Orders in Medieval English Episcopal Registers', in Henry Mayr-Harting and R. I. Moore (eds), *Studies in Medieval History Presented to R. H. C. Davies* (London, 1985), p. 233.

¹⁰¹ 3 & 4 Edward VI, c. 12; Hughes, *Reformation*, ii, pp. 113-6.

The 1548 lists named 283 parish clergy.¹⁰² By 1548 the parochial clergy formed two distinct, although not homogeneous, groups. These groups were firstly, the incumbents and secondly, the employed assistant clergy, including parish curates, chapel curates, private chaplains and schoolmasters. A number of Cheshire parishes continued to be wholly appropriated even after the dissolutions of the monasteries and college of St John. The majority were in the deaneries of Chester and Wirral, having been transferred to the Dean and Chapter of the new cathedral or to the bishop. These appropriated parishes were staffed by paid curates who have been included with the assistant clergy for the purposes of the following discussion. Incumbents of parishes which had not been appropriated numbered 68 in 1548 and still included a number of dignitaries of Coventry and Lichfield, even though the county was no longer a part of that diocese. These men included Henry Suddall (or Siddall), rector and prebendary of Tarvin (a Cheshire parish) and also rector of Barrow.¹⁰³ Other prominent officers of Coventry and Lichfield diocese included Richard Walker, rector of West Kirby and Wynbunbury, and archdeacon of Stafford later also archdeacon of Derby.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, the two rectors of the moieties of Malpas were both canons residentiary of Lichfield at one time. Of these two men, William Hill later became archdeacon of Salop

¹⁰² Clergy numbers in 1548 are taken from CALS EDV 2/2; EDV 2/3 and EDV 2/4. It is apparent that some of the employed clergy held more than one position. Positive identification of individuals at this time is always difficult, but where such men have been identified with some degree of certainty, for the purposes of this discussion they have only been counted once. The identification of incumbents is somewhat easier, and they obviously included a number of pluralists. However, as each parish which was not wholly impropriated would generally have had an incumbent, any incumbent holding multiple benefices has been counted on as many occasions as he appears in arriving at the total.

¹⁰³ E. I. Carlyle, 'Siddall, Henry (*d.* 1572)', rev. Andrew A. Chibi, *DNB* (online edition accessed 28 February 2012); 'Prebendaries: Tervin', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese (2003), pp. 63-65 (online edition accessed 6 February 2012); CCEd Person ID 25690 (accessed 28 February 2012). The Clergy Church of England database has been an invaluable aid in tracing clerical careers, but all references have been verified as far as possible.

¹⁰⁴ 'Archdeacons : Stafford', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857*: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese (2003), pp. 14-16 < www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34738 > (online edition accessed 7 February 2012); CCEd Person ID 23996 (accessed 28 February 2012).

in 1557 and Arthur Dudley was later a canon and prebendary of Worcester as well.¹⁰⁵

Most of these diocesan officials must have delegated the majority of the work of the parish to their curates.

The majority, 47 (69.12 per cent), of the incumbents retained their parishes throughout Edward's reign.¹⁰⁶ Of the remainder, 8 (11.76 per cent) had left their parish by 1554 for reasons which I have not been able to trace, 8 (11.76 per cent) had died and 3 (4.41 per cent) had resigned. Two had been deprived for marriage. These were Nicholas Hyde of Mottram in Longdendale and Thomas Taylor of St Mary's in Chester.¹⁰⁷ Taylor had been deprived of his benefice by 10 September 1554, presumably because of his marriage, and had not been replaced at the time of the visitation.¹⁰⁸

The successors to those vacancies which occurred during the reign came from a variety of backgrounds, but included a number of men who had previously worked as curates or other assistant clergy. At Holy Trinity, Chester, Ralph Stopford, was instituted as rector in February 1552, but died by 1 July 1552. In 1541 he had been employed by the rector to look after the parish and was presumably popular as he been

¹⁰⁵ For Hill see 'Prebendaries: Weeford'; 'Canons residentiary of Lichfield'; 'Archdeacons: Derby', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese* (2003), pp. 70-71; 78-94; 10-12 < www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=151 > (online edition accessed 7 February 2012); CCed Person ID 26890 (accessed 28 February 2012). For Dudley see 'Prebendaries: Colwich'; 'Canons Residentiary of Lichfield'; 'Archdeacons: Salop', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese* (2003), pp. 27-29; 78-94; 12-14 < www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=151 > (online edition accessed 15 February 2012); 'Canons: Ninth Prebend', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 7: Ely, Norwich, Westminster and Worcester Dioceses* (1992), pp. 130-131 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35292> > (online edition accessed: 15 February 2012); CCed Person ID 24073 (accessed 7 December 2011).

¹⁰⁶ Names of incumbents in 1548 are taken from CALS EDV 2/2; EDV 2/3 and EDV 2/4 and in 1554 from CALS EDV 1/1.

¹⁰⁷ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 75.

¹⁰⁸ CALS EDP 74/1/1 (presentation of Charles Duckworth); Earwaker, *St. Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 81; CCed Person ID 34734 (accessed 28 February 2012).

loaned 10s from parish funds in 1551, perhaps to finance his institution as rector.¹⁰⁹ In Wirral deanery, John Aneon succeeded to the parish of Heswall following the death of Peter Brereton. Aneon had been an assistant in the neighbouring parish of Thurstaston in 1548.¹¹⁰ By 1554 eight of the twenty two parishes which had fallen vacant since 1548 were held by men who had previously been curates in other Cheshire parishes.¹¹¹ This suggests that by this time it was becoming increasingly possible for some of the employed clergy in the county to improve their position by acquiring a benefice, although this would probably be one of the poorer livings. However, patronage continued to be of enormous importance and as details of presentations have not always survived, it is not possible to show how far kinship and other network connections were factors in these promotions.

Other incumbents came from a more eminent background. For example, Bernard Gilpin was presented to the rectory of Thornton-le-Moors in 1553, but he was troubled by his non-residence and resigned the living by 24 October 1553.¹¹² Gilpin was a celebrated preacher and kinsman of Cuthbert Tunstall, bishop of Durham. He had

¹⁰⁹ CALS EDP 70/1/1 (presentation of Ralph Stopford); CALS EDA 1/1, f. 39v (presentation of Thomas Tadgill); Irvine (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester, 1541-2; Together with a List of the Tenths and Subsidy Payable in the Deaneries of the Archdeaconry of Chester', *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 3 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 33, 1896), p. 2; Rev. J. R. Beresford, (ed.), 'The Churchwarden's Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532 to 1633', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), p. 114; CCEd Person ID 34754 (accessed 28 February 2012).

¹¹⁰ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 20; CCEd Person ID 23364 (accessed 28 February 2012). I have not been able to find any record of the institution of John Aneon, but his successor's patrons included a man named John Anion, so the family may have acquired the patronage of the living by 1553; CALS EDA 1/1, f. 3.

¹¹¹ These include Woodchurch, where in the 1548 list the first clerk listed has the surname Wright, although his Christian name is illegible. It has been assumed that this was William Wright; CALS EDV 2/3, f. 2. CCEd Person ID 23962 (accessed 28 February 2012) gives William Wright as rector of Woodchurch in 1548, but the rector is named in CALS EDV 2/3 f. 2 as Dr Ralph Sneyd, who had died by 8 October 1549; 'Canons Residentiary of Lichfield', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese* (2003), pp. 78-94 <www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34773> (online edition accessed 3 March 2012).

¹¹² David Marcombe, 'Gilpin, Bernard (1516-1584)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 January 2012); CALS EDP 269/1/1 (presentation of William Ducke).

obtained a general preaching licence in 1553, and although there is no evidence that he ever visited his Cheshire parish, it is not impossible that he did preach there in the light of his views on the duties of parochial incumbents.¹¹³

The experience of the 215 other parish clergy was rather different from that of the incumbents. Fewer than half of them, that is, 98 (45.58 per cent), were still in the same parish in 1554, but 27 (12.56 per cent) had moved to another parish in Cheshire, either through promotion to a benefice or merely moving to another employment. Of the remainder 8 (3.72 per cent) are known to have died, as they were marked '*mortuus*' in the 1554 list and another 4 (1.86 per cent) may have died, either because they are known to have been in their parish since at least the 1520s or because they were over 60 in 1548. Additionally, epidemics of disease, to which the clergy were particularly exposed in view of their obligation to visit the sick and dying, were beginning to affect the county by the early 1550s.¹¹⁴ For example, in June 1552 one Consistory Court deponent recalled an outbreak of 'the great swett' in Tarporley the previous year.¹¹⁵ Of the assistant clergy, 75 (34.88 per cent) disappeared for unknown reasons, compared with 11.76 per cent of the incumbents. There is far more surviving evidence about the reasons for changes of incumbent than about the reasons why curates left their employment which are unfortunately not often known.¹¹⁶ Probably because there were relatively few newly-ordained clergy to take up vacancies, by 1554 the number of employed clergy

¹¹³ Michael Hinton, *The Anglican Parochial Clergy: a Celebration* (paperback edition London, 1996), pp. 80, 84.

¹¹⁴ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, p. 8 suggests that 'The clergy as a group were presumably particularly vulnerable to disease.'

¹¹⁵ CALS EDC 2/5, f. 61v.

¹¹⁶ The information about incumbents comes largely from the presentation book, CCALS EDA 1/1 or from surviving deeds of presentation filed at Chester Record Office under the individual parishes included in 'parish bundles', EDP series. At this time the appointment of curates is not usually recorded in these sources.

had fallen by more than a third (see Table 4 below). The decline in numbers was much worse in some deaneries than in others; Nantwich suffered hardly any net loss, while Frodsham had lost almost half of its assistant clergy during the period. There is no clear reason why this should have been the case, although ten clergy had been lost from just one parish and its chapelries in Frodsham deanery. This was Great Budworth, which had

Table 4 – Losses of assistant clergy between 1548 and 1554 by deanery.¹¹⁷

	Number of curates in 1548	Stayed in parish	Moved within county	Came from outside county	Number of curates in 1554	Number of curates lost	% loss
Chester deanery	40	17	8	2	27	13	32.50%
Wirral deanery	30	13	2	2	17	13	43.33%
Malpas deanery	10	7	-	-	7	3	30.00%
Nantwich Deanery	26	14	4	7	25	1	3.85%
Middlewich deanery	19	7	3	1	11	8	42.11%
Frodsham deanery	55	19	4	5	28	27	49.09%
Macclesfield deanery	35	21	3	3	27	8	22.86%
Total	215	98	24	20	142	73	33.95%

been wholly impropriated to Norton Priory before the dissolution and seems to have had an unusually large quota of clergy in 1548, compared with known staffing at other dates.¹¹⁸ Frodsham deanery had more clergy in 1548 than the other deaneries, but still had a number of dependant chapelries to be served by curates, as did Nantwich where

¹¹⁷ Numbers of assistants in 1548 are taken from CALS EDV 2/2; EDV 2/3 and EDV 2/4 and in 1554 from CALS EDV 1/1. Where I have not been able to identify new appointments as clergy from Cheshire who were employed in the county in 1548 I have treated them as coming from outside. This may not be correct in all cases.

¹¹⁸ CCed has included an additional four men as clergy serving Witton Chapel (location ID 5018) (accessed 28 February 2012) in the parish of Great Budworth in 1548. This seems to be a misunderstanding caused by the chaotic nature of the evidence. In my opinion, and that of W. F. Irvine (CALS DFI 162, not foliated), these four men were chapel wardens, and not clergy.

the town itself continued as a chapelry of Acton. There is little evidence that clergy outside the city of Chester seized the opportunity of vacancies there to move to the city. Nor does it appear that the remoter areas were generally less popular, as Macclesfield deanery included some of the largest parishes and some of the roughest terrain in the Pennine foothills, but lost relatively few clergy. The evidence indicates that in general those deaneries which lost the most were unable to make up the numbers. It was also the case, however, that the changing role of the parish clergy, with the abolition of the mass and obligatory auricular confession, meant that fewer assistants were required.¹¹⁹ The declining number of assistant parish clergy during this period was noted by Haigh in Lancashire which was, of course, in the same diocese as Cheshire, but has also been observed in other dioceses across the country.¹²⁰

Haigh concluded that, in Lancashire, it was generally younger men who moved away, leaving older men behind.¹²¹ This conclusion was based on the assumption that it was mainly younger men who came forward for ordination, and that a large proportion of the newly-ordained soon left the county. The number of men ordained priest in Chester diocese in the period from 1542 to 1547 was 208. It is impossible to establish the county of origin of the majority of those ordained since the diocese covered such a vast area, however, 27 men ordained priest during this period can be demonstrated to have taken up posts in Cheshire subsequently (see Table 5 below). While the age of the majority is unknown, it is probable that most were young men. For example, at the time

¹¹⁹ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 80; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 152-3.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 154-5; Peter Marshall, *The Face of the Pastoral Ministry in the East Riding, 1525-1595* (York, 1995), pp. 3-4; Felicity Heal, 'The Parish Clergy and the Reformation in the Diocese of Ely', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society*, 66 (1976), p. 154.

¹²¹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 155-6.

of ordination as priest John Cotgreave was about 27; John Blaken was about 25 and Richard Cross was about 23.¹²² Of these 27 ordinands who found positions in Cheshire,

Table 5 – Known Cheshire appointments of men ordained priest between 1542 and 1546.¹²³

Year ordained priest	Total	Date held position in Cheshire parish			
		1548 and 1554	1548 only	1554 only	First Cheshire post after 1554
1542	5	2	1	1	1
1543	4	1	2	-	1
1544	5	4	-	-	1
1545	3	1	1	1	-
1546	9	5	3	1	-
1547	1	-	1	-	-
Total	27	13	8	3	3

three are not known to have taken up any post before 1554 and three other men took up a variety of posts in Cheshire, but not until after 1554.¹²⁴ Unfortunately, I have not been able to discover what any of them was doing in the interim.

In Lancashire, a much larger county than Cheshire, 26 of those serving in 1548 had been ordained in Chester since 1542, and half of them had disappeared by 1554.¹²⁵

¹²² Cotgreave was about 29 in February 1550; CALS EDC 2/4, f. 170. John Blaken was ordained priest on 30 May 1545, at which date he was about 25 as he was about 32 in May 1552 (CALS EDC 2/5, f. 49v). Richard Cross appears on the chantry certificate in 1548 aged 26 (TNA: PRO E 301/8/1). He may be the curate of the same name employed by the parishioners of Swettenham, but found to be unsatisfactory (BL Harley 2046, f. 78v).

¹²³ Ordination details are taken from Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', pp. 25-80. Employment details are taken from CALS EDV 2/2; EDV 2/3; EDV 2/4 and CALS EDV 1/1 supplemented by CCed. Only men ordained priest are included in this analysis.

¹²⁴ These three were Reginald Wadeson, ordained in 1542, and instituted as vicar of Waverton in 1556 (CCed Person ID 23991 (accessed 28 February 2012)); Richard Smith, ordained in 1543, who was vicar of the neighbouring parishes of Sandbach and Brereton by 1565 (CCed Person ID 32484 (accessed 28 February 2012)) and Charles Mobberley, ordained in 1546, who was curate of Knutsford in 1563 (CCed Person ID 31460 (accessed 28 February 2012)).

In Cheshire 21 of those serving in 1548 had been ordained at Chester during Bird's episcopate and of them only 5, less than one quarter, had gone by 1554. The reasons for their disappearance must have been varied, but at least one was embroiled in a scandal and probably left for entirely personal reasons. This was John Cotgreave, who had been ordained priest on 18 December 1546 and by 1548 was acting as assistant to his brother, Randle, at St Peter's in Chester.¹²⁶ By January 1550 he had been living in Chester for two years and was involved in a salacious divorce case.¹²⁷ Deponents in the case stated that in about 1541, before his ordination, Cotgreave had contracted a marriage *per verba de praesenti* with Alice Gridlowe, in the presence of witnesses. This should have been a legally binding marriage.¹²⁸ He had then been 'absent and forth off the contrey' when Alice, believing him to be dead, had married Thomas Belen.¹²⁹ Following Cotgreave's return to Chester, the two had renewed their relationship and the Belen family servants had been scandalised by their behaviour. Their maid, Joanna Curden, deposed that

when hyr Master was goen to london she suspected the said Sir John cotgreue
and hyr maistries Alis belen for when hyr master was att home both he and she
vsd to lie in a lowe chamber and when he was goen she wold lie in a hie chamber

¹²⁵ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 156.

¹²⁶ Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', p. 73; CCALS EDV 2/4 f. 2; TNA: PRO C 1/1295/51-54; CCed Person ID 32079 (accessed 28 February 2012), which erroneously gives Cotgreave a second ordination as deacon on 18 December 1546. His age at ordination has been calculated from his deposition in February 1550, when he was aged about 29; CALS EDC 2/4, f. 170.

¹²⁷ CALS EDC 2/4, ff. 147-52; ff. 168-71; ff. 173-9; EDC 1/12, f. 169v, f. 172v; f. 175v; f. 176v; f. 179; f. 181.

¹²⁸ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 56-60; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 1990), p. 132.

¹²⁹ CALS EDC 2/4, f. 174. In her deposition the word 'married' has been crossed out and 'ded' substituted. If Alice Belen did initially depose that she thought that John Cotgreave had married someone else, this would presumably have nullified her case that she was legally pre-contracted in marriage to him, so perhaps she changed her story. Frederick J. Furnivall, (ed.), *Child-Marriages, Divorces and Ratifications in the Diocese of Chester*, Early English Text Society (old series) 108 (1897) has transcribed John Cotgreave's deposition at p. li, finding it the 'most amusing bit that I've seen in a Trothplight case'.

hyr selff alone ouer Sir John cotgreues chamber ... in the said loft chamber ther was a tressell and vnder the tressell ther was a loose bord wich was strone ouer with raches wich was ouer Sir Johns chamber and throe that Sir John came into the loft chamber att his pleasure.¹³⁰

The matter was the talk of the neighbourhood, as others also deposed, and presumably Cotgreave's position in the parish became untenable as a result and his name does not subsequently appear among the Chester city clergy. However, a presentment '*ex officio contra dominum Johannem cotgreue et aliciam eius vxorem*' was listed in the neighbouring parish of Christleton at the 1554 visitation. There is no note of the reason for the presentment, and the proceedings are marked '*stet*'.¹³¹

Only four other men who had been ordained since 1542 left their posts in Cheshire between 1548 and 1554. It is difficult to know why these men left, death may have claimed some and it is possible that others left to pursue a more lucrative career in another part of the country. This evidence does not support a conclusion that a large proportion of the newly-ordained young clergy moved away. However, the age profile of the county's clergy does suggest a preponderance of older men. By 1554 almost one third (46) of the 142 assistant clergy had been working in Cheshire for at least twenty years.¹³² However, many of these men may still have been under fifty, while only three are known to have been over sixty. Also included among their number were ten ex-

¹³⁰ CALS EDC 2/4, ff. 148-9.

¹³¹ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 76. This was an office, or official, case against Sir John Cotgreave and his wife, Alice. *Stet* (let it stand) would have been used to suspend proceedings without closing the matter, probably because the parties did not turn up at that time.

¹³² These figures have been calculated by comparing the taxation list of 1533 (BL Harley 594 ff. 146-154) with the visitation record of 1554 (CCALS EDV 1/1).

chantry priests, but all of these 46 men had served in the church before the Henrician changes.

There is very little evidence to indicate the personal views of the Edwardian clergy of Cheshire, but different sources reveal a range of opinions, as might be expected. One of the county's incumbents was Richard Gerrard, who had been presented to the rectory of Grappenhall in 1522, which he held in plurality with Dodleston and Bangor-on-Dee¹³³ in Flintshire. He probably resigned the living of Grappenhall soon after being presented to the wealthier living of Wigan in February 1554.¹³⁴ He was still rector of Grappenhall in March 1554 when he took part in the examination of George Marsh, later burned as a heretic. In the course of the examination Gerrard condemned the Edwardian prayer book; 'the parson of Grapnall sayd thys last Communion was the most diuelishe thing that euer was deuised.'¹³⁵

One enduring indication of religious conservatism was opposition to clerical marriage, and even by the late sixteenth century this disapproval was one of the 'popish errors' still commonly encountered in Cheshire.¹³⁶ There may have been a prevailing view in the Edwardian period that the diocesan and cathedral hierarchy should set an example by their own marriage. George Wilmesley, the chancellor of the diocese, had married. Although the date of his marriage is not known, he had had two legitimate

¹³³ This parish was in the diocese of Chester, in the county of Flintshire, and is also known as Bangor-is-y-coed and Bangor Monachorum.

¹³⁴ George T. O. Bridgeman, *The History of the Church and Manor of Wigan in the County of Lancaster*, part I (Chetham Society, new series, 15, 1888), pp. 128-31.

¹³⁵ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 40; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 184; John Foxe's, *The Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 Edition, Book 11, p. 1771) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 5 March 2012).

¹³⁶ William Hinde, *A Faithfull Remonstrance of the Holy Life and Happy Death of John Bruen of Bruen-Stapleford in the County of Chester, Esquire* (London, 1641), pp. 16-17; this was one of the conservative attitudes condemned in John Bruen when he went to Oxford in 1577 before his conversion.

children by September 1553.¹³⁷ Bishop Bird, however, is not known to have had any children and later claimed to have been ‘maryed agaynst his will and for bearing with ye tyme’.¹³⁸ There is also some evidence concerning the marriage plans of the lesser cathedral clergy. During Lent 1549 Hugh Burnbie, a chaplain at the cathedral, contracted a marriage with Anne Andrew although she was reluctant to accept him. Several deponents said that she refused at first, but was eventually persuaded ‘att the mocion off Elisabeth lepington’, but only if he would agree to ‘tarie as concerneng the mariage betwixe them toe ... vntill she sawe moe prestis married’.¹³⁹ Elisabeth Lepington was the wife of John Lepington, a canon and prebendary of Chester.¹⁴⁰ After Anne had agreed, and accepted several gifts, including a prayer book, William Glaseor, a city alderman who was present at the time said ‘yt the said hugh burnbie and Anne did nede off non other thinge concerning the contracte but to goe to the church and solempnize the same’.¹⁴¹ However, Anne seems to have regretted her acceptance of the proposal, and Hugh sued her for breach of contract in the Consistory Court. The case dragged on for seven months from 21 June 1549, even though Hugh had agreed to wait until at least

¹³⁷ Christopher Haigh, ‘A Mid-Tudor Ecclesiastical Official: the Curious Career of George Wilmesley’, *THSLC*, 122 (1971 for 1970), p. 17; Piccope (First Portion), pp. 103, 180.

¹³⁸ John Foxe Miscellaneous Papers BL Harley 421, f. 1-1v; Rev. F. Sanders, ‘John Bird, D.D., Bishop of Chester, 1541-1554’, *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 13 (1907), pp. 121-2.

¹³⁹ CALS EDC 2/4, ff. 127, 121; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 182. Haigh gives the man’s name as Hugh Bunbury. CCEd includes no clerks named Hugh Bunbury, but includes Hugh Burneby, curate of Ightham in the diocese of Rochester in 1555 (person ID 2255 (accessed 28 February 2012)). In view of the subsequent career of John Lepington, it seems likely that Hugh Burnbie did later move to the south of England.

¹⁴⁰ John Lepington 1545–1554; ‘*Canons of Chester*’, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: Volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 50-63 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35849>> (accessed 5 March 2012). He may have been the last prior of the Gilbertine House of St Andrew in York (David M. Smith, (ed.), *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales. Vol. III: 1377–1540* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 608). Claire Cross and Noreen Vickers, ‘Monks, Friars and Nuns in Sixteenth Century Yorkshire’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series*, CL, 150 (1995 for 1991 and 1992), p. 409, state that the Chester prebendary Lepington was ‘just possibly’ the last prior of St Andrew’s.

¹⁴¹ CALS EDC 2/4, f. 125.

Midsummer. Anne failed to attend any of the hearings and on 23 January 1550 sentence was given in favour of Hugh.¹⁴² It may be stretching the evidence to suggest that there was a concerted effort on the part of the diocesan hierarchy to influence the lesser clergy into marriage by example and to encourage reluctant young women into the role of clergy wives. However, it does certainly seem that Anne Andrew initially felt some degree of coercion to accept the proposal and changed her mind once she had time to reflect.

It appears that few parochial clergy took the opportunity to marry based on subsequent evidence of deprivations. Prebendary John Lepington was deprived by April 1554, probably because of his marriage, and at the time of the visitation that year held the relatively lowly position of assistant in the parish of Backford, on the Wirral peninsula near Chester.¹⁴³ Like John Bird, however, he later moved to a living in the diocese of London, to which he was presented by Richard Rich at the nomination of Edmund Bonner.¹⁴⁴

One other potential source of information about the personal views of the county's clergy is through examination of their wills. Only three such wills survive from Edward VI's reign, which are those of Robert Wigan, a former monk of Chester; Peter Brereton, pluralist rector of Heswall who died aged about 75 in 1553 and Thomas Molyneux, rector of one moiety of Wallasey, who died in 1549.¹⁴⁵ Robert Wigan is not

¹⁴² CALS EDC 1/12, ff. 138; 139; 141v; 143; 147; 151; 155; 160; 166; 170; 174.

¹⁴³ CALS EDA 1/1, f. 41v; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 20v.

¹⁴⁴ CCEd person ID 63583 (accessed 5 March 2012). The editor of CCEd is not certain that the prebendary (person ID 36491 (accessed 5 March 2012)) is the same person as the rector of Great Birch in the diocese of London of the same name. It seems to me, however, that he is very likely to be the same man and that both he and John Bird were protected by Bonner, whose Cheshire connections linked them all.

¹⁴⁵ Robert Wigan's will is TNA: PRO PROB 11/33/437, Sir Robert Wiggan; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 75; Peter Brereton's will is at CALS DCH/C/459 transcribed in Mary Pearson, (ed.), *The Wills*

named among the serving parochial clergy in 1548, but still considered himself to be a clerk when he made his will in August 1550. His will, perhaps surprisingly, is the least conservative of the three. He bequeathed his soul 'into the marcifull handes ofAlmightie god my only Savior and Redemer' and made no provision for prayers for his soul. The wills of the two incumbent clergy reveal persisting belief in the efficacy of *post mortem* prayers, together with other conservative tendencies. Peter Brereton left 12d to 'every Prest that Wyll com to my buriall to pray for my soule and all Crysten soules'. Thomas Molyneux bequeathed his soul to 'almightye god to owr ladye seint Marye and to the holye companye of heaven' and left the residue of his estate to be 'distributed and bestowed as my executoures shal thinke most mette and best For my sowls healtht'. A corollary to these bequests is that both of these last two testators expected that their wishes would be carried out, by clergy and executors who presumably shared their beliefs.

The career of Peter Brereton illustrates how the career of graduate clergy of the early sixteenth century might be expected to progress; he had been a royal chaplain, was a considerable pluralist, and probably did not spend much time in his Cheshire parish.¹⁴⁶ On his death, he was succeeded by a local non-graduate curate, John Aneon.¹⁴⁷ As Felicity Heal has pointed out, a university education was not necessarily desirable in a clergyman at that time, as it was generally considered to be a means to promotion in the

and Inventories of the Ancient Parishes of Malpas, Tilston and Shocklach and their Townships in the County of Chester from 1508 to 1603 (Malpas and District Local History Group), i, pp. 20-3; Thomas Molyneux 's will is at CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 281-2.

¹⁴⁶ Peter Brereton graduated B.A. in June 1518, and received his M.A. in July 1520, 'Braly-Bruer', *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (1891), pp. 171-200.< <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117048>> (accessed 6 March 2012). Peter Brereton's age at death has been calculated from the chantry certificate which gives his age as 70 in 1548 (PRO: TNA E 301/8/1). This would, however, have meant that he was 40 when he graduated, which seems implausible.

¹⁴⁷ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 20; CCEd Person ID 23364 (accessed 28 February 2012).

church, rather than 'a commodity to be expended for the benefit of parishioners.'¹⁴⁸ At this time in Cheshire it seems to have been clerical shortage, possibly combined with hard work, rather than acquisition of a degree, which enabled some of the assistant clergy to advance their careers in the church. Of the twenty-seven men ordained between 1542 and 1546 who later worked in Cheshire only two are known to have had a degree, but nine of them ended their career with a parochial incumbency. These included Humphrey Biron, rector of Cheadle, who in 1592 was classified amongst the group 'no graduates nor preachers but catechizers' and John Lowe, vicar of Acton who in the same report was included amongst 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men'.¹⁴⁹ Others of the ordinands must have been educated to a quite a high standard, even if they did not hold degrees. John Cotgreave of St Peter's in Chester is known to have gone to school at Malpas, presumably to the grammar school founded by Peter Brereton's father, Sir Randle, in the 1520s.¹⁵⁰ William Chorlton had been schoolmaster in Stockport since at least 1536, although he was not ordained priest until 1546.¹⁵¹ Other curates were well able to read and write Latin: witness (Figure 12 below), a letter written by Phillip Moyle, curate of Malpas, to the Chester Consistory Court in 1550. The divided rectory of Malpas was held at the time by two absentee dignitaries of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield and Moyle had been employed by them since at least 1541.¹⁵² In view of the status of the incumbents, they may have been prepared to pay a reasonable stipend to their assistants and thus to attract men of a higher calibre than other curates, and Moyle

¹⁴⁸ Heal, 'Parish Clergy in the Diocese of Ely', p. 144.

¹⁴⁹ CCED; Humphrey Biron (also Beron, Berron, Byron, Byrom, Buron) (person ID 35644 (accessed 28 February 2012)); John Lowe (person ID 36508 (accessed 28 February 2012)).

¹⁵⁰ CALS EDC 2/4, f. 168.

¹⁵¹ PRO: TNA PROB 11/25/572, Nicholas Elkok; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xix, pp. 63-4. In 1536 Chorlton, as schoolmaster, was witness to this Stockport will. Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination register', p. 66.

¹⁵² Irvine (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries', p. 5.

may have been exceptional, and to describe him as 'vtterlie vnlearned' would appear to be a grave injustice.

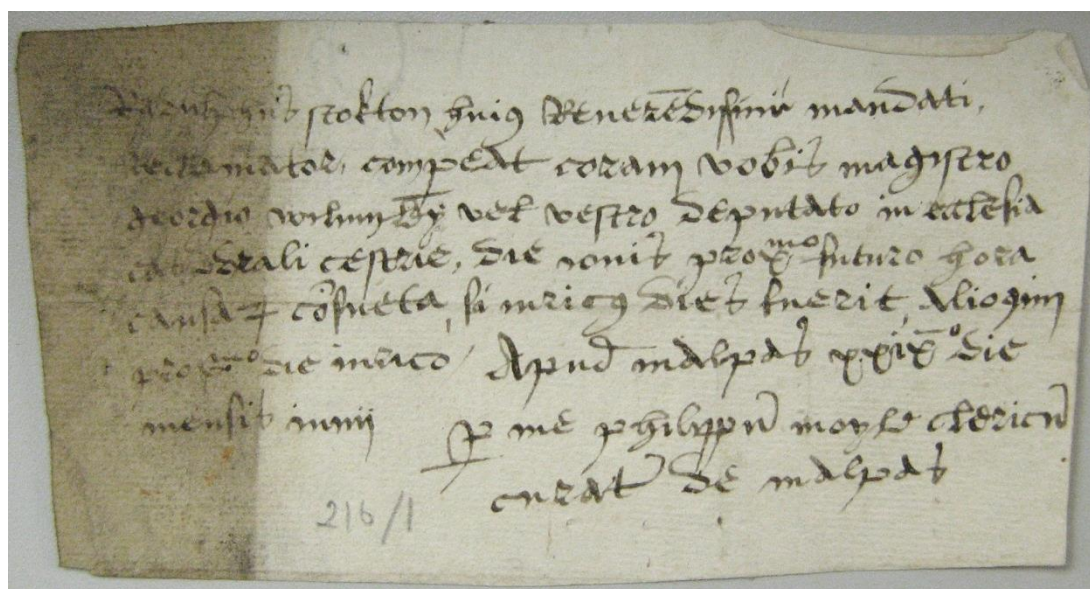


Figure 12 – Letter from Philip Moyle, curate of Malpas, written on 29 June [1550].
 CALS EDC 1/12, f. 216/1.¹⁵³

A key feature of the Edwardian Reformation was the emphasis on preaching and the associated licensing of a number of charismatic preachers, some of whom undertook preaching tours in the north-west.¹⁵⁴ Among their number was John Bradford, who preached at Chester following the issue of his preaching licence in 1550.¹⁵⁵ In 1552

¹⁵³ Records held at the Cheshire Record Office are reproduced with the permission of Cheshire Archives and Local Studies and the owner or depositor to whom copyright is reserved. This letter is written on a loose sheet inserted in the Consistory Court Book and is a reply to a mandate for the appearance of a parishioner of Malpas in the Consistory Court. As may be seen, the left-hand side of the paper has suffered some damage. 'Ranulphus stokton, huius Reuerendissimi mandati, Reclamator, compareat coram vobis magistro georgio wilmsley vel vestro deputato in ecclesia cathedrali cestrie, die nonis proximo futuro hora causarum consueta, si iuricus dies fuerit, alioquin proximo die iurico/ Apud malpas xxix^o die mensis maij per me philippum moyle clericum curatum de malpas'. 'Randle Stockton, opposer of purgation, subject of this order of your Reverence, shall appear before you M. George Wilmesley or your deputy in the cathedral church of Chester on the ninth day of next month at the usual time for hearings, if that shall be the day for swearing, otherwise on the next oath day. At Malpas 29th June by me Philip Moyle, clerk, curate of Malpas'.

¹⁵⁴ Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 79-80; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (second edition, London, 1989), p. 261.

¹⁵⁵ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 168-9. Bradford refers to Westchester, a name by which the city was regularly known at the time.

Bernard Gilpin, briefly incumbent of a Cheshire parish, warned that the gospel was not being preached often enough.¹⁵⁶ The answer to this was to ensure that clergy appointed to parishes were competent preachers but a national shortage of clergy hampered government efforts to rectify the position. On the other hand, in Cheshire this recruitment crisis resulted in the development of what may be seen as a career path for some parish clergy as it became increasingly possible for them to aspire to promotion, achieved on merit, rather than through influence or university education. Although there is very little evidence of the preaching ability of the county's clergy promoted at this time, at least one, John Lowe of Acton, was later considered to be a competent preacher. It is, however, difficult to know to what extent promotion continued to depend primarily upon networks of influence. The anecdotal evidence that assistant clergy – the curates – were generally ignorant and uneducated is demonstrably unreasonable. While the employment prospects for the county's clergy may have improved during the reign of Edward VI there is unfortunately very little available evidence of how those who did embrace a parochial career responded to the religious changes of the time. The few clerical wills reveal little of the testators' beliefs and it appears that very few took the opportunity to marry, although this may have been due in part to reluctance on the part of potential brides. While it is problematic to attempt to extrapolate from so little evidence, it is reasonable to suggest that while a few of the clergy cautiously welcomed change the majority conformed, but perhaps with no great enthusiasm.

¹⁵⁶ Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 146.

The Laity in the Reign of Edward VI

During the short reign of Edward VI individual parishioners throughout England were required to accept what amounted to revolutionary changes in religious practice and liturgy. Contemporaries recognised the unusual speed and scale of the changes, 'The greater change was never wrought in so short space in any country sith the world was.'¹⁵⁷ These changes affected not only liturgical practice but the very structure of church buildings was altered as the abolition of the chantries led to the removal of chantry chapels and orders were given for the destruction of altars, images, pictures and screens. Furthermore, it was not only the physical surroundings of parish worship which changed during the reign; the parish as a community was affected although, as Beat Kümin has pointed out, the 'parochial network remained largely intact'.¹⁵⁸ However, the Reformation changes involved 'the elimination or overwhelming of some of the key constituent elements in the balance of a late medieval community.'¹⁵⁹ Andy Wood has drawn attention to the political consequences of this revolution in religion, 'An unintended consequence of the Reformation ... took the form of a crisis of belief in which traditional modes of legitimation ... were called into question.'¹⁶⁰ In this section I intend to consider whether lay attitudes to the church as an institution were already shifting prior to the reign of Edward VI, and to what extent the reign represented a dramatic break with the past or merely the rapid acceleration of an evolutionary process.

¹⁵⁷ Sir Richard Morison 'one of the lesser members of the Edwardian evangelical establishment' quoted in MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant*, p. 102.

¹⁵⁸ Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: the Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1560* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 202-3.

¹⁵⁹ Eamon Duffy, 'The Disenchantment of Space: Salle Church and the Reformation', in James D. Tracy (ed.), *Religion in the Early Modern State: Views from China, Russia and the West* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 324. Duffy refers only to 'the Reformation' here, but the subsequent text refers mainly to the effect of changes which took place under Henry VIII and Edward VI.

¹⁶⁰ Andy Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions and the Making of Early Modern England* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 2010), pp. 22-3.

An examination of the fragmentary surviving evidence of personal belief may help to illuminate the extent to which individuals welcomed or resisted the introduction of new religious ideology which the government sought to impose by legislation. Although the Pilgrimage of Grace attracted widespread support throughout the northern part of the country in 1536, Cheshire was not greatly affected. The reign of Edward saw further extensive uprisings in the ‘commotion time’ of 1549 in which religious considerations were undoubtedly one factor.¹⁶¹ No study has previously been made of the response of Cheshire at the time of these disorders, and I will examine the conclusions which can be drawn from surviving Cheshire sources.¹⁶²

Eamon Duffy has argued that the dissolution of the chantries deprived parishes of lay control over auxiliary clergy, but in some cases in Cheshire the dissolution gave parishioners increased control over the appointment of their clergy. Following the abolition of the college at St John’s College, the chantry commissioners recommended the appointment of Robert Bowier (Bower or Boyer) and Thomas Latwiss ‘twoo of the late vycars of the sayd Colledge’ to continue as vicar and curate of the parish church which replaced the college.¹⁶³ Thomas Latwiss had been replaced as curate by Peter Blake, from St Peter’s in Chester by 1554.¹⁶⁴ No evidence survives about how Blake was appointed, but within twenty years the parishioners were accustomed to ‘elect’ or choose the vicar’s assistant and it seems that every parishioner (or at least every male

¹⁶¹ Jones, ‘The English Risings of 1549’, pp. 305 -32.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 290, observes that Cheshire is one of the few English counties not covered by the secondary literature and mentions one possible source of information for the county’s response.

¹⁶³ TNA: PRO E 301/8/1.

¹⁶⁴ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 16.

parishioner) was consulted about the choice.¹⁶⁵ Elsewhere in the county, Macclesfield remained a dependent chapelry of Prestbury parish, and a commission of enquiry into matters at the chapel was perhaps appointed following the report of the 1546 chantry commissioners as it reported back in September of that year.¹⁶⁶ The commission recommended that the mayor and burgesses of Macclesfield ‘from hensforth shall have the nominacon & appoyntment of a sufficient ... priest whom they shall thinke mete to celebrate and serue in the said Church’. The choice of priest was thus left entirely to their judgement. These two examples demonstrate that following the dissolution of chantries and colleges there was an extension of what seems to have been quite a widespread practice in the county for laymen to appoint and pay for clergy of their choice in a number of parishes.

This is demonstrated by the report on the parish clergy dating from 1541/2, after the foundation of the new see.¹⁶⁷ In the Cheshire parishes and chapelries listed, sixty-seven clergy were paid by named laymen while fifty-three were paid by the incumbent, presumably as their curate, and nineteen were directly supported by the parish. Of the clergy paid by laymen, some are known to have been private chaplains. In the parish of Bowdon, for example, Nicholas Warburton was described as ‘*conduct’ per Johannem Carrington*’ and it is known from the wills of members of the Carrington family that he was employed by them for some years as their chaplain.¹⁶⁸ In the parish of Stockport, Hugh Foley was listed ‘*ex stipendio Petri Legh*’. He was paid by the Leghs as

¹⁶⁵ PRO: TNA E 134/38and39Eliz/Mich30, depositions of Hugh Jannion, Richard Bird and Richard Broster who deposed that ‘one Robert Bafforde was Chosen by the parishioners to serve as an assistante there (wherevnto this deponent being a parishioner gave consent)’.

¹⁶⁶ CALS EDC 5/7/3.

¹⁶⁷ Irvine, (ed.) ‘List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries’, pp. 1-11. It may be noted, however, that this list covers eleven deaneries of the diocese, not just Cheshire.

¹⁶⁸ Emma Carrington, 1525: CALS EDA 2/1, f. 1 (Piccope, (First Portion), pp. 1-3). John Carrington, 1553: CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 114v- 116v (Piccope (First Portion), pp. 192-6).

incumbent of their chantry chapel at Disley.¹⁶⁹ Sometimes, however, the relationship between a hired priest and his parochial employers broke down. In 1546, the parishioners of Swettenham had agreed to fund the employment of Richard Cross as assistant to Hugh Barnston the vicar. They did not find him satisfactory, however, and refused to pay him: ‘the said Sir Richard did soe order himslefe in or service that he was worthy to haue noe wages nor non shall haue of vs’.¹⁷⁰ The dissolution of colleges and chantries in Cheshire, therefore, extended the rights of parishioners over their clergy, as in the case of St John’s, but in other parishes it was already established practice for decisions on the hiring and firing of some clergy to be taken by the whole or a section of their parishioners. I suggest that this extension of secular control over the appointment of clergy contributed to the process by which the clergy and, by extension the liturgy which they performed, became less ‘separate’ from the congregation. This process proceeded alongside the Edwardian church government’s religious policy exemplified by the introduction of the vernacular communion service in 1549.

For Eamon Duffy, a key factor in the loss of chantries was the consequent loss of opportunities for parishioners to participate in organisations such as guilds and fraternities which had developed alongside, but separate from, the parish. Although the majority of guilds drew their membership from one parish, this was by no means true in all cases. Duffy suggests that it was particularly the case that urban gilds might draw their members from a number of parishes, particularly when membership might bring

¹⁶⁹ Wood, ‘Disley’, p. 65. His surname is also given as Fowle or Foole.

¹⁷⁰ BL Harley 2046, f. 78v. He may be the Richard Cross ordained priest in 1545 (CCed person ID 31927 (accessed 14 February 2012)) who was one of the vicars choral at St John’s by 1548; TNA: PRO E 301/8/1.

commercial advantages.¹⁷¹ This may be seen in the case of the influential Guild of Holy Trinity in Coventry, for example, to which a number of Cheshire people belonged, as did several members of the royal family.¹⁷² There is very little extant evidence of the existence of guilds in Cheshire. However, this may partly be due to the fact that many small parochial guilds elsewhere are known about only through bequests in wills and very few Cheshire wills of the time survive. Certainly in Cheshire guilds were important in the religious life of Nantwich, which had a guild hall in the churchyard, subsequently used as a grammar school.¹⁷³ The importance of the guilds there is reflected in the ordinances drawn up in 1538, following the dissolution of Combermere Abbey, the previous proprietor:

Alsoe it is ordered that all such person or persons as be in noe gilde within this Church that they nor none of their children shall haue at their decease and their bringing home none of ye ornaments of the Church: nor no more of the bells to be rungen for them but the third Bell.¹⁷⁴

Clearly, the guilds must have been responsible for providing much of the ornamentation of the building. Elsewhere, a fraternity is known to have existed at the chantry chapel at Pott.¹⁷⁵ At Stockport guilds may have provided or supported Our Lady's service, St

¹⁷¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 141-54.

¹⁷² *The Register of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, St. Mary St. John the Baptist and St. Katherine of Coventry*, vol. i, ed. Mary Dormer Harris (The Dugdale Society, 13, 1935), *passim*.

¹⁷³ Hall, *Nantwich*, pp. 30, 277.

¹⁷⁴ quoted in Hall, *Nantwich*, p. 32.

¹⁷⁵ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, ii, p.46. Duffy pointed out that the fee of 6s 8d charged at Pott was the amount often charged for admission to guilds and would have precluded the poorest from membership, although at Pott it was possible to pay by instalments; *The Stripping of the Altars*, p. 152; CALS DDS 14/10 (2).

Peter's service and St Anthony's service.¹⁷⁶ Similarly, services of Our Lady at Northenden and Rostherne may have been sponsored by guilds.¹⁷⁷

It is generally accepted, however, that there were comparatively few religious guilds in the city of Chester, and their effect on city parish life was correspondingly limited.¹⁷⁸ No record survives of any guilds in the majority of the city's churches, and the few for which records do survive mainly attracted the wealthiest inhabitants. The craft guilds continued to be extremely important to the city, but their main religious role was in the production and performance of the mystery plays which continued, apparently much as before. References to the Pope and Corpus Christi in the banns (or proclamation of the plays) were merely crossed through.¹⁷⁹

Duffy has deplored the loss of 'altars, lights and guilds, and with them the groups who paid for and maintained them.'¹⁸⁰ Ronald Hutton has also found it 'interesting that the regime of Protector Somerset had almost as shattering an effect upon the secular or semi-secular customs of the ritual year.'¹⁸¹ In this connection he referred to fund-raising customs, often previously the preserve of parish guilds, such as the holding of church ales, which were abandoned in the period from 1547 to 1549 by most of the parishes in Hutton's study. However, there is no indication in the two sets of

¹⁷⁶ In 1540 Robert Arden remembered all three in his will (Piccope (Second Portion), pp.138 -141) and in 1541 William Davenport left 13s 4d each for the maintenance of two of these services (Piccope (First Portion), pp. 76-81:CAL S EDA 2/1, f. 153 v).

¹⁷⁷ In 1527 Robert Honford left lands and cattle to Our Lady's Service at Northenden (Piccope, (First Portion), p. 5) and in 1526 William Brown left 3s 4d to Our Lady's Service at Rostherne (CAL S EDA 2/1, f. 8v).

¹⁷⁸ 'Later medieval Chester 1230-1550: Religion, 1230-1550', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 80-89 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19191>> (accessed 7 May 2012).

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*; Laurence M. Clopper, (ed.), *Records of Early English Drama: Chester* (Manchester, 1979), pp. 27-8; 38-9.

¹⁸⁰ Duffy, 'Salle Church', p. 342.

¹⁸¹ Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), p. 87.

surviving Cheshire churchwardens' accounts covering this period that either of these parishes ever raised money in this way. This may, however, be because both were in the city of Chester and the type of fund-raising entertainments such as church ales seem to have less prevalent in urban parishes.¹⁸² The majority of the income of these two Chester churches arose from church rates and 'leystalls'.¹⁸³ Hutton has also found that many parishes sold or destroyed their maypoles at this time, which he felt may have been part of the process of abandoning church ales or parish wakes and the associated destruction of 'idols' and images.¹⁸⁴ Some Cheshire maypoles were still standing in 1548, as one Bunbury deponent mentioned that he had been asked 'to goe to the grene to the meypoll ther and they wold pleye att the ball wich they did'.¹⁸⁵ Other traditional festivities continued in Cheshire, such as the St John's Day bonfire in Chester, which probably formed part of the city's Midsummer Show. The cathedral accounts recorded expenditure of 8s 10d for the fire in 1547, and the payment almost doubled to 16s in 1551.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² Judith M. Bennett, 'Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), p. 34; Katherine French, 'Parochial Fund-raising in Late Medieval Somerset', in Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs and Beat A. Kümin (eds), *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), p. 126. Bennett also suggests that church ales may have been less popular in the north of England.

¹⁸³ leystall or laystall = burial place, *OED* (online edition accessed 16 May 2012). The two surviving sets of accounts for this period are those of St Mary on the Hill, Chester and Holy Trinity, Chester (excerpts only).

¹⁸⁴ Hutton, *Merry England*, pp. 87-8.

¹⁸⁵ CALS EDC 2/4, f. 61, undated deposition of Richard Hodgkinson referring to events 'abowt a fortnyght after midsomer'; although undated his deposition appears in the deposition book between November 1548 and February 1549.

¹⁸⁶ R. V. H. Burne, 'Chester Cathedral in the Reigns of Mary and Elizabeth', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), pp. 56-7; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p. 21; Hutton, *Merry England*, p. 89.

Another type of organisation associated with pre-Edwardian parish practice which survived in some areas of Cheshire was the cow charities.¹⁸⁷ In many parishes throughout England guilds and other parish groups used to maintain stocks of cattle, sheep and even bees, and the profits from these were used to maintain lights in the church or for other pious uses. These groups were of the type which had developed alongside the parish structure and whose loss with the dissolutions of the chantries was deplored by Duffy. He identified a number of such groups in the parish of Morebath in Devon whose income was mainly derived from the sale of wool from small flocks of sheep.¹⁸⁸ At the chapelry of Pott, in Cheshire, Geoffrey Downes had provided twenty sheep to be leased out and the rental was to be used for Our Lady's service at the chapel. Later, he provided 100 cows for the use of the poor in return for prayers.¹⁸⁹ In drawing up the inventories of chantry possessions in 1548, the commissioners for Cheshire listed seventy-three cattle throughout the county valued at £30 although by then they found no cows associated with Pott chapel.¹⁹⁰ Commissioners for other areas of England also listed cattle among chantry assets, for example, in the East Riding of Yorkshire they found that occasional observances were financed by cows rented out for cash.¹⁹¹

In 1526 James Goodacre of the parish of Woodchurch in Wirral deanery had bequeathed 20 marks (£13 6s 8d) to buy twenty bullocks to be hired out to finance

¹⁸⁷ These charities are particularly associated with the Wirral peninsula and seem subsequently to have been uncommon outside the county; Marjorie Sykes, 'The Cow in Cheshire', *Folklore*, 89 (1) (1978), pp. 68-9.

¹⁸⁸ Eamon Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (New Haven; London, 2001), pp. 24-8.

¹⁸⁹ CALS DDS 11/3; Colin Richmond, 'The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500', in Christopher Harper-Bill (ed.), *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), p. 122.

¹⁹⁰ TNA: PRO E 301/8/29.

¹⁹¹ Kitching, 'The Chantries of the East Riding of Yorkshire', p. 194.

prayers for the souls of himself and his wife.¹⁹² It seems that these cattle were overlooked by the chantry commissioners, or perhaps concealed from them, and in 1566 an Exchequer commission was appointed to take depositions about this and other matters in the parish.¹⁹³ Deponents stated that the trustees appointed under the will had purchased ‘Seven yoke of smalle bullockes for the maytenance of poore mens plowes’. A rent of 2s a year had been charged for their hire but after some years they were sold because they were ‘decayed by ill kepinge’ and seven cows were bought with the proceeds. These were hired out to seven poor men of the parish at the yearly rate of 2s 8d and the welfare and distribution of the cattle was supervised by a group of parishioners acting as trustees. Although one question in the interrogatory specifically asked what the annual rents were used for, all the deponents, with an understandable degree of amnesia, followed John Gleave of Prenton who stated that the income was employed ‘for the mayntenance and encrease of the same Cattell and to no other vse’. The commissioners must have been satisfied, as the last of the Woodchurch charity cows were not sold until 1863 and the last cow charity dinner took place in 1965. At least five Wirral parishes also operated similar schemes, an interesting continuity of pre-Reformation practice.¹⁹⁴

Immediately following the dissolution of the chantries and suppression of guild activity, therefore, some fund-raising enterprises continued in much the same way as they had previously done, but devoted their efforts to charitable, rather than religious,

¹⁹² BL Harley 2067, f. 35; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xx, p. 67.

¹⁹³ TNA: PRO E 134/8Eliz/East2.

¹⁹⁴ Sykes, ‘The Cow in Cheshire’, pp. 68-70; William Williams Mortimer, *The History of the Hundred of Wirral* (London, 1847), p. 183. Little is known of the origins of most of the charities, other than the one in Woodchurch, but according to Sykes, most were probably established later. Following the sale of the last Woodchurch cows the money was invested and used for charitable purposes. It is to be hoped that James Goodacre would have been pleased that the Cow Charity bearing his name survived for nearly 450 years.

purposes. Such efforts continued to be parish-based, rather than centring on, for example, townships. The commission of enquiry into the Woodchurch cows was part of the Elizabethan government's search for property, particularly land, which had been concealed during successive dissolutions.¹⁹⁵

However, before this there had been official concern about concealment of assets. The confiscation of church goods during the reign of Edward VI had prompted particular initiatives in some parishes across the country to pre-empt the seizure by a variety of means, not just concealment. Many items used in parish churches had been gifted or advanced on indefinite loan by parishioners who retained a proprietorial interest. Once the prospect of appropriation became increasingly likely, some of these loans were called in. At the parish of St Mary in Chester on 8 January 1548

Elyn Clarke wydowe comyth before the hole parishe demandynge ... of them one certan Chalyssse And so ... [the] Churche wardense with advise and consent of the hole parisheners did deluer the same chalyssse vnto the said Elyn as her awne.¹⁹⁶

It may be noted that, as elsewhere in the country, the entire parish was involved in endorsing the return of the chalice; in Duffy's phrase there was 'collective responsibility'.¹⁹⁷ Mistress Clarke's action in reclaiming the chalice may have been prompted by concerns aroused by the diocesan survey of church goods, following which on 12 January 1548 John Bird, bishop of Chester, submitted a report setting out what

¹⁹⁵ C. J. Kitching, 'The Quest for Concealed Lands in the Reign of Elizabeth I', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 24 (1974), pp. 63-78.

¹⁹⁶ CALS P20/13/1flyleaf (the entry is dated 8 January 1547 but has been assumed to relate to 1548 according to the new-style calendar); Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 229.

¹⁹⁷ Eamon Duffy, 'The End of It All: The Material Culture of the Medieval English Parish and the 1552 Inventories of Church Goods', in Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (eds), *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donington, 2006), p. 388.

goods had recently been sold by parishes in his diocese.¹⁹⁸ This survey was probably designed to halt the alienation of parish property in the face of popular concerns about government seizure of church goods. Such concerns had been rife since the 1530s, when one of the motivations of the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 had been anger at the rumours that church plate was about to be seized.¹⁹⁹ In the Cheshire deaneries only six parishes or chapelries were reported in 1548 to have sold any goods. Most of the proceeds of those goods which had been sold had been applied to the repair or refurbishment of the parish church buildings.²⁰⁰

Government concerns about the sale of church goods prompted another survey in February 1549, this time to be carried out by the sheriff and justices of the peace who were to report on what goods were held in each parish or chapelry and what had recently been sold or appropriated. The reports submitted by the justices for the different Cheshire hundreds indicate that their investigations varied in scope and thoroughness, although they declared that the details submitted were ‘a short extracte only of the plate and Belles of euery parochie Church within the holle shyre’.²⁰¹

The Wirral certificate is one of the least detailed. There is no record of any goods sold or concealed and although the Wirral report is torn it indicates that the majority of churches had only one or two chalices and one or two bells and only Neston had a paten. The explanation for scanty details may lie in the poverty of this hundred. A fuller individual inventory for Neston includes only one chalice with a paten, and the only ornament was a ‘crosse of copper and gylt’. Apart from the bells in the steeple, the other

¹⁹⁸ *CSPD*, Edward VI, p. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Duffy, ‘The End of It All’, p. 382.

²⁰⁰ *CSPD*, Edward VI, p. 26.

²⁰¹ TNA: PRO E 117/1/46.

church goods comprised various vestments, several of which are described as ‘verey olde’ or ‘old and ragged’ and most were made of commonplace fabrics such as canvas, worsted or bustian.²⁰² However, in other Wirral parishes parishioners managed to conceal some goods. It seems that one chalice was concealed from successive surveys of Woodchurch and this was the subject of the Elizabethan enquiry at the same time as the investigations into the cow charity.²⁰³ The justices in some of the other hundreds were more thorough in their surveys in 1549. For example, the report on Broxton hundred went into some detail about church goods which had been appropriated from Malpas church. Although requests had been made for the return of the items, they had not been recovered.²⁰⁴

There are insufficient extant Edwardian parish inventories for Cheshire covering the period between 1547 and 1552 to indicate whether there was widespread disposal of church assets as a reactive response to royal policy, as Duffy suggests was the case elsewhere, notably in London.²⁰⁵ In May 1553 the last known Chester inventories of Edward VI’s reign were compiled and by then there was very little left in the city’s churches and even the cathedral was left with almost no plate.²⁰⁶ At Holy Trinity church, for example, Henry Gee, with his usual care in record-keeping, had drawn up a list of the goods which passed into his charge as warden in 1532. The goods then included two chalices, both with patens, together with a cross, a ring, candlesticks and other plate.

²⁰² CALS DDX 43/51. The fabrics are canvas = strong or coarse unbleached cloth made of hemp or flax; worsted = woollen fabric or stuff made from well-twisted yarn spun of long-staple wool combed to lay the fibres parallel and bustian = kind of cotton fabric, chiefly of foreign manufacture, used especially for making waistcoats and certain church vestments; *OED* (online edition accessed 24 May 2012). Bustian is unlikely to have been made of cotton at this time, however.

²⁰³ TNA: PRO E 134/8Eliz/East2.

²⁰⁴ TNA: PRO E 117/1/46.

²⁰⁵ Duffy, ‘The End of It All’, p. 388-9.

²⁰⁶ TNA: PRO E 117/1/47.

There were also six full suits of vestments of different colours for the various festivals of the year made of luxury fabrics such as damask and taffeta plus sundry other vestments, together with banners, veils, altar cloths and other adornments.²⁰⁷ Contrary to instructions, the wardens of Holy Trinity sold the majority of their vestments, plus some other items, in the year which ran from Easter 1551.²⁰⁸ However, this may have been due to the influence of evangelicals like Henry Gee as they seem to have been eager to strip the church, since they also pre-empted the Privy Council order of November 1550 ordering the removal of altars.²⁰⁹ In the year from Easter 1549 they paid 2s ‘for getting down the Auters in the church’ and 4d ‘for gettunge the tabernacle down’. They then acquired ‘a table & frame for the Auter’ for 8s.²¹⁰ Following sales and confiscations the 1553 inventory for Holy Trinity reveals that the two chalices and patens ‘all gylde’ had been replaced by one silver chalice and paten, weighing 15¾ ounces. As this weighed less than either of the two previously used in the church, it is probable that their own plate had been taken away, to be replaced by smaller, less valuable items. The only other goods were two surplices, six linen towels and two table cloths.²¹¹ Clearly, the interior appearance of the church had changed radically during Edward’s reign.

Similarly the parish of St Mary’s was allowed to keep only one chalice and paten in 1553, in place of the three formerly held. They were also only allowed one surplice instead of the numerous vestments previously owned. The commissioners sold the rest

²⁰⁷ Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester’, pp. 106-7.

²⁰⁸ Church officials had been forbidden to alienate or sell any plate or other valuables in 1549; Duffy, ‘The End of It All’, p. 382.

²⁰⁹ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 72.

²¹⁰ Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester’, p. 113. No proceeds are stated for the list of goods sold in which the vestments etc. are followed by a colon and then the words ‘the comunion boke & bible & paraffras’, probably, therefore, the proceeds of the sale were used to acquire these books which had been commanded by various injunctions and other orders.

²¹¹ TNA: PRO E 117/1/47.

of St Mary's remaining goods for £10 13s 6d.²¹² However, before this the wardens had already sold goods to the value of £21 10s and given £18 of this to the poor, although it is noted, that some items were sold without the consent of the parishioners. The flyleaf of the first extant churchwardens' accounts book for St Mary's includes an undated list of church goods which was probably drawn up about this time and this indicates that, although a number of items had been handed over to the commissioners or sold, some other items were 'in the handes' of various parishioners. As no sale proceeds are noted in these cases this suggests that they had been taken away to save them from enforced sale. This list also notes the return of the chalice to Mistress Clarke. It may be that the wardens were concerned to make a record of what had happened to everything in their keeping before the 'kynges comysyners came to sherche the churche' in 1553.²¹³

The accounts of St Mary's record that 4d was paid for 'wytlymyng the churche' in the year to Easter 1548 and later the same year 8d was paid for two horse-loads of lime and 2s 6d for further work whitewashing the church. In the same year 2d was paid for 'takyng down of the Rode', a prompt response to the 1548 order from the council for the removal of images.²¹⁴ Three years later, in the year from Easter 1550, 10s 6d was spent on taking down the altars and tiling the church floor, this was about a year after the altars at Holy Trinity had been removed, although there is no record of the purchase of a table and frame to replace them until after 1552.²¹⁵ In the year from Easter 1549 the new prayer book, two psalters and Erasmus's *Paraphrases* were acquired. The last seems to have been part-funded by a parishioner according to the entry 'payde to mr

²¹² *Ibid.*.

²¹³ CALS P20/13/1.

²¹⁴ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 230. Lime was also used at this time during the interment of bodies, particularly within the church building.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 237.

wydney for the price of on half of on booke called parafracs'.²¹⁶ The revised prayer book was bought for 7s in 1552, presumably in time for use by 1 November 1552, as required.²¹⁷ As at Holy Trinity, therefore, the wardens of St Mary's were reasonably quick, or even anticipated, various royal instructions concerning removal of images and altars and adoption of new liturgy, but at both churches parishioners were reluctant to allow the commissioners to appropriate their treasures, in the case of St Mary's, preferring to sell them and give the money away. At St Mary's attempts were made also to conceal certain items, particularly vestments. In this connection it may be noted that in 1553 the commissioners came to search the church, presumably on the assumption that such an attempt would be made.

A growing tendency on the part of parishioners to confront ecclesiastical authority is also suggested by an increase in tithe disputes. Tithe cases came before the consistory court in Chester in increasing numbers. In 1530 11 of 110 causes (or 10 per cent) related to tithes or other church dues, apart from mortuaries, but by 1552 this had increased to 32 of 85 causes (or 37.6 per cent) relating to tithes only.²¹⁸ This trend has also been noted in other areas, for example, Ralph Houlbrooke found that tithe suits in Norwich and Winchester increased between five and ten times between the 1520s and the 1560s. He also considered that this 'proliferation of tithe suits was one more symptom of the declining authority of the church.'²¹⁹ In Lancashire Haigh felt that the increased number of lay farmers following the dissolution of the monasteries (and, it

²¹⁶ The 1549 Prayer Book was to be used from Whit Sunday (9 June 1549) and injunctions issued at the time of the Royal Visitation in 1547 required the clergy to provide a copy of the *Paraphrases*; Hughes, *Reformation*, ii, pp. 106, 92. The delay in acquiring *Paraphrases* may have been caused by financial constraints in view of other costs imposed around this time.

²¹⁷ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 238; Hughes, *Reformation*, ii, p. 123.

²¹⁸ CALS EDC 1/4; EDC 1/13. It is not always possible, however, to identify the type of cause. It may also be noted that the volume of business heard in the consistory court was declining by 1552.

²¹⁹ Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People*, p. 146.

may be added, of the chantries and colleges) was a key factor, leading to increased withholding of tithes. This may have been due either to resentment on the part of parishioners or to what was often viewed as a rapacious desire to maximise income on the part of farmers, exemplified by attempts to alter customary arrangements. However, this was a period of raging inflation which almost inevitably led to attempts to re-negotiate commutation payments and to exploit a source of income to its fullest extent. Haigh established that while the number of tithe causes involving priests in the Chester court in the 1530s and the 1540s remained stable, the number involving lay farmers increased by more than six times.²²⁰ It may be, however, that an additional factor in the growth of tithe litigation was the development of what Steve Hindle has termed ‘popular legalism’, which he identified as widespread in the seventeenth century. This may be defined in terms of an increasingly sophisticated knowledge of the law and how to exploit it, coupled with awareness of punishment or sanctions in the event of failure.²²¹ In other words, some Edwardian tithe cases may be regarded as motivated by popular politics as much as religion or economics.

The most extreme form of popular protest was, of course, uprising, and the summer of 1549 saw widespread commotions across England. Historians have suggested a variety of motivation behind this discontent, and in some areas there was clearly opposition the introduction of the new liturgy.²²² Other recent research has indicated that the risings were more geographically widespread than had previously

²²⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 58-62.

²²¹ Steve Hindle, ‘The Shaming of Margaret Knowsley: Gossip, Gender and the Experience of Authority in Early Modern England’, *Continuity and Change*, 9 (3) (1994), p. 396; Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions*, p. 7.

²²² MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant*, p. 44.

been understood, although Cheshire is one of the few counties not yet considered in the secondary literature.²²³

There are several antiquarian compilations covering this period which were drawn up by Cheshire men later in the century. A list of mayors, with annual historical notes, was drawn up in about 1594 by William Aldersey, a Chester merchant born in 1543 who was mayor of Chester in 1594 and 1614.²²⁴ A compilation of historical material was also made by Robert Rogers, who was archdeacon of Chester from about 1566 until his death in 1595.²²⁵ Both exist in several versions and that of Robert Rogers was later amplified and amended by his son, David, who probably gave the material its chronological form.²²⁶ Since it was commonly the practice of antiquarians to copy from one another, it is now almost impossible to know the origins of much of the material used. The events of 1549 are described in ‘Archdeacon Robert Rogers Breviary’ as follows: ‘Bolen loste ye commons rebelled ye lord Shefilde slayne also masse put awaye

²²³ Jones, ‘The English Risings of 1549’, p. 290.

²²⁴ One copy of the ‘Manuscript History of the Mayors of Chester by William Aldersey’ is at CALS ZCR 469/542, and there is another copy at BL Additional Manuscripts, 39925. There were several prominent men of Chester called William Aldersey at this time, including one of the city’s first Members of Parliament <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/aldersey-william-1513-77>> (accessed 14 June 2013). The identity of the author of the history is confirmed by the reference to the date of his birth plus various other personal references.

²²⁵ ‘Archdeacons: Chester’, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 45-47. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35846>> (accessed 14 June 2013).

²²⁶ The Rogers’ compilations are now known as the *Breviaries*. The various versions are discussed in Clopper (ed.), *REED: Chester*, pp. xxvii-xxxvi, including one in Liverpool University Library Special Collections: MS 23.5 ‘Archdeacon Robert Rogers Breviary’. Confusingly, both the works of Aldersey and of Rogers are sometimes referred to as ‘The Annals of Chester’, although they differ in many ways. Two different series of extracts from the *Breviaries* were transcribed and printed in *Cheshire Sheaf*, most fully by W. F. Irvine in *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxix and xxx. A primary purpose of Aldersey’s history, repeated in the *Breviaries*, was to list the mayors and sheriffs of Chester so that events are listed using the mayoral year which ran from the Friday after the Feast of St Denis (9 November). Events of summer 1549 are therefore listed under 1548. David Mills has written some notes on the Aldersey’s Manuscript History, with particular reference to the Chester plays, which are available online. However, the only way to access this seems to be via the link to the catalogue at Cheshire Record Office <<http://archives.cheshire.gov.uk/default.aspx>> and to input ‘ZCR 469’ in the reference field under the Advanced Search option.

& publike prayer in english brought in'.²²⁷ The risings are thus characterised as a rebellion of the commons. Lord Sheffield, Northampton's second-in-command, was killed in Norwich in July 1549.²²⁸ His death was clearly regarded as significant but there is no mention of any specific events in the course of the risings elsewhere in England. The brevity of the entry referring to the rebellion, with no reference to any uprising in Cheshire, does suggest that the county remained quiet. This impression is reinforced by a much longer entry for the following year which recorded a 'greate fraye' in Chester between the citizens of the town and 500 Irishmen.²²⁹ This brawl is given much greater prominence, presumably because it directly affected the people of Chester.

In her study of the 1549 stirs Amanda Jones has suggested that '[w]e should not assume that Cheshire was unaffected by the "commotion time". Although no details of disturbances are known, neither does the county seem to have been reported quiet. The surviving equity pleadings in the Chester exchequer ... might provide new information.'²³⁰ As a county palatine, Chester had retained its own system of courts although procedures and jurisdiction were not rigidly established. By the 1520s, however, although administrative functions were retained the judicial function of the Chester exchequer was as an equity court.²³¹ As such, the decision process tended to be

²²⁷ Liverpool University Library Special Collections: MS 23.5, f. 86v.

²²⁸ Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions*, p. 66.

²²⁹ Liverpool University Library Special Collections: MS 23.5, f. 86v.

²³⁰ Jones, 'The English Risings of 1549', p. 290n. She suggests that 'PRO CHES' might supply more information, although does not elaborate as to precisely which series of records in this collection she felt might be of use. There are two divisions of CHES records at The National Archives, containing thirty-eight series of records. Division 1 comprises 'Records of the Exchequer of Chester mainly relating to its judicial, financial and secretarial duties' containing eleven series. Division 2 comprises 'Records of the County Court and Courts of Great Sessions for Chester and Flint relating to jurisdiction over civil and criminal actions in Cheshire and Flintshire' containing twenty-two series; <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/Home>> *sub* CHES (accessed 2 June 2012).

²³¹ Tim Thornton, 'Local Equity Jurisdictions in the Territories of the English Crown: the Palatinate of Chester, 1450-1540', in Diana E. S. Dunn (ed.), *Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1996), p. 38.

one of arbitration and the aim was to reach agreement by negotiation.²³² The cases heard mostly concerned property, and frequently involved land disputes such as actions for trespass; boundary disputes or inheritance disputes and these disagreements could, and did, sometimes erupt into violence. Thus although some of the cases heard in the Exchequer did involve procedure to bind parties to the action to keep the peace, it is unlikely that the equity pleadings would have involved anyone involved in riot or rebellion against the government.

The Chester court of great sessions heard civil and criminal pleas, much like assize courts in other counties and by this time held two sessions annually, at Easter and Michaelmas.²³³ Jones has recorded that following the commotions in Buckinghamshire in July 1549 rebels were bound over by recognisances to keep the peace towards all of the king's people, issued at what seem to have been special sessions of the peace held in various parts of the county.²³⁴ There is no reason to suppose that, if there had been any uprising in Cheshire in 1549, the procedure would have been different. Unfortunately, however, there are no extant records of the proceedings of Cheshire justices of the peace from this time. However, general recognisances or mainprises (bonds) to keep the peace were issued by both the Chester exchequer and court of great sessions, for which some contemporary records do survive.²³⁵

²³² *Ibid.* pp. 36, 41-2.

²³³ 32 Henry VIII, c. 43; Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 131, 222-3.

²³⁴ Jones, 'The English Risings of 1549', p. 201.

²³⁵ Dorothy J Clayton, *The Administration of the County Palatine of Chester 1442-1485* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 35, 1990), p. 11. It may be noted that the terms 'recognisance' and 'mainprise' were not synonymous in the fifteenth century. The mainprise was essentially a bail-bond whereas the recognisance was a more complex and varied, but less stringent, type of bond intended to enforce court appearance; *ibid.*, pp. 241-8. Too little work has been done on the evolution of the Chester courts in the early sixteenth century to describe how the function of the two types of bond may have changed.

Both the sessions roll and sessions file for the sitting of the court of great sessions in September 1549 are extant, but neither lists an unusually high number of men bound over to keep the peace generally.²³⁶ Although peace bonds also survive among the exchequer records, it is not clear exactly what proceedings each of these bonds relates to, nor, indeed, whether they related to cases in the exchequer or in the court of great sessions. As an aid to establishing the relative number of those bound over in 1549 on a general recognisance or mainprise, and thus possibly involved in an uprising earlier in the year, this source is therefore problematic.²³⁷ There is thus no indication in the surviving Chester court records to suggest any unusual activity in the county in the preceding few months. Although an argument from silence is often ill advised it does seem that this factor, combined with the very limited reference in the *Annals* to the commotions elsewhere, indicates that Cheshire remained generally quiet in the summer of 1549.

While there seems to have been little overt opposition to the religious changes of Edward VI's reign, the extent of actual popular support in Cheshire for religious reform is difficult to assess. Only twenty-seven wills have been traced for the period, and these reveal a wide range of soul bequests and other pious provisions. In some cases it seems likely that the soul bequest, where it has survived, may not be a true reflection of the beliefs of the testator. The wills of Sir Edward Fitton and his widow, Dame Mary, are

²³⁶ The sessions roll is at TNA: PRO CHES 29/257 (series described as a plea rolls) and includes one general recognisance at rot. 4, this bound several men who had contravened a previous recognisance. The sessions file is at TNA: PRO CHES 24/92/6 (series described as great sessions gaol files) and includes, in a list summarising proceedings, the names of six men bound over on general recognisance, of whom five had already been so bound at the previous session in April 1549 (TNA: PRO CHES 24/92/5).

²³⁷ TNA: PRO CHES 5/5 is the Mainprise Roll for the reign of Edward VI. The catalogue, which acknowledges that further work is needed to clarify the nature of these records, is at <<http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/SearchUI/records/C4066-palatinate-of-chester-exchequer-of-chester--collection>> (accessed 2 June 2012).

both extant, although not in the original version, and were written about three years apart.²³⁸ The soul bequests are identical and so were presumably composed by the same person who wrote both wills: ‘Firste I bequeth my sowle vnto almightie god which haith ye same redemyd by his most precios & painfull passion trustinge faithfullye by the merites of the same of remission of my sinnes & to be one of the euerlastinge liff’. Some slight spelling differences may merely reflect the idiosyncrasies of the people keeping the different registers. This form of words avoids any reference to the intercession of Mary or the saints, which had been condemned in 1547.²³⁹ Dame Mary Fitton’s will, written in 1551, suggests that she had retained a belief in the power of *post mortem* intercession and thus in Purgatory since she goes on to leave money ‘to be bestowed for the welthe of my soule’ although the abolition of the chantries in 1548 had epitomised official denunciation of the doctrine of Purgatory.²⁴⁰ Other wills of the period reveal the same mixture of response to official policy and persistence of traditional belief: the will of George Leche, alderman of Chester written in 1550, avoids mentioning the saints and begins ‘trustyng by ye merites of christis passion to haue euerlastyng lif’.²⁴¹ However, he too requested his executors to act as ‘shalbe thought most plesure [sic] vnto almyghtie god and most helth full vnto my soule’. Not all testators avoided reference to intercession by the saints, however, although preambles referring to Mary and the saints became less common as the reign progressed. The last surviving reference to Mary in an Edwardian will appears in the will of James à Cawday, glover of Chester, in April 1553.

²³⁸ Sir Edward Fitton, 1549: York, Borthwick Institute for Archives, Sir Edward Fyton of Gawsworth, Feb. 1548/9 Prob. Reg. 12A ff. 1v-2v (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xlv, pp. 37-89). Dame Mary Fitton, 1551: TNA: PRO PROB 11/39/464, Dame Mary Fytton (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 56).

²³⁹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 452-3.

²⁴⁰ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 78.

²⁴¹ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 207v-210v (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xx, pp. 35-6).

However, as this is not a probated copy and seems to be rough notes, the wording of the final will may have altered.²⁴² Other than Cawday's will, the last reference to Mary appears in the 1549 will of the clerk, Thomas Molyneux, rector of a moiety of Wallasey.²⁴³ There are so few surviving wills, however, that any attempt to analyse trends is problematic.

However, the surviving wills do reveal that while testators continued to leave bequests to specified clergy, they were increasing disinclined to leave money to churches or chapels for the maintenance of services or the fabric of the building. It is probable that the confiscation of church plate was a deterrent. This is a particularly striking feature of the will of David Middleton, another alderman of Chester who died in 1548.²⁴⁴ He left money to cover half the cost of glazing a window, not in his parish church, but in the new common hall in Chester, where the assembly met. For some, pride in civic buildings was replacing pride in the parish church. Further, ten out of the twenty-seven wills examined made bequests to the poor, instead of for prayers or obsequies; this trend has also been observed in other areas of the country.²⁴⁵ Eamon Duffy has pointed out alms-giving was traditionally linked to salvation; however, a key difference was that these Edwardian bequests make no mention of prayers linked to the alms given.²⁴⁶

Other evidence indicates that religion remained a central concern in the lives of many of the county's inhabitants. In 1551 John Segar of Bunbury accused Margaret

²⁴² BL Harley 2067, f. 207.

²⁴³ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 281-282.

²⁴⁴ TNA: PRO PROB 11/32/201, Davythe Mydelton (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xviii, pp. 88-9).

²⁴⁵ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 78.

²⁴⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 358.

Palen of defamation, claiming that she had called him a heretic.²⁴⁷ The incident in question had developed from the escalation of an argument between neighbours about the killing of some ducks. The accusation of defamation indicates the continued importance placed by individuals upon their public reputation in religious matters, perhaps especially in times of such radical changes in the church. Failure to conform could still result in the ultimate sanction of execution. Palen deposed that Segar ‘has bene but a while Dwelling in bunburie parich’ and the incident may be a reflection of the distrust of a stranger. However, there is always the possibility that Segar had been observed in some religious practice which Palen considered to be heretical, although she gave no evidence to this effect and merely claimed that his reputation had not been harmed by her words.

More concrete evidence of the beliefs of one individual comes from a bill presented to the court of great sessions in Chester. This was the presentment of Hugh Dickon, a labourer formerly of Mobberley in Wilmslow parish in the north east of the county. He was specifically accused under the Act of Six Articles of 1539 of denying the real presence on 30 May 1547 reportedly saying,

That the masse was not a holy thyng and yt he beleves not that the breade consecrate at Masse by the preest was & is the very body of Cryste it was made by man and Further the seid hughe dickon seid that he beleves not that the sacrament on thaulter is the very body of cryste it was made by man.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁷ CALS EDC 2/5, ff. 21; 86-88.

²⁴⁸ TNA: PRO CHES 24/92/2. The bill is in poor condition, like so many of these documents, and some words down the right-hand side are illegible, but the indictment is stated to have been brought under the statute of 31 Henry VIII (1539), which is said to have applied after 12 July 1539 and made all who denied transubstantiation liable to be burned as heretics and to lose all their property as traitors; Hughes, *Reformation*, i, p. 365.

He was committed to Chester Castle by Sir Edward Warren, a local justice, and the witnesses against him were a local yeoman and two parish clergy. One of the clerks was named as ‘hugh henrison’, who was presumably Hugh Harrison, curate of Wilmslow.²⁴⁹ The other clerical witness was ‘Jacobus broke’. This is most likely to have been James Brooke, listed as a stipendiary at Wilmslow in the chantry certificate of 1548.²⁵⁰ It is notable that the man accused, being a labourer, was of relatively humble status and yet espoused what were still quite radical religious views for the time. It is possible that his denunciation was a result of distrust of outsiders since his occupation suggests that he may have been an itinerant, and was unlikely to have been tied to a specific area by tenancy or ownership. It was also possible that, as a poor man, he may have been accused by wealthier neighbours at a time when communities were under considerable stress.²⁵¹ There is no way of knowing how he had acquired his beliefs, whether by contact with others or personal reflection. The presentment does perhaps reflect a prevailing atmosphere of distrust and uncertainty in which the parish clergy and some parishioners continued to hold conservative views and so objected to Hugh Dickon propounding his views ‘*palam et publice*’.²⁵² The indictment is endorsed ‘*billa vera*’ but, only a few months later, by November 1547 the Act of Six Articles was abolished by Edward VI’s first parliament, and such words would no longer have been condemned as heretical.²⁵³

²⁴⁹ CALS EDV 2/3, f. 11; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 30.

²⁵⁰ TNA PRO: E301/8/17 where he is named as George, although the clergy lists of 1548 and 1554 give his first name as James; CALS EDV 2/3, f. 11; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 30.

²⁵¹ Andy Wood, “‘A lyttull worde ys tresson’: Loyalty, Denunciation, and Popular Politics in Tudor England’, *The Journal of British Studies*, 48 (4) (2009), p. 845.

²⁵² ‘openly and publicly’.

²⁵³ Hughes, *Reformation*, ii, p. 101; MacCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant*, p. 76. ‘*Billa vera*’ means ‘true bill’ and is the phrase used when a jury found a bill of indictment to be supported by the evidence. I have not been able to discover what happened to Hugh Dickon.

The scanty surviving evidence indicates, therefore, that a wide range of personal religious beliefs existed in the county at all levels of society. The few extant wills show that while notice had been taken of the changed rules on the intercession of saints, some testators continued to believe that *post mortem* acts could benefit their soul, implying continuing belief in Purgatory. The doctrine of justification through faith alone, as set out in the third of the Homilies issued in 1547, was therefore not immediately embraced by all.²⁵⁴ On the other hand, however, there is no evidence to suggest that the occasion of the introduction of the English liturgy in 1549 provoked any significant overt opposition in Cheshire, as it did elsewhere. If the changes of Edward's reign did give rise to personal religious anxiety, there is no evidence that this provoked the legitimization crisis which Andy Wood saw as having occurred in other counties.²⁵⁵ The loyalty of Cheshire seems to have been assumed, as revealed by a deposition of 1566 in the Chester Consistory Court which recalled events in 1553:

Richard Aghton sonne to this deponent came downe that Sommer from London with lettres from the Duke of Northumberland to fetch v^e certeine of the gard and brought news of the death of kinge Edward.²⁵⁶

Therefore, while Catholic beliefs persisted among some of the population of Cheshire, Northumberland's Protestant regime felt sufficiently confident of support in the county following Edward's death to consider attempting to raise the county.

²⁵⁴ Hughes, *Reformation*, ii, pp. 95-8.

²⁵⁵ Wood, *The 1549 Rebellions*, pp. 22-3.

²⁵⁶ CALS EDC 2/8, f. 59v. The phrase 'with lettres ... the gard' has been crossed out suggesting that the deponent had second thoughts about making this statement, perhaps after considering the possible implications of opposition to the crown.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the chantries had little effect on Cheshire chantry chapels for the practical reason that most chapelries were considered so important to the maintenance of worship in the county's large parishes that they were retained. While in the short-term the dissolution had a negligible effect on the number of employed clergy over the whole county, as the reign progressed the number of men putting themselves forward for ordination declined sharply, in line with the experience of other parts of the country. As the number of clerical vacancies increased, opportunities opened up for career advancement for existing clergy on a scale previously unknown. This was facilitated by the transfer of additional parish patronage into the hands of local ecclesiastical patrons whose acute shortage of money meant that much was alienated on long leases to local gentry.

The loss of chantries situated within parish churches and later appropriation of church goods must have had a greater impact in terms of the effect on the provision of services, but the relative poverty of the area meant that there was little church equipment to be seized in some part of the county. This did not, of course, mean that there were no objections to the confiscation of church goods, and there were illicit alienations and concealments of assets. Possibly as a result of this, parishioners became less confident in the enduring basis of parish religion, and by 1553 at least one testator who wanted to leave a chalice to his church specified that it was a loan, rather than a gift.²⁵⁷ While religious guilds were relatively unimportant in Chester, their loss in other areas of the county was probably felt more keenly, but lay organisations seem to have developed

²⁵⁷ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 229v-230v (W. F. Irvine, (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills not now to be Found in any Probate Registry. 1301-1752* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 30, 1896), pp. 177-9).

quickly to take over much of their secular role, notably in the dispensation of charity. The loss of intercessory prayers, however, could not be replaced and undoubtedly to many parishioners the loss was a considerable upset.

The sweeping changes of the reign resulted in the modification of the relationship of many individuals with their parish. This characterised the political consequences of the Edwardian Reformation in Cheshire, but to some extent it was a continuation of a process which had already begun. This changing relationship was apparent in the extension to more parishes and chapelries of the right to choose their own clergy, although in some cases this was on a very restricted franchise. Also, in relation to tithe litigation, litigants increasingly came to rely on their view of how the law applied to them. Automatic deference to the authority of the church began to be replaced by 'popular legalism'. Both of these factors were affected by Reformation changes in that the dissolutions of the monasteries and chantries opened new avenues of opportunity, but also caused some confusion and dissatisfaction with lay acquisition of ecclesiastical assets.

The little evidence which survives reveals neither general overt enthusiasm for, nor widespread resistance to, the religious changes of Edward's reign. However, the impact on and response by the laity is complex and in some ways contradictory. In the parish of Holy Trinity in Chester, for example, it can be seen that while official instructions for removal of altars and obliteration of wall-paintings were pre-empted, presumably motivated by enthusiasm for change, church goods were illegally sold or concealed. Thus parishioners demonstrated that they could absorb some elements of the official process of reform while rejecting others. Local people were able to perceive in

the changes both opportunities as well as threats to existing parish arrangements. This was not supine conformity since evidence reveals individuals actively seeking to secure property and claim rights of various kinds; on the other hand there is no evidence of active resistance in Cheshire, as there was elsewhere. This may, perhaps, be characterised as a form of passive resistance joined with opportunism. The reign of Mary, reveals further evidence of this type of resistance as the new regime sought to restore much of what had been destroyed.

5

THE MARIAN RESTORATION

William Aldersey's history of Chester related how 'that good prince Edward dyed the fyfte or sixte of Julie 1553 and then Quene Marie succeded, who altered religion, and many godlie busshopps and prechers suffered for the testimony of the truthe'.¹ In this chapter I will look at the effects of the Marian religious changes on the county of Chester in the light of David Loades's observation that Mary's chief ecclesiastical advisers, Gardiner and Pole, emphasised discipline and ritual as the best way to restore the Catholic Church.² Parts of correction books survive for three visitations during the reign; one carried out by each of the two bishops and one by the archbishop of York *sede vacante*. An examination of these visitation records will indicate how the Marian bishops approached the enforcement of the return to Catholicism and a surviving set of articles from Cuthbert Scott's visitation in 1557 reveals his particular concerns.³ The types of clerical offences presented and the number of clergy disciplined also reveal the extent to which the Edwardian reforms had been embraced by the parochial clergy. A third major component in the Marian restoration of Catholicism was preaching. Duffy has persuasively argued that the regime's commitment to preaching has been persistently undervalued by historians. He contends that Pole's insistence on weekly preaching in the parishes, together with his exploitation of printed propaganda remained a high priority throughout the reign - persuasion as well as punishment, as Duffy has put

¹ CALS ZCR 469/542.

² David Loades, 'The Marian Episcopate', in Eamon Duffy and David Loades (eds), *The Church of Mary Tudor* (Aldershot, 2006), p. 54.

³ Greater Manchester County Record Office E7/12/1/2. These visitation articles are held in a collection relating to Middleton parish, which was at that time in Lancashire, but in the diocese of Chester.

it.⁴ There is little indication of a concerted campaign of preaching in the diocese of Chester in the reign of Edward VI; any evidence for such an initiative during Mary's reign will be examined below. Duffy has also recently argued that Pole sought to establish his ideal of an 'educated resident preaching pastoral clergy' throughout the country by means of a programme of education and the eradication of pluralism and simony.⁵ The extent to which this ideal was implemented in Cheshire will be considered. By 1553 the parish clergy were much depleted in number and ordinands were no longer coming forward at Chester, so that response to these Marian initiatives will be revealed by a consideration of whether the young men of Cheshire began again to put themselves forward for ordination. Finally, the lay response will be considered. The restoration of the mass called for a substantial investment in church equipment, since so much had been confiscated or sold. The abolition of guilds and fraternities meant that much of the organisation behind voluntary parochial fundraising had been lost. In this section the county's response to the sustained requirement for finance to fund the reconstruction will also be considered.

The Diocesan Hierarchy and Marian Visitations

The first bishop of Chester, John Bird, had been appointed following the foundation of the see in 1541, but had left much of the administrative work of the diocese to his chancellor, George Wilmesley. While he has been seen as a reasonably diligent and effective administrator, his religious convictions do not seem to have been wholeheartedly behind a return to Catholicism. He had amassed considerable power and

⁴ Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven and London, 2009), pp. 17-21; 57.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

influence and, as a result, would be difficult to supplant.⁶ Bird had married in Edward's reign, and despite repudiating his wife was deprived on 16 March 1554, '*propter conjugium*' (on account of marriage).⁷ Wilmesley had also married, probably sometime before 1553, but he was undoubtedly protected by the fact that Edmund Bonner, Marian bishop of London, was his half-brother, albeit they were both illegitimate.⁸ It may also have been Wilmesley's influence with Bonner which secured for Bird a post as his suffragan following his deprivation.⁹

The new bishop of Chester was George Cotes, a Yorkshireman whose previous connection with the diocese was as a canon and prebendary of the cathedral since 1543.¹⁰ By 1538 it had become apparent that he had not subscribed to the 1534 Oath of Succession, with its rejection of papal supremacy, and it was reported to Cromwell that he had preached 'a sinister and seditious sermon' at Sheen on Easter Sunday 1538, to

⁶ Christopher Haigh, 'A Mid-Tudor Ecclesiastical Official: the Curious Career of George Wilmesley', *THSLC*, 122 (1971 for 1970), p. 10.

⁷ Rev. F. Sanders, 'John Bird, D.D., Bishop of Chester, 1541-1554', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 13 (1907), pp. 119-20.

⁸ Haigh, 'A Mid-Tudor Ecclesiastical Official', pp. 17-18, 2-3.

⁹ John Foxe Miscellaneous Papers BL Harley 421, ff. 1-1v; Sanders, 'John Bird', p. 120.

¹⁰ At July 2012 there is no entry in *Oxford DNB* (online edition) for George Cotes (also spelled as variants of Coates, Coots or Cott). The main account of his life is thus still Rev. F. Sanders, 'George Cotes, Bishop of Chester 1554-1555', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, new series, 18 (1911), pp. 79-97. There are also biographical notes in Thomas F. Mayer and Courtney B. Walters (eds), *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole 4. A Biographical Companion: The British Isles* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 140-1. David Loades, 'The Marian Episcopate', p. 42 states that Cotes had been archdeacon of Chester prior to his elevation to the see, presumably based on Foster's, *Alumni Oxoniensis* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117053>> (accessed 10 July 2012). However, there is no other evidence of this and the post of archdeacon at that time is generally understood to have been held by John Bird himself, who had saved the £50 annual salary otherwise due to the archdeacon by retaining the position. Loades's contention regarding Cotes, that it was 'a fairly obvious move to translate him from archdeacon to bishop' is thus debateable. Cotes had been presented to the prebend at Chester by Henry VIII on 24 March 1543 (*LP* xviii (1), 346 (63)); '*Canons of Chester*', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 50-63 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35849>> (accessed 10 July 2012). Loades also states that 'his views on the divisive issues of the day are not recorded' ('The Marian Episcopate', p. 42), although the following discussion will present evidence of some of his opinions.

the effect that no man was bound to obey the King if this was against the law of God.¹¹ He was required to submit and was characterised at the time by Latimer as ‘wilfully witty, Dunsly learned, Moorly affected, bold not a little, zelous more than enough’.¹² It may have been his sermon at Sheen which commended him to Henry Mann, prior there from 1535, and subsequently dean of Chester, who was in a position to assist him to the vacant prebend in 1543.¹³ Latimer’s epigram suggests that as well as sharing Thomas More’s opposition to the Royal Supremacy, Cotes was an object of ridicule among reformers as a proponent of old-fashioned scholastic theology which had come under criticism from Renaissance humanist scholars such as Erasmus.¹⁴ Cotes had an impressive record as an academic, however, and was elected master of Balliol in November 1539 although his election was not universally welcomed.¹⁵ Prior to his election the visitor of Balliol, John Longland, bishop of Lincoln, wrote to Cromwell’s secretary:

I Beseche you remembre the mater of baylive colledge, that ther maye be an indyfferent good man ther chosen. For if Cootes shulde obtaigne itt, I rekonne the collidge vndoon ... the man is soo wilfull, headye, parcyall, and factyous, that within breff tyme ther shulde be fewe in that house, butt of his countreythe.¹⁶

¹¹ *LP* xiii (1), 819.

¹² Strype, *Annals*, i (1), pp. 470-1; Sanders, ‘George Cotes’, pp. 82-3.

¹³ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, ii, pp.11-13.

¹⁴ On the criticism of scholasticism by the majority of leading humanists see, for example, John M. Parrish, ‘Education, Erasmian Humanism and More’s *Utopia*’, *Oxford Review of Education*, 36 (5) (2010), p. 591.

¹⁵ <<http://archives.balliol.ox.ac.uk/History/masters.asp>> (accessed 10 July 2012). Hughes described him as a theologian ‘of some weight’; Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England* (London, 1950-1954), ii, p. 232.

¹⁶ R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), p. 19; TNA: PRO SP 1/154, f. 111 (*LP* xiv (2), 477).

Cromwell pushed through the election, but Cotes was not popular with the fellows and was encouraged to resign in 1545.¹⁷

The reasons for the choice of this seemingly-difficult man as bishop are problematic, although he was well-regarded as a preacher and scholar and his history of opposition to the royal supremacy may have commended him to Queen Mary. Cotes was consecrated bishop in London by Gardiner on 1 April 1554 with seven other new episcopal appointees ‘at St. Mary Overy’s, before the high altar; and a goodly mass was said. And when all was done thay yede [sic] unto my lord chancellor’s, for ther was as grett a dener as youe have seen.’¹⁸ This suggests that the new bishops were presented as a cohesive group, closely allied to government interests and policy. Cotes began his first diocesan visitation in the cathedral chapter house just over two months later, on 11 June, so must have travelled up to Chester quickly in order to put in place the visitation machinery.¹⁹ It is probable that the everyday business of the diocese had continued under George Wilmesley throughout this period, although Haigh has stated that the administration of the diocese had ‘ground to a halt at the death of Edward VI’. He thought, for example, that the consistory court did not sit between June 1553 and June 1554.²⁰ This was based on a lacuna in the court book for the period, combined with a ‘similar gap’ in the depositions book. However, evidence that the court had continued to operate during this period comes on the first page of entries in the court book in June

¹⁷ Sanders, ‘George Cotes’, pp. 85-7. Sanders records that on one occasion a junior fellow unwittingly helped himself to the breakfast laid out for Cotes, provoking a disproportionately furious response at the perceived affront to his position and dignity.

¹⁸ John Gough Nichols (ed.), *The Diary of Henry Machyn, Citizen and Merchant-Taylor of London from A.D. 1550 to A.D. 1563*, Camden Society, old series, 42 (1848), p. 58.

¹⁹ CALS EDV 1/1, ff. 3v, 70. Haigh states, however, that Cotes ‘did not enter his diocese as bishop until early in 1555, when his first official acts took place’; Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 179.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

1554 which includes a record of proceedings in a case which was clearly on-going.²¹ Furthermore, the missing section of the depositions books covers far more than the year to June 1554, as one book ends in July 1552 and the next book does not begin until November 1554.²² The surviving records do, however, reveal one key change; the proceedings in the consistory court on 1 June 1553 are headed '*Consistorio regis curie ecclesiastice*' (in the king's ecclesiastical consistory court) while the proceedings on 7 June 1554 are headed '*Consistorio reuerendi patris domini georgij permissione diuina cestrensis episcopi*' (in the consistory of the reverend father lord George, by divine permission bishop of Chester).²³ This reveals the acceptance by diocesan authorities of the rejection of royal supremacy by June 1554, in accordance with the royal injunction of 4 March 1554.²⁴

Wilmesley continued to occupy a powerful position in diocesan administration, demonstrating continuity in the local church hierarchy which may have weakened his authority in the ostensible volte-face which the restoration of Catholicism represented. George Marsh, the one man known to have been burned for heresy in the diocese during Mary's reign, was not slow to point out that both Wilmesley and Cotes had conformed under Edward VI.²⁵ It may be that Cotes realised that this continuity in personnel might impede the enforcement of change, or perhaps he hoped to curtail Wilmesley's

²¹ CALS EDC 1/13, f. 153; on 7 June 1554 the cause of Elisabeth Rowlands c. Edward Frere is listed '*ad iij^o producendum iuxta retroacta et testes sunt examinanti*' (for the second [time] to produce [witnesses] according to previous proceedings and witnesses have been examined). There is no prior reference to proceedings in this case in extant pages of the court book.

²² CALS EDC 2/5 and EDC 2/6.

²³ CALS EDC 1/13, ff. 140, 153.

²⁴ William Wizeman, 'The Religious Policy of Mary I', in Susan Doran and Thomas S. Freeman (eds), *Mary Tudor: Old and New Perspectives* (Basingstoke, 2011), p. 153.

²⁵ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition, Book 5, p. 1189) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 12 July 2012). Foxe also referred to the burning at Chester in 1556 of 'one Hoke a true martyr of the Lord', but I have not been able to find any other reference to this man and Foxe gives no other information about him (1563 edition, Book 5, p. 1617).

influence, and he appointed Robert Percival as archdeacon of Chester, probably late in 1554.²⁶ Percival was the first archdeacon of Chester appointed by a bishop since the creation of the new see, but possibly did not spend much time in the diocese until he was appointed treasurer of the cathedral in 1556.²⁷ In the following year he was appointed commissary-general and official principal of the consistory court.²⁸ Wilmesley may have had some influence in the appointment, however, as he owned the advowson of the archdeaconry, and Percival paid him a pension of twenty marks for the position.²⁹ John Hanson (or Hampson) was appointed archdeacon of Richmond.³⁰ Hanson had been a scholar of Balliol while Cotes was master.³¹ By 1555, Hanson, rather than Percival, regularly presided in the consistory court. Throughout the short episcopate of Cotes, however, George Wilmesley continued to wield considerable power in the diocese and he was authorised deputy for the first episcopal visitation.³² If the new bishop wished to re-invigorate his see by the imposition of discipline and conformity on his flock,

²⁶ 'Archdeacons of Richmond', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 47-49 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35847>> (accessed 13 July 2012). This gives no precise date for the appointment, however, Ormerod, i, p. 115, records the appointment of Percival in 1554 and his subsequent deprivation and imprisonment in Elizabeth's reign.

²⁷ Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, pp. 36-7. He was probably also rector of Toft in Cambridgeshire and of Ripley in Yorkshire (CCed person ID 32854 (accessed 14 June 2013)). Bird is not known to have appointed an archdeacon of Chester.

²⁸ EDC 1/14, ff. 145v-146.

²⁹ Piccope (First Portion), pp. 118, 120.

³⁰ Hanson replaced John Hurleston who had probably been deprived for marriage; 'Archdeacons: Richmond', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 47-49. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35847>> (accessed 14 June 2013).

³¹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 196; CCed person ID 36769 (accessed 14 June 2013). Hanson was also vicar of Rochdale from 1557 to 1560; F. R. Raines, *The Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, ed. Henry H. Howarth (Chetham Society, new series, 1, 1883), pp. 39-41. He is, however, most unlikely to have been in addition vicar of Hornby in the North Riding of Yorkshire from 1562, as shown in CCed, since he was deprived of the archdeaconry of Richmond in 1559 and went into hiding; J. B. Wainwright, 'Archdeacons Deprived under Queen Elizabeth', *Ampleforth Journal*, 17:1 (1911), p. 41.

³² CALS EDV 1/1, f. 3v. The rectory of Bowdon had been leased by John Bird to George Wilmesley for 99 years from the expiry of a 40 year lease granted in 1546, but at the same time he had granted another lease on similar terms to two local gentry. The latter lease seems to have prevailed as the lease of Bowdon is not mentioned in Wilmesley's will; *Notitia Cestriensis*, p. 40.

Wilmesley was not the ideal agent for such reforms. Not only had he been married, but he also had at least one, and probably two, illegitimate children born during Mary's reign.³³ Furthermore, Haigh has justifiably suggested that his two attempts to stop Cotes passing sentence on George Marsh indicate that he was 'the last person to be a persecuting rigorist'.³⁴

George Cotes died, probably in December 1555. John Foxe gleefully claimed in the 1563 edition of the *Acts and Monuments* that just as Cotes had caused George Marsh to be burned, he had in his turn been visited by the judgement of God which had caused him to be 'burned with a harlot' due to his 'wicked and adulterous behavior'.³⁵ His successor, nominated in April 1556, was Cuthbert Scott, like Cotes, an eloquent preacher.³⁶ He had been appointed vice-chancellor of Cambridge University in 1554 and took part in a public disputation at Oxford with Cranmer, Latimer and Ridley. He contributed to the success of Pole's reconstruction of the universities when he returned to Cambridge in January 1557 as head of his visitation commission. During this visitation he caused the bones of the reformers Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius to be exhumed and burned. He may thus be regarded as something of a zealot, but appears to have been conscientious in administering his diocese, and was resident and a regular preacher there for most of the period of his episcopate. In his administration of the

³³ Haigh, 'A Mid-Tudor ecclesiastical official', pp. 17-8.

³⁴ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 185; John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition, Book 5, p. 1190) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 12 July 2012). Foxe reports his first interruption, 'good my Lord, stay, stay, for if ye procede any further, it wil be to late to call it agayn.'

³⁵ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition, Book 5, p. 1191) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 21 July 2012). In this context burn = to infect with sores, especially with venereal disease *OED* (online edition accessed 25 July 2012). Foxe initially claimed that this positive identification of the disease which afflicted Cotes was affirmed on oath by the coroner, but toned this down somewhat in later editions, possibly because the veracity of the story was disputed.

³⁶ Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, p. 24; Kenneth Carleton, 'Scott, Cuthbert (d. 1565)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 25 July 2012).

diocese of Chester a major achievement was his success in eclipsing the influence of George Wilmesley. This was partly achieved by developing the roles of the archdeacons, particularly John Hanson.

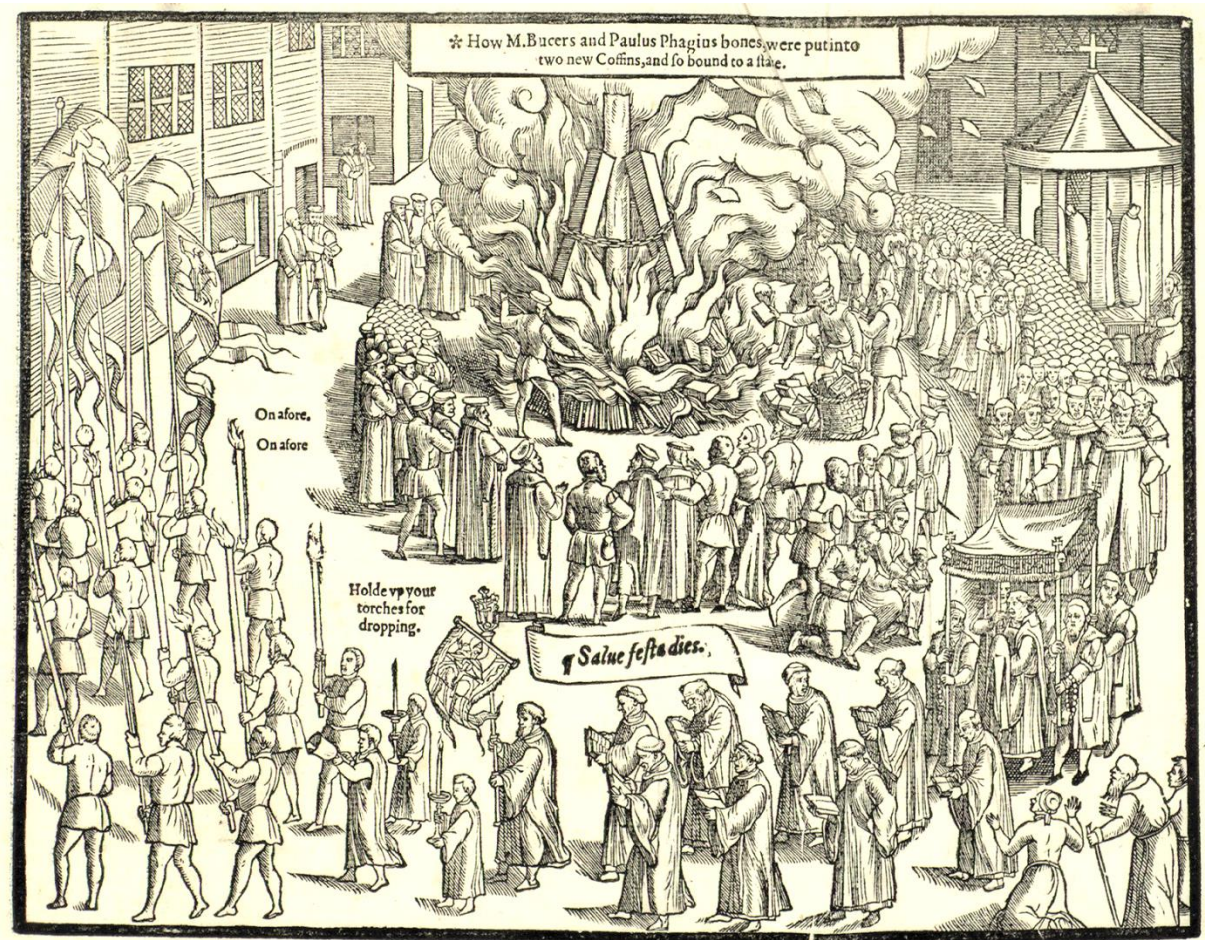


Figure 13 – Cuthbert Scott (under the canopy) oversees the burning of the bones of Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius. (John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition, Book 5, p. 1629)

(HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011)

Available from <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 25 July 2012)).³⁷

A vital tool for both bishops in the Marian reconstruction of the church was visitation. Each deanery was visited in turn in June and July 1554 and it seems probable

³⁷ This illustration is reproduced by kind permission of the editors. The image is also the Frontispiece to Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, where he explains that the veil in which the sacrament was carried by Scott had been personally blessed by Pope Paul IV.

that all of this part of the visitation process was carried out by Wilmesley, who was certainly the visitor of the cathedral and deanery of Chester on 18 June.³⁸ Cotes did not confine himself to Chester, however, and George Marsh has left a vivid account of the bishop's visit to Lancaster, where he 'there set vp and confirmed all blasphemous Idolatry, as holy water castyng, procession gaddyng, Mattens mumblyng, children confirmyng, Masse hearyng, Idols vp setting, with such hethenish rites forbidden by God; but no Gospell preachyng'.³⁹

It is clear from the visitation records that the rural deans of Chester diocese had continued to exercise a disciplinary role throughout the changes of administration. Some parishioners were presented again at the visitation for transgressions which had already been punished by a local dean some years earlier, and such cases were generally dismissed without further penance.⁴⁰ In other cases, penalties imposed by the local incumbent were considered sufficient punishment.⁴¹ Thus the emphasis on discipline which Duffy has seen as characteristic of the Marian regime was not necessarily a new process in the diocese, although it may have been applied more rigorously than before.

An integral part of the restoration of the mass was the return of the high altars to the chancel in place of the wooden tables of Edward's reign, together with the

³⁸ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 16.

³⁹ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition, Book 11, p. 1774) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 12 July 2012). The date of his visit is not recorded but probably, despite Sanders ('George Cotes', pp. 90-2) did not coincide with the ecclesiastical visitation. This was to have been at Hornby for Lancaster deanery on 12 July 1554; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 1v. The removal of Marsh to Chester followed Cotes's visit to Lancaster and seems to have taken place two or three months before he was burned on 12 April 1555.

⁴⁰ For example; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 98; Davenham – Thomas Leftwich was subject to on-going penalties imposed by the dean of Manchester in Lancashire for an unspecified offence.

⁴¹ For example; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 93; Daresbury – John Cheshire and Margery Lachford '*fornicatores/ comparuit vir et fatetur delictum sed penas pergeunt iniunctas per vicarium de rostorn quare iudex dimissit*' (fornicators/ the man appeared and confessed to the offence but penalties [imposed] by the vicar of Rostherne are on-going and therefore the judge dismissed [the cause]). Daresbury was probably a chapelry of the parish of Runcorn, at this time, rather than a parish in its own right.

restoration of the necessary books, equipment, vestments and images. As Duffy has put it, 'it is in the effects of this parochial reconstruction that we can most clearly discern the responsiveness of the nation to the restoration of traditional religion.'⁴² Haigh has calculated that 85 per cent of churches and chapels visited in the diocese of Chester (not just Lancashire) in 1554 had their altar, cross and images and that the 1557 visitation indicated that 91 per cent had their rood and other ornaments.⁴³ However, it is not clear that this was the case in Cheshire. In the course of visitations, it was the churchwardens who were normally held responsible for offences involving church furnishings or equipment. The reports presented to the Cheshire visitors lack the detail of, for example, Harpsfield's visitation of Kent which presented a meticulous record of every fault.⁴⁴ At the 1554 Chester visitation, the wardens of five parishes and one chapelry in Middlewich deanery had been presented, but there is no entry detailing the nature of the faults and the hearings were adjourned without further comment. In one other Middlewich case, the parish of Davenham, an entry recording an adjournment has been made but is crossed through and it is recorded that the wardens appeared '*quibus iudex iniunxit ad recipiendum omnia necessaria in dicta ecclesia*' (whom the judge ordered to restore (or recover) everything necessary in the said church).⁴⁵ This suggests that a number of items had not been restored. In some cases, for example at Lymm and Runcorn, the wardens had been presented for unspecified offences but either they failed to appear or there is no record of any proceedings.⁴⁶ In all these cases, the churches and

⁴² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars; Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c.1580* (paperback second edition, New Haven and London, 2005), p. 543.

⁴³ Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (paperback edition, Oxford, 1993), pp. 211-2.

⁴⁴ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 555.

⁴⁵ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 97v.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, ff. 91v, 94v.

chapels had clearly been visited, but the precise nature of the offences presented cannot be known. In other cases, although an entry has been made, the wording is general in nature and does not specify that the altar has not been restored. At Rostherne, in Frodsham deanery, the wardens are presented because '*ecclesia et Cimiterium paruntur ruinas et carent ornamentis et ceteris necessarijs*' (the church and cemetery in ruins and they lack ornaments and other necessary things). A separate slip of paper, which has been inserted elsewhere in the book, lists the items missing from Rostherne and also records that 'the hyght alter ys to be Repeyryd & not dycent.'⁴⁷ However, there is no way to infer the defects in the altar from the presentment as recorded. Thus it may well be that other churches which are recorded as 'ruined' or generally lacking had also not restored their high altar. Furthermore, the wording of the list of defects suggests that there was a high altar at Rostherne, but that it was not in a condition which the visitors found acceptable. It is thus probable that it had never been completely removed in Edward's reign but had been damaged or defaced in some way but left *in situ*.

The 1554 visitation record lists the presentments from 59 parishes and 13 chapelries in five of the county's seven deaneries.⁴⁸ In 39 parishes (66 per cent) there was either a return of '*omnia bene*'; or the wardens have not been presented or the presentment involves specific offences not connected with the church building, such as missing vestments and banners or problems with the churchyard. Of the remaining parishes, in only 3 cases is there specific reference to failure to restore the altar.⁴⁹ However, in the remaining 17 parishes, the wardens have been presented but no

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, f. 87v. The slip of paper is not foliated but is currently inserted between ff. 73 and 74.

⁴⁸ CALS EDV 1/1, ff. 70-109.

⁴⁹ These were at Ince in Chester deanery (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 76v); Stoke in Wirral deanery (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 78) and Wybunbury in Nantwich deanery (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 104v).

offences are listed (9 parishes) or there is a general reference to the need for repairs in the church itself, which may have included work needed on the altar, as at Rostherne (8 parishes). In respect of the chapelries, in 3 cases there were no offences by wardens; in 4 cases the wardens were presented, but no offences are recorded; in 5 cases the chapel was ruined or in need of repair and in only 1 case is there specific reference to failure to repair the altar.⁵⁰ Therefore, although the evidence supports a definite conclusion that altars had not been restored in 3 parishes and 1 chapel (7 per cent); for 17 parishes and 9 chapelries (36 per cent) the evidence is inadequate since either there are no offences specified in the presentment or there is a general reference to the need for repairs. I do not think that it can be assumed that in Cheshire more than 57 per cent of parishes and chapelries definitely had altars which were considered by the visitors of 1554 to be adequately restored. Although some may have had a high altar, this may have been in the church from before the time of Edward VI, but never removed. The 1554 visitation evidence thus does not unambiguously support Haigh's claim that 85 per cent of parishes in Chester diocese as a whole had apparently restored their altars by then. It might more reasonably be said that the evidence suggests that they had been fully reinstated in just over half of the Cheshire parishes and chapelries visited; in other cases the evidence is inconclusive.

This is not, of course, to deny that in many places parishioners enthusiastically hurried to restore items which had been destroyed or plundered by the Edwardian commissioners. At St Mary on the Hill in Chester, the churchwardens' accounts for the year from Easter 1553 record a payment of 16d 'to the carvar for a frame to the tabull of

⁵⁰ This was at Churton (also known as Churchen Heath in the parish of St Oswald, Chester); (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 74).

the hee alter'. This could have been either a stone or wooden altar. They also set up an 'angell' and paid 20d 'for gyllydyng a Nemyche of owre lade'. It is also clear that parishioners were donating, or perhaps returning, other items, as 12d was paid 'for a sokett to the crosse that mester vadrey dyd gyue to the churche'.⁵¹

There were seven presentments of clergy in 1554, and where there is any record of proceedings, the matter had been referred to the bishop. The majority of the disciplining of the clergy was carried out in the consistory, rather than through the visitation process. The presentments of laity in 1554 mainly relate to personal sexual offences. Of the 217 cases involving the laity, 190 (88 per cent) involve this type of offence. The city of Chester provided a wider variety of offences than the rest of the county, including three of the five cases of failure to attend church or confession.⁵² The other two of these offences occurred in Nantwich deanery. The three of those accused of failure to attend church who attended for correction all successfully claimed to have attended church in another parish, the other two men accused did not appear.⁵³ Two other men were accused of non-attendance at church combined with other offences. One man in Nantwich deanery was accused of also creating a disturbance on Sunday, but the case was dismissed on the condition that he would behave better in future.⁵⁴ The other such case was in Chester city, where the man was accused of not attending church, drunkenness and abusing his wife. He ignored the indictment.⁵⁵ Other cases which did not involve personal sexual incontinence included two cases of personal failings such as

⁵¹ CALS P 20/13/1; J. P. Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill Chester* (London, 1898), p. 239.

⁵² The offences were presented at Holy Trinity; CALS EDV 1/1 f. 73v and St Michael; CALS EDV f. 72v.

⁵³ At Acton parish; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 108. Acton was a large parish with a number of chapelries, including that of the county's second largest town, Nantwich. The man who turned up for correction claimed to have attended Church Minshull and was told to go to his own church in future.

⁵⁴ This was also at Acton; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 108.

⁵⁵ In the parish of Holy Trinity; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 73v.

drunkenness and five cases of keeping a brothel.⁵⁶ No cases of heresy of any kind were uncovered in the entire county.

The 1556 visitation was carried out following the death of George Cotes under the auspices of the archbishop of York, Nicholas Heath.⁵⁷ Records survive for only three of the county's seven deaneries. The correction process was carried out in August 1556, and the only recorded visitor was George Wilmesley.⁵⁸ In eight parishes of Macclesfield deanery, the wardens were presented but no offences are listed. All but one of the specified faults by the laity comprised moral lapses, punished by a fine and public penance. An alternative to public penance, perhaps in the case of wealthier parishioners, was the imposition of an additional financial penalty such as the fine of 3s 4d imposed on John Crutchlow of Middlewich towards the repair of his parish church.⁵⁹ The only presentment which did not involve a moral lapse was at Lymm where Joan Starkey was presented because her servant had carted a load of hay 'apon relicke Sunday last'.⁶⁰ Relic Sunday was celebrated in July on the third Sunday after Midsummer Day, and was traditionally one of the holy days when indulgences were granted.⁶¹ The offence of working on the Sabbath was exacerbated by the fact that this was a special festival. The presentment of this offence suggests that it was unusual, and perhaps the diocesan authorities were making a point that festivals revived under Mary were to be observed with reverence. The penalty imposed was two days' penance in a shift plus a fine to be imposed at Bury, where the consistory court sometimes sat.

⁵⁶ Both the cases of drunkenness were in the city of Chester at St Michael's; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 72v. One of the brothels was in Chester, again in St Michael's parish and the other four were in Nantwich deanery at Bunbury, Coppenhall and Marbury; CALS EDV 1/1, ff. 108v, 106v.

⁵⁷ CALS EDV 1/1, ff. 157-168v.

⁵⁸ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 157.

⁵⁹ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 159v.

⁶⁰ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 163v.

⁶¹ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 396.

In general, however, the 1556 visitation gives the impression that it was hurried and superficial. There are no recorded presentments of clergy, so it does not appear that there was any article of enquiry involving clerical supervision. Scott's primary visitation began in August 1557.⁶² A surviving set of articles are hand-written and come from Lancashire, but may be assumed to have been the same for the entire diocese as they are headed 'Articles to be enquired vpon in the vysitacion at chester'.⁶³ Bonner's 1554 visitation articles were widely adopted by other bishops as the basis for their own visitations, but Scott's articles are much less detailed than Bonner's, with different emphasis.⁶⁴ They are divided into three groups. The first group of articles concerns the state of the church buildings and the provision of appropriate equipment for the 'doing of godes servyce'. One article of this group relates to brawling in church, perhaps in the interests of instilling reverence for church buildings, as enquiry was to be made whether any of the church buildings 'be polluted by effucyon of blood or ether feghting or brawling'. The returns do not indicate that this was a major problem in Cheshire where just one man was presented at Dodleston for disturbing the service with a drawn sword. His penance in linen shift was commuted to a fine of 2s, payable to John Hanson, one indication that Hanson was becoming increasingly influential in the diocese.⁶⁵ The last of this section of the articles concerned the provision of vicars to appropriated churches. This suggests that there may have been problems with the provision of clergy in some

⁶² CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 1. The correction book is in poor condition, having been badly damaged by damp, insects and mould.

⁶³ Greater Manchester County Record Office E7/12/1/2. The articles are not numbered.

⁶⁴ W. H. Frere and W. P. Kennedy (eds), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, Alcuin Club Collections (1910), ii, pp. 330-59.

⁶⁵ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 14v.

parishes where advowsons had been transferred following the dissolution of the monasteries and colleges.

In 1557 the church buildings were reportedly in better condition than they had been three years earlier.⁶⁶ Of the 80 parishes and chapelries named in the visitation record for Cheshire deaneries, 16 (20 per cent) reported either that the altars needed repair or that the church was in need of repair or ruined. This was a considerable improvement on the position in 1554. In 1557 the investigation seems to have been more rigorous, and wardens were threatened with penalties of up to £4, usually to be paid towards the repair of the cathedral, if they failed to effect the necessary repairs.⁶⁷ There are three specific references to altars being out of repair; at the chapelry of Wrenbury and the parishes of Wybunbury and Barthomley.⁶⁸ In the last case the wardens were required to attend the consistory as they had failed to complete the repairs which had been specified in a bill. However, the presentments suggest that all the required altars, images, ornaments and equipment had been replaced in most churches in Cheshire. Exceptions included Eccleston where the wardens '*caerent libris et alijs necessarijs*' (lack books and other necessities).⁶⁹ This was a remarkable achievement in little over three years.

The next set of articles concerned the clergy; points of inquiry included practical matters such as pluralism (but not non-residence), irregularities in presentation, marriage and clothing but also spiritual factors such as heretical or schismatical views. The poor

⁶⁶ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 6-32v; 43-47v; 50-64v.

⁶⁷ For example at Bowdon (EDV 1/2a, f. 24) where the church and cemetery were in ruins the penalty for not attending to the repairs would be 40s and at Great Budworth (EDV 1/2a, f. 27) where the church and cemetery needed repair the penalty would be £4.

⁶⁸ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 87, 88. Faults reported in 1554 were that at Wrenbury the church was in ruins (there is no specific reference to an altar); at Wybunbury the altar had not been built and at Barthomley the wardens were fined 6d, but no offence is entered.

⁶⁹ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 9v.

condition of the correction book means that some of the records are not easily legible, but there seem to have been five presentments of clergy. At Great Budworth the vicar was presented for failure to maintain hospitality and at Coppenhall the rector was required to appear at a later date to answer certain articles.⁷⁰ The vicar of Runcorn was also required to appear before the bishop.⁷¹ The two other presentments involved Richard Hassall at Audlem who was accused of marrying strangers without banns and had fled rather than answer the charge, and an unnamed one of the two rectors at Malpas who was not resident and whose rectory was a ruin.⁷²

The investigation of the laity, however, was rigorous and the section of the articles involving enquiries into their behaviour comprises twelve items covering religious and moral matters. The first of these is an enquiry into the existence of ‘assembles or conventicles wherein is redd privie lectures sermons or playes’. Although none were discovered in Cheshire there was clearly a concern that such groups might have developed, although whether this concern was motivated by national or local events is unclear. As in 1554, the majority of presentments were for moral lapses, but many more individuals were presented for not attending church than had previously been the case. The majority were from the deaneries of Chester and Nantwich and this visitation uncovered one case of heresy at Bunbury, although the suspect had fled.⁷³ Most of those presented for non-attendance either had some excuse, such as that they

⁷⁰ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 26v, 91v.

⁷¹ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 31.

⁷² CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 21. This could have been either of the two rectors, Arthur Dudley or William Hill. Dudley had already been disciplined in the consistory court for letting the chancel and rectory fall into disrepair, following which he been presented with a bill for a share of work done (CALS EDC 1/14, f. 66v; CALS EDP 186/7). Dudley retained his share of the rectory until his death at the end of 1577 (CCEd person ID 24073). Hill retained his moiety until 1562 when he resigned on an annual pension of £16 (Ormerod, ii, p. 608). Neither seems to have resided in Malpas for any length of time.

⁷³ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 88.

had been required to work, or denied the charge. Those who denied the accusation were mostly permitted to vindicate themselves through compurgation, such as Joanna Quark at Thornton who was only required to produce four compurgators.⁷⁴ Many of the accused who lived in Chester claimed that they had attended another church, and were warned to keep to their own parish church in future, although William Wett, from the parish of St Peter, was excused as he had a licence from the bishop to sing in the cathedral; perhaps this was an indication of an enthusiastic return to the old services.⁷⁵

However, an indication that the thoroughness of the visitation process was dependent upon those who were responsible for making the enquiries comes from the parish of Bowdon. The incumbent there since October 1556 had been John Hanson, a key figure in the Marian diocesan administration and reconstruction. At this parish there was an unusual presentment of seven men, named together but apparently charged with a variety of offences. Of the four who turned up, one was charged with an unspecified violation for which he was punished by having to provide a candle to the value of 2d and to donate 4d to the poor. The other three were charged with failing to take up a collection during divine service for which they had to do penance in linen shift with bare feet and head.⁷⁶ On the basis of the penance imposed this failure to organise a collection was taken seriously. The purpose of the collection seems likely to have been to raise money to refurbish the church which was reported to be ruinous.

One of the few references to preaching in the diocese comes from a presentment at Thornton where a parishioner had rung the bells while the curate was in the pulpit,

⁷⁴ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 14.

⁷⁵ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 16.

⁷⁶ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 25.

presumably to drown his words.⁷⁷ Whether this was due to personal animosity or doctrinal conviction is not specified. Scott's visitation articles do not include any allusion to sermons, although Bonner's articles for London include instructions about preaching.⁷⁸

A defining feature of Bird's episcopate had been the drastic decline in the number of ordinations, to the point where the evidence indicates that there were no ordinations at Chester between the end of 1547 and the beginning of 1555.⁷⁹ The resumption of ordinations under the Marian bishops suggests that attempts to re-invigorate the church enjoyed some success. By the end of Mary's reign ordinations had reached a level not seen since the 1520s.⁸⁰ Three ordination ceremonies were held in 1555, but following the death of Cotes at the end of that year no further ceremonies were held until 1557 when there were four, followed by five in 1558.⁸¹ The majority of the ordinations were performed in Chester, either at the cathedral or in the bishop's private chapel but the last ceremony of Mary's reign was carried out by Thomas Stanley, bishop of Sodor and Man, in Preston parish church in December 1558. A total of 170 men were ordained during this period. Based on identified titles to orders, 40 came from Cheshire, whereas 73 came from Lancashire.⁸² The population of Cheshire

⁷⁷ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 14.

⁷⁸ Frere and Kennedy (eds), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, ii, pp. 334.

⁷⁹ W. F. Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register of the Diocese of Chester, 1542-1558', *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 4 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 43, 1902), pp. 80-1; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 155. As discussed above, however, the declining number of candidates for ordination in the early sixteenth century was not unique to Chester diocese.

⁸⁰ Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', pp. 81 -112; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 200.

⁸¹ The ordination details in the following discussion are taken from Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', pp. 85 -115. The discussion here is based on the number of men ordained, not the number of ordinations, since some men were ordained to several orders successively during the period.

⁸² These figures are calculated from Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', pp. 81 -112. The use of titles to extrapolate residence of ordinands is, however, problematic. The implications of titles are not fully understood, and the residence of the gentleman or institution supplying the title is not an infallible guide to the residence of the ordinand. Furthermore, it has not been possible to identify the residence of 13 of

was probably about three-quarters that of Lancashire at this time, so that proportionally more ordinands came forward from Lancashire than from Cheshire.⁸³ This might suggest that the Marian reconstruction found greater support in Lancashire than in Cheshire. However, it is notable that 36 of the 170 men ordained had letters dimissory from other dioceses. These ranged from Hereford to Carlisle and also included several Welsh dioceses, suggesting that the bishops of Chester may have been more diligent in organising ordinations than other bishops. The fee for ordination at Chester seems to have been 12d for most orders and a note was sometimes made when the fee had not been paid in full.⁸⁴ Ordination ceremonies were thus a source of income which may help to explain why so many were held in Chester diocese, which was one of the poorest. The ceremony in June 1557, for example, brought in £1 19s in fees.⁸⁵ There is no indication in the Marian register of how many men ordained priest might have been graduates, as all are referred to as '*Dominus*'.

The evidence indicates that the Marian administration initially faced some difficulty in imposing any reform programme in Chester, partly because of the influence of George Wilmesley. It was not until his power had been eclipsed with the appointment of two staunchly Catholic archdeacons, both of whom refused to conform under Elizabeth, that the work of reconstruction could begin. The death of Cotes at the end of 1555 was doubly important. On the one hand the vacancy was a further period without

the titles of the Marian ordinands. The identified titles, other than those from Lancashire and Cheshire, were from residents of other counties of the diocese; additionally some clergy were ordained on letters dimissory, particularly from Welsh dioceses. However, titles have been used as a guide to residence in the absence of better evidence.

⁸³ C. B. Phillips and J. H. Smith, *A Regional History of England - Lancashire and Cheshire*, (paperback edition, Harlow, Essex, 1994), p. 7. Had the number ordained reflected the relative levels of population, it might have been expected that about 55 ordinands would have been from Cheshire.

⁸⁴ For example, against the name of Robert More, ordained subdeacon in June 1558 is noted '*non soluit in toto*' (not paid in full); Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', p. 107.

⁸⁵ Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', pp. 92-4.

effective control, but on the other, the appointment of the archdeacon of Richmond, John Hanson, as the commissary of the archbishop of York helped to enforce his authority over that of Wilmesley. However, for two of the five and a half years of Mary's reign episcopal vacancies meant that the diocese lacked effective leadership which must have slowed the programme of restoration. Despite this, the church buildings and equipment were largely refurbished and restored, possibly not to their previous standard, but it may be noted that by the end of the reign at least one parish had replaced not one, but three altars.⁸⁶

The Parish Clergy

In this section the effect of the Marian hierarchy's emphasis on discipline and ritual upon the parish clergy of Cheshire will be examined, as far as surviving evidence allows. The types of offences presented at visitation or referred to the consistory court will also indicate the extent to which the clergy had embraced change in Edward's reign. An inevitable consequence of the decline in ordinations under John Bird was a shortage of newly-ordained clergy in the early years of Mary's reign, and, as we have seen, the number of parish clergy had reduced by more than a third between 1548 and 1554, although the loss had been greater in some deaneries than others. An additional factor in Mary's reign was the particular effect of epidemics on the clergy because of their

⁸⁶ CALS EDV 1/1 between ff. 110 and 111; two undated slips of paper inserted between the pages of the 1554 visitation book. One is identifiable as relating to Dodleston, the other unnamed, which could have been anywhere in the diocese. The unnamed church enclosed an undated list of its equipment, including a note that they had 'Sett vp iij awters agayne'.

pastoral role in visiting the sick and dying.⁸⁷ The obligation of Catholic clergy to take the host to those sick parishioners who requested it and to hear last confessions and to administer unction to the dying rendered them particularly vulnerable.⁸⁸ The implementation and success of any programme to eradicate pluralism and improve educational standards among the parish clergy of Cheshire will also be considered.⁸⁹

One of the first orders regulating the conduct of the clergy in general, not just in the parishes, was the inhibition against married clergy performing mass. This was publicised in a proclamation of December 1553, following the parliamentary repeal of the Edwardian legislation permitting clerical marriage.⁹⁰ The injunctions ordering the deprivation of married clergy followed in March 1554. Deprived clergy who were willing to separate from their wives and do penance might hope to acquire a new benefice in time, 'so it be not in the same place' and thus out of the way of temptation.⁹¹ Although George Wilmesley was married, his position in the diocese was not derived from any benefice, which may be how he survived this purge.⁹² Only two Cheshire clergy are recorded in the Bishop's Act Book as having been deprived in 1554, although in neither case is the reason for the deprivation recorded.⁹³ These were John Lepington, prebendary of Chester, and William Eaton, rector of Coppenhall. John Lepington is known to have been married, as a deposition made by his wife survives, and he may

⁸⁷ John S. Moore has calculated that Lancashire lost over a fifth of its population between 1546-8 and 1563 and Cheshire possibly lost even more; John S. Moore, 'Population Trends in Lancashire, 1548-1563', *THSLC*, 157 (2009 for 2008), pp. 54-5.

⁸⁸ Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), p. 8; Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 182-3.

⁸⁹ Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, p. 26.

⁹⁰ Nichols (ed.), *Diary of Henry Machyn*, p. 50; Hilda Grieve, 'The Deprived Married Clergy in Essex, 1553-61', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 4th series, 22 (1940), pp. 145-6.

⁹¹ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1583 edition, Book 10, p. 1448) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 20 August 2012) .

⁹² Richard Copsey, 'Bird, John (d. 1558)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 20 August 2012).

⁹³ CALS EDA 1/1, ff. 41v, 43.

have been instrumental in encouraging the cathedral clergy to marry.⁹⁴ Like John Bird, however, following his deprivation he moved to a living in the diocese of London, to which he was presented by Richard Rich at the nomination of Edmund Bonner.⁹⁵ The marital status of William Eaton has not been established, but he is not known to have acquired any other benefice and did not recover the living of Coppenhall. This went to John Smallwood, who had been ordained priest at the age of about 21 in 1546 and had then taken up an appointment as an assistant at Acton.⁹⁶ He was presented to the living of Coppenhall on 6 June 1554 by Richard Wilbraham.⁹⁷ This was probably Richard Wilbraham of Woodhey, who held the right of presentation *pro hac vice* from the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield. Wilbraham was a lifelong servant of Mary Tudor. He entered her service while she was at Ludlow in about 1525 and had been promoted to master of her jewel house on her accession.⁹⁸ Wilbraham was a committed Catholic. In his will of July 1558 he invoked the Virgin Mary and the holy company of saints and left money for annual prayers and a requiem mass for the souls of himself and his family. He also left money to the poor of several parishes, including Coppenhall.⁹⁹ John Smallwood, the new young rector there, seems to have had a strong vocation, although he managed to accommodate the religious changes of the times. He was required to appear following the 1557 visitation '*ad redendum articulis*' (to return articles), but the nature of these

⁹⁴ CALS EDC 2/4, ff. 127, 121.

⁹⁵ CCED person ID 63583 (accessed 5 March 2012).

⁹⁶ CCED person ID 32473 (accessed 20 August 2012); Irvine (ed.), 'Ordination Register', p. 72; CALS EDV 2/4, f.13. His approximate age at ordination has been extrapolated from *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxi, p. 21, where in a report of a deposition in 1574/5 his age was stated to be 50.

⁹⁷ CALS EDA 1/1, f. 43.

⁹⁸ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/wilbraham-%28wilbram%29-richard-1504-58>> (accessed 20 August 2012).

⁹⁹ Piccope (First Portion), pp. 85-90.

articles is not specified.¹⁰⁰ He remained, apparently resident in his parish, for almost thirty years until his death late in 1583, and was rural dean of Middlewich by 1571.¹⁰¹ His will expresses his belief in his salvation ‘by that one oblation of Christe Jesus my redeemer fynished uppon the crosse’. It also makes several references to his books, which he clearly prized, but he also valued his numerous cross bows, racks and arrows. He is not known to have married, but had at least one illegitimate daughter.

Two other parochial incumbents who are definitely known to have been married were Thomas Taylor, rector of the wealthy parish of St Mary on the Hill in Chester and Nicholas Hyde, vicar of Mottram in Macclesfield deanery.¹⁰² Taylor had been presented in 1546, married in 1550 and had at least one child baptised in 1553.¹⁰³ It is thus reasonable to assume that he had left the living by 1554 due to deprivation for marriage. In the 1548 call book he is given the title ‘Mr’, although it has not been possible to ascertain what type of degree he held, nor where he obtained it.¹⁰⁴ His successor was Charles Duckworth, instituted in September 1554. He was probably a young man when presented to the living, as he held it for over forty years until his death in 1596.¹⁰⁵ He had a similar career progression to Smallwood at Coppenhall, having been a stipendiary and curate at Aldford from at least 1542 before his appointment at St Mary’s.¹⁰⁶

However, unlike Smallwood who seems to have been reasonably conscientious, there

¹⁰⁰ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 31, 91v.

¹⁰¹ CALS EDC 5 1571/10 Middlewich (issue of commission to Smallwood as rural dean of Middlewich to investigate a defamation case involving sexual immorality by a clergyman); Piccope (Second Portion), pp. 59-61. Smallwood left bequests to Thomas Wilbraham of Woodhey, suggesting a close relationship with this family.

¹⁰² Earwaker, *St. Mary-on-the-Hill*, pp. 81, 107; TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 75.

¹⁰³ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 81.

¹⁰⁴ CALS EDV 2/4, f. 23v.

¹⁰⁵ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁶ W. F. Irvine, (ed.), ‘List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester, 1541-2; Together with a List of the Tenths and Subsidy Payable in the Deaneries of the Archdeaconry of Chester’, *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 3 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 33, 1896), p. 5; CALS EDV 2/2, f. 1v.

were complaints about his neglect of his cure from the time of his appointment. In 1559 the wardens and parishioners complained that their parson 'of longe tyme hathe not byn residente with them ... nether makithe distribucions' and in 1592 it was reported that the rector was 'nott resident, noe sermons preched by his procurement. He hath ij benefices doth nott lease the same to his Curatt nor keepeth a precher'.¹⁰⁷ Nicholas Hyde, however, remained with his parishioners as curate at Mottram following his deprivation, and was restored to the living in 1559.¹⁰⁸ He died in 1575 and was succeeded in the parish by his son.¹⁰⁹

Complaints about non-beneficed married clergy in Cheshire were usually referred to the consistory.¹¹⁰ The first of these cases were dealt with at a special session, presided over by George Cotes, which met on 23 March 1555.¹¹¹ This was during Lent, the traditional period of repentance and penance, although the timing may not have been deliberate. It was the first occasion on which the bishop is known to have presided over the consistory court since the formation of the diocese in 1541, indicating how seriously the local church hierarchy took the charges. Three priests who were accused of being married were probably from Lancashire; Richard Taylor, Robert Wright and Robert

¹⁰⁷ C. J. Kitching, (ed.), 'The Royal Visitation of 1559; Act Book for the Northern Province', *Surtees Society*, 197 (1975 for 1972), p. 85; W. F. Irvine, 'The Bishop of Chester's Visitation Book, 1592', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, 5 (part 4) (1895), p. 408. I have not been able to trace the identity of any other benefice held by Duckworth.

¹⁰⁸ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 75.

¹⁰⁹ Earwaker, ii, p. 127; Ormerod, iii, p. 854.

¹¹⁰ The only such case presented at visitation instead was that of John Cotgreave and Alice, his wife, at Christleton, although unfortunately, there is no record of any charge or proceedings in this matter. CALS EDV 1/1, f. 76.

¹¹¹ CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 12v-13.

Houghton.¹¹² Taylor and Wright were ordered to put away their wives.¹¹³ Robert Houghton failed to appear, and may have fled.

Two other matters were heard at this session, and Haigh stated that these also concerned married clergy, but this is based on a misinterpretation of the evidence. Thomas Clayton was summoned ‘*quia maritavit margaretam raynforde alias cleyton in secundo gradu prioris vxoris suo*’ (because he has married Margaret Rainford otherwise known as Clayton in the second degree [of affinity] to his former wife). There is no suggestion that he was a clerk.¹¹⁴ Roger Mason, vicar of Huyton in Lancashire, was charged with conducting the marriage without banns in the knowledge of the impediment. Robert Halsall, his curate, rather than citing Mason for marriage, as Haigh claimed, was accused by Mason of preparing to solemnise the marriage after calling the banns three times but once the vicar had learned of the impediment he stopped the proceedings. The curate was ordered to provide 7d worth of wax for the sepulchre as a penalty for his ignorance.

Two assistant clergy from Cheshire were summoned to the consistory in May 1555, although their cases were not heard by the bishop. Richard Butterson had been ordained subdeacon in 1546, and had been married some two years later by William

¹¹² Haigh stated that these men were all from Warrington, but their parish is not named in the proceedings. There was also a Richard Taylor at Prestbury in 1548, so it is possible that he was the man charged. Robert Houghton or Aughton failed to appear at the consistory court hearing; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 180.

¹¹³ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 51; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 180-1; CCEd person ID 22063 (accessed 24 August 2012). They were both then summoned again four months later accused of continuing to consort with their ‘pretenced’ wives and Wright was subsequently charged with the same offence on two later occasions and was suspended from his duties, although he was again serving the parish in 1565 so must have been reinstated subsequently.

¹¹⁴ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 13.

Dalton, an assistant clergyman in the parish of Barthomley.¹¹⁵ It is not known what post Butterton held by 1555, but by then he not only had two children but had grown out his tonsure, grown a beard and was wearing clothing deemed to be unsuitable. He was required to separate from his wife, and thus, presumably also his children, under pain of excommunication. He was also ordered to restore his tonsure, remove his beard and wear suitable clothing or suffer a similar penalty. Clerical beards were widely associated with Protestant clergy, which is one reason why consistory courts ordered their removal.¹¹⁶ Peter Williamson was summoned to the same session and also ordered to restore his tonsure; remove his beard and to dress in appropriate clerical dress. He does not seem to have married Margaret Cottingham, but was ordered not to frequent, cohabit or consort with her in future on pain of excommunication.¹¹⁷ In June 1555, Randle Downe, vicar of Over, appeared at the consistory, also accused of fornication for which he had been presented at the 1554 visitation.¹¹⁸ He strenuously denied the charge of marriage with Alice, his servant, and also denied the charge of fornication with her, and of fathering several children.¹¹⁹ He was permitted to establish his innocence by means of compurgation with four local clergy. This suggests the existence of local networks of clergy who looked to each other for support. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact

¹¹⁵ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 32; Richard Butterton is CCed person ID 35588 (accessed 24 August 2012) and William Dalton is CCed person ID 32100 (accessed 24 August 2012). No action seems to have been taken against William Dalton, probably because he had married Butterton legally during the reign of Edward VI.

¹¹⁶ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 139; Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, p. 73, Plate 2. The double standards evident in the treatment of the parish clergy by their superiors are striking. In common with many Italian churchmen, Cardinal Pole had grown a long, flowing beard, while some parish clergy were ordered by the Chester Consistory Court to remove their beards and to cut their hair on pain of sanctions.

¹¹⁷ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 32v. This man may have been the same as the curate of Upton in Wirral deanery who was noted in 1592 amongst 'no graduates nor preachers but catechizers', but he does not appear in Cheshire or apparently elsewhere in the diocese before that; CCed person ID 30573 (accessed 24 August 2012).

¹¹⁸ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 102v.

¹¹⁹ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 39v.

that not all of these clerical compurgators were parish incumbents, or from neighbouring parishes. One of the four was Charles Ince, curate of Wettenhall in Over parish, who might be expected to support his vicar; two of the four came from neighbouring parishes: these were Richard Baneon, vicar of Whitegate and Gilbert Southworth, perpetual curate of Church Minshull, but the fourth was John Foxe, chaplain to Mr Brereton, in the parish of Brereton, some distance from Over.

Thus three Cheshire parish incumbents were deprived in 1554: William Eaton of Coppenhall; Thomas Taylor of St Mary's in Chester and Nicholas Hyde of Mottram. It is probable that all of them were married, and they represent less than 4 per cent of parish incumbents.¹²⁰ The case of Randle Downe of Over shows that the hunt continued for other beneficed clergy who were married, and presumably he vehemently denied it (*'prorsus denegauit'*) in anticipation of a similar fate unless he could refute the allegation. This low percentage indicates that the beneficed clergy of Cheshire were much more reluctant to marry than clergy in some other areas, particularly in the south of England. A study of Essex clergy found that just over 27.5 per cent of parochial incumbents were deprived for marriage, while in Norfolk and Suffolk about a quarter suffered the same fate.¹²¹ Among the unbeneficed, the proportion of married clergy presented from Cheshire was even lower, as there were only two recorded presentments of clergy who admitted to being married, either at the consistory or through the

¹²⁰ In the 83 parishes of the county there were 70 clergy who may be regarded as beneficed in 1554, the other parishes had no incumbent at the time of the visitation or were normally staffed by salaried curates. The number of parishes had increased from 82 to 83 with the creation of the parish of Whitegate in the reign of Henry VIII, following the dissolution of Vale Royal.

¹²¹ Grieve, 'The Deprived Married Clergy in Essex', pp. 142-3; the percentage for Essex is calculated from Hilda Grieve's calculation that 88 of the 319 beneficed clergy in July 1553 were deprived for marriage by October 1556; G. Baskerville, 'Married Clergy and Pensioned Religious in Norwich Diocese, 1555', *The English Historical Review*, 48 (189), January 1933, p. 45.

visitation procedure, out of the total of 142 assistant clergy.¹²² These were John Cotgreave, who had been married before he was ordained, and Richard Butterson.¹²³ The overall percentage of the county's total clergy who were presented or punished for marriage was thus less than 2½ per cent.¹²⁴ This may be compared with the position in another northern county, Yorkshire, where about 10 per cent of the clergy are thought to have married.¹²⁵ Haigh calculated that throughout Lancashire probably ten clergy married, representing less than 4 per cent of the total, but, as shown above, his calculation of the number married should be reduced by two so that the proportion in Lancashire is more like 3 per cent, much in line with the percentage in Cheshire.¹²⁶ It has been suggested that the English were often hostile to clerical marriage, so that reluctance to marry when it was legal to do so may have stemmed from pragmatic as much as doctrinal reasons, as lay treatment of clerical wives and children could be unpleasant, although usually did not go beyond slander and name-calling.¹²⁷

While few Cheshire clergy were punished for being married, some were charged with other faults. The celebration of clandestine marriages was a regular complaint. Thomas Latwiss was called before the Consistory Court in Chester in March 1553 and admitted that he had conducted at least one marriage ceremony in his own chamber 'withowt banns askyng', while curate of St John's in Chester. Following the wedding he

¹²² At the time of the visitation in 1554 neither Cotgreave nor Butterson was included in the clergy call list which raises the question of how they were employed at the time. If they were working as private tutors, for example, it seems unlikely that their appearance would have caused such public outrage.

¹²³ I have assumed here that the Richard Taylor who was presented was from Warrington and was summoned to appear before the consistory with two other clergy from the same parish. See above pp. 186-7 for Cotgrave's marriage.

¹²⁴ These comprise 5 clergy out of a total of 208 in 1554.

¹²⁵ A. G. Dickens, *Reformation Studies* (London, 1982), p. 104.

¹²⁶ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 181.

¹²⁷ Eric Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation', *The Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1) (1992), pp. 7-8; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 182.

administered communion to the married couple and the witnesses.¹²⁸ He himself had been married in the previous year, also without the calling of banns, but no record has been traced of any proceedings against him for marriage during the reign of Mary so he may have been widowed or put away his wife. He was still curate at St John's in 1559/60.¹²⁹ In January 1557 several parishioners of Wrenbury were excommunicated for attending a wedding which had been solemnised without banns by Thomas Taylor, described as '*capellanus*'.¹³⁰ No recorded proceedings were taken against Taylor in the consistory, and the only clerk with that name who is recorded in the county around this time was the married rector of St Mary, deprived in 1554. It is possible, although unlikely, that this was the same man.¹³¹ In 1557 Richard Hassell, making his only recorded appearance in Cheshire, was accused at the visitation of marrying strangers in the parish of Audlem, without dispensation.¹³² The proceedings are marked with a note that he had fled ('*aufugit*') and there is also a note that he was at Whitchurch.¹³³

The most common offence for which clergy were reported in 1554 was sexual incontinence and fathering illegitimate children, although no cases were presented at subsequent Marian visitations. In 1554 Randle Downe and Randle Hunt from the parish of Over were presented for fornication.¹³⁴ The case of Randle Downe was transferred to the consistory, and he was subsequently also charged with being married. Randle Hunt

¹²⁸ CALS EDC 1/13, ff. 122v-123.

¹²⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xxv, p. 72.

¹³⁰ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 193.

¹³¹ Thomas Taylor, rector of St Mary's, was a graduate and had held one of the most valuable livings in the county. It is unlikely that he would have been described by the relatively humble description '*capellanus*'.

¹³² CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 90.

¹³³ There is no record of him at Whitchurch which was in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield. He is possibly the man of that name recorded as curate of Marston Chapel, Stafford St Mary in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in 1561, CCed Person ID 27015 (accessed 28 August 2012).

¹³⁴ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 102v.

was reported to have left the parish, but had returned to Cheshire by 1563, when he signed an acknowledgement of the Elizabethan royal supremacy as an assistant at Malpas.¹³⁵ At Runcorn Robert Eaves was presented for living suspiciously with Alice Robinson, and his case was in the hands of the bishop. At Great Budworth Thomas Boswell was presented by a parishioner for fathering a child, this presentment was possibly in retaliation for his own presentment for fornication.¹³⁶ These cases were taken seriously, and normally referred to the bishop for correction. Like the marriage of priests, however, priestly fornication was not popular with parishioners. Men found it offensive to be publicly accused of being the children of priests, and such liaisons seem to have been regarded as almost as bad as relationships with foreigners. Early in 1555, in the parish of Wistaston, John Alexander accused Agnes More of defamation because she ‘shuld scalnder hym to be a prestis sone ... and shuld saye that Elisabeth his mother hade toe children bie a prest before she was married and so went vp to london and married a lumbard’.¹³⁷ It does not seem to have been the accusation of illegitimacy, as much as being fathered by a priest, which caused offence.

While there is no evidence that any parish clergy were accused of heresy, several Cheshire clergy were required to attend before the bishop or the consistory for unspecified offences. These included John Smallwood, rector of Coppenhall, who was required to appear ‘*ad redendum articulis*’ and John Mere, vicar of Runcorn, who was told at the 1557 visitation to contact the bishop.¹³⁸ Mere was a minor canon of Chester

¹³⁵ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, p. 34.

¹³⁶ CALS EDV 1/1, ff. 90, 92v.

¹³⁷ CALS EDC 2/6, f. 21v. ‘Lumbard’ is a corruption of lombard = native of Lombardy (in northern Italy) or possibly = native of Lombardy engaged as a banker, money-changer, or pawnbroker; hence applied generally to a person carrying on any of these businesses *OED* (online edition accessed 29 August 2012).

¹³⁸ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 31, 91v.

cathedral and accused at the 1578 visitation of non-residence in his parish.¹³⁹

Unfortunately there is no record of further proceedings in these cases. The only Cheshire incumbents presented for non-residence were the two rectors of Malpas. In 1557 both were presented at the visitation '*quia non resident in beneficiis et rectoria pacitur ruinam*' (because they do not reside in the benefices and the rectory is in ruins).¹⁴⁰

Neither attended for correction. Prior to this, in September 1555, the rector of the lower moiety, Arthur Dudley, had been summoned *ex officio* to the Consistory Court for failing to keep his part of the rectory in repair and the matter had been placed in the hands of William Brereton, at that time patron of the living.¹⁴¹ Although these were the only two clergy presented for non-residence during Mary's reign many other parochial incumbents cannot have been resident, although few were such blatant pluralists.

A number of other clergy held more than one parish, some held two in Cheshire. These included Hugh Powell who was rector of Astbury and Eccleston, on opposite sides of the county.¹⁴² In Chester Deanery Henry Suddall or Siddall was rector of Barrow and prebend of Tarvin. He was also vice-dean of Christ Church in Oxford and had been licensed as a preacher in 1547.¹⁴³ Other parish incumbents also held appointments outside the county. In Macclesfield Deanery, Thomas Bulkeley, rector of Cheadle was a fellow of All Souls, Oxford, and presumably a friend of David Pole, also

¹³⁹ See Appendix.

¹⁴⁰ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 21.

¹⁴¹ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 66v.

¹⁴² Eccleston had a net value of £15 3s 10d and Astbury was one of the most valuable livings in the county with a net value of £67 19s 8d; *Valor v*, pp. 207, 214; 21 Henry VIII, c. 13; TNA: PRO PROB 11/32/441 Sir Thomas Gravener; Ormerod, ii, p. 830; iii, p. 27; CCed Person ID 32872 (accessed 29 August 2012).

¹⁴³ E. I. Carlyle, 'Siddall, Henry (*d.* 1572)', rev. Andrew A. Chibi *DNB* (online edition accessed 29 August 2012). Chibi says that he never married, so he is not likely to be the man of the same name identified as one of the deprived married clergy of Essex by Hilda Grieve, 'The Deprived Married Clergy in Essex', pp. 151-2.

a fellow, who left bequests to him of money and a book.¹⁴⁴ He had leased out the rectory at Cheadle to his aunt, Katherine Bulkeley, former abbess of Godstow for ninety years from 1552, and the parish was run by a curate.¹⁴⁵ Arthur Lowe had been presented to the rectory of Stockport by Thomas Cromwell in 1538, although Dorothy, countess of Derby claimed to have acquired the advowson which she wanted for her chaplain.¹⁴⁶ He had subsequently acquired two prebends in 1554. He was presented to Dernford in Coventry and Lichfield by two men, one of whom was David Pole, and Fridaythorpe in York by the Queen; he was deprived of this prebend by 1563.¹⁴⁷

During the course of Mary's reign, twenty-two of the county's incumbents concurrently held other appointments in the church. These ranged from men who held two incompatible benefices within the county to men of power and influence holding a number of important positions right across the country. These men were most unlikely to have been permanently resident and they represent 30 per cent of the parish incumbents during Mary's reign, yet only the two rectors of Malpas are known to have faced any kind of censure through the diocesan disciplinary processes, and no records of punishment have survived. Some of these clergy were presented to appointments in plurality by church officials like David Pole, or even by the Queen herself. Even the

¹⁴⁴ 'Bruges-Bythner', *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (1891), pp. 201-227 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117049> > (accessed 18 August 2012); Earwaker, ii, p. 220; T. F. Mayer, 'Pole, David (d. 1568)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 29 August 2012).

¹⁴⁵ *Notitia Cestriensis*, pp. 270-1.

¹⁴⁶ *LP* xi, 51 (attributed to 1536).

¹⁴⁷ CCEd Person ID 27889 (accessed 29 August 2012); 'Prebendaries: Dernford', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 10: Coventry and Lichfield Diocese* (2003), pp. 33-34 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34750> > (accessed 15 February 2012); 'Prebendaries: Fridaythorpe', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 4: York diocese* (1975), pp. 36-37 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=34556&strquery=Lowe> > (accessed 19 August 2012).

conscientious John Hanson did not regard his pluralism as a matter of concern as long as he employed a 'sufficient' curate in his parishes.¹⁴⁸

It seems highly unlikely that there was a serious attempt in Cheshire to establish the 'educated resident preaching pastoral clergy' which Duffy set out as Cardinal Pole's vision for England.¹⁴⁹ However, it may be that if the parishioners were satisfied with the services provided by an adequate curate, non-residence was not considered important. Furthermore, it may have been that the parochial supervision and reinforcement of the Catholic restoration by a pluralist of Hanson's calibre was more important than the issue of residence to the diocesan hierarchy. The presentments from Bowdon after Hanson's appointment do indicate that the parish was more closely supervised than it had previously been. One major obstacle was, of course, the system of patronage and widespread leasing of rectories, sometimes on very long leases. Haigh found evidence in Lancashire that 'official patronage was deliberately used to place well-qualified and committed conservatives in the most important parishes'. He also pointed out that Mary and Cardinal Pole presented thirteen men to Lancashire parishes.¹⁵⁰ In Cheshire there is evidence of only two clergy appointed by Queen Mary. One of these was William Ducke (or Duke), presented to Thornton in 1553, during the minority of the patron, following the resignation of Bernard Gilpin.¹⁵¹ He was a fellow of Exeter College in 1541 and held the degree of MA from Christ Church, where Henry Suddall, rector of the

¹⁴⁸ Raines, *The Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 41.

¹⁴⁹ Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, p. 26.

¹⁵⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 205.

¹⁵¹ CCEd Person ID 12255 (accessed 29 August 2012); 'Disbrowe-Dyve', *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (1891), pp. 406-439 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117056>> (accessed 29 August 2012).

neighbouring parish of Barrow, was vice-dean.¹⁵² It was at Thornton that a parishioner was charged in 1557 with ringing the bells while the curate was in the pulpit.¹⁵³ This suggests that Ducke left at least some of the preaching to the curate.

The other incumbent presented by Queen Mary was Peter Prestland, appointed vicar of Sandbach in 1554.¹⁵⁴ He is unlikely to have been a graduate as he is always referred to as *Dominus*. He is probably the man of the same name who was curate at Thursaston on the Wirral in 1541 and held the parish of Middlewich from 1568, possibly in plurality, so enjoyed a long career in various parishes of the county.¹⁵⁵ What may have commended him to the Queen is not clear, but shortly after his promotion to Sandbach he was summoned before the Consistory Court.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, the precise nature of his offence is not clear, but on 8 October 1556 he attended a session of the court presided over by John Hanson to hear his judgement. Prestland '*fatetur ipsum ignoranter processisse contra iurum ordine*' (confessed that he had proceeded contrary to the correct procedure through ignorance). He was ordered to confess his fault publicly the following Sunday.

A further obstacle to the realisation of Cardinal Pole's ideal in Cheshire was the high proportion of the county's incumbents who were prepared to conform to successive religious settlements. Twenty-nine of the seventy incumbents (or more than 41 per cent) named in the 1548 clergy lists of the reign of Edward VI remained *in situ* through the

¹⁵² During Elizabeth's reign, if not earlier, Exeter College was 'strongly Catholic'; <http://www.exeter.ox.ac.uk/documents/college/college_history.pdf> p. 7 (accessed 29 August 2012).

¹⁵³ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 14.

¹⁵⁴ CCEd Person ID 32278 (accessed 29 August 2012).

¹⁵⁵ Irvine (ed.), 'List of Clergy in Eleven Deaneries', p. 4; Walford D. Selby, (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Records Preserved in the Public Record Office, London* (part II) (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 8, 1883), p. 398.

¹⁵⁶ CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 123, 132v, 148v.

reign of Mary and into Elizabeth's reign and were again listed in 1563.¹⁵⁷ It is possible that some of this large group may not have been totally committed to the re-establishment of Catholic practice, but conversely, as they retained their parishes through successive regimes, they presumably conformed as far as was necessary. Among these twenty-nine, however, were nine pluralists or non-residents.¹⁵⁸ Although more than 41 per cent of the incumbent clergy retained their parishes throughout Mary's reign, ten parishes lost their incumbents through death between 1554 and 1563.¹⁵⁹ Some parishes became vacant more than once, and other vacancies were due to resignation or transfer, but in fifteen cases there are no surviving details of the reason for the vacancy, so it is possible that others also died. Unfortunately, there is no surviving clergy list for the diocese between 1554 and 1563, so it is not possible to quantify the losses of unbeneficed clergy through death, which must have affected the whole body of clergy. However, the report of the 1559 Royal Visitation indicates a shortage of curates. At Macclesfield there had been no curate to serve the chapelry for four years and at Sandbach there was no vicar or curate.¹⁶⁰ In 1562 it was reported from Northenden that

about v yerres past, when the newe sicknes was hote and extreme within this parishe so that John Leigh, clark ... then parson there, havinge, at that present, no curate, but forsed to minister hym self, was so continually travaylid in visitinge of his parishioners, that he ... gave warninge to thinhabitantes of Baguley, in Bawden paresh, that they shuld resort to their owne parish churche of Bawden,

¹⁵⁷ CALS EDV 2/2, 2/3, 2/4; EDV 1/3.

¹⁵⁸ TNA: PRO SP 15/27/2 f. 170v; R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972), p. 3.

¹⁵⁹ CALS EDV 1/1 passim and EDV 1/3 passim.

¹⁶⁰ Kitching (ed.), 'Royal Visitation of 1559', pp. 77, 82.

there to receyve their rightes and duties of the church, for that he cold not bothe serve them and discharge his duty and cure to his owne parishioners.¹⁶¹

Thus although it is impossible to quantify the decline in numbers, there is certainly evidence that clerical shortages were causing problems by the end of Mary's reign. This decline in numbers is evident despite the increased number of ordinands.

Haigh saw this surge in ordinations as symptomatic of a religious revival in Lancashire. He felt that the 'reasons for this dramatic increase in recruitment must have been religious rather than economic'. This contention was based on the reasoning that few new clerical posts were created under Mary and 'there were presumably still enough priests among those who had withdrawn in Edward's reign to provide the larger numbers needed for Catholic liturgy.' He goes on to say that it 'was probably the opportunity to serve in the traditional Church which attracted men to the priesthood again'.¹⁶² This seems contradictory, as if there were few available posts, there would presumably not have been enough jobs for the newly-ordained to take up in order to enter the service of the church. In all probability, however, opportunities for employment were greater than they had been for some time by 1557, because of the high mortality of the period. The economic factor of job opportunities cannot therefore be discounted, but it cannot have been the only reason, and was probably not the main reason, why so many men from the area chose to enter the church in Mary's reign. It

¹⁶¹ Frederick J. Furnivall, (ed.), *Child-Marriages, Divorces and Ratifications in the Diocese of Chester*, Early English Text Society (old series) 108 (1897), p. 139. John Leigh, (CCed Person ID 36488 (accessed 29 August 2012)) was presented to Northenden in 1545, came from a local gentry family and completed the rebuilding of the chancel in 1557. He died in March 1561 and was buried at Northenden; Earwaker, i, p. 291. Earwaker says that he 'appears' to have also held the rectories of Dean and Blabey in Lincolnshire [sic]. According to CCed he did not hold either Deane in Lancashire or Dean in Cumberland, and is not recorded in CCed as rector of Blaby in Leicestershire (Lincoln Diocese). I cannot find any evidence of a parish of Blabey in Lincolnshire. In any case, in performing his duties in Northenden parish he was an extremely conscientious pastoral clergyman.

¹⁶² Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 200.

does seem likely that the restoration of the Catholic Church was a stimulus to recruitment, but even this did not supply the manpower to fill all the available vacancies by the end of the reign.

Instead of the ideal envisaged in Cardinal Pole's long-term vision for the English parochial clergy, the confusion of the religious changes of the mid-sixteenth century produced incumbents like John Smallwood of Coppenhall. Smallwood may have been a trusted administrator, although he may have been motivated in part by financial considerations in his lucrative role as rural dean, but his lifestyle was less than exemplary. Perhaps this was only to be expected as priests must have struggled to reconcile conflicting pressures. The diocesan hierarchy did make some efforts to improve standards of behaviour using the existing disciplinary procedures of visitation and the consistory court. Although Duffy suggests that Pole's epitome of the parish incumbent was a well-educated resident, the evidence from Cheshire does not suggest that this was either the reality or even the ideal in the county. Furthermore, the system of patronage meant that lay interests predominated in the appointment of parish clergy, and while these interests remained primarily financial, there was little hope of a general move towards this ideal in Cheshire.

There is no indication that the diocesan visitors uncovered any clerical heresy, although some irregular procedures were punished. Clerical marriage was not popular with either the clergy or the laity as Anne Andrew, the young woman encouraged to marry one of the cathedral clergy during the reign of Edward VI, showed when she asked her suitor to 'tarie as concerneng the mariage betwixe them toe ... vntill she sawe

moe prestis maried'.¹⁶³ The reluctance of the vast majority of the county's clergy to marry suggests an innate conservatism, which may well mean that most welcomed the return of Catholic practice. Unfortunately, the lack of evidence about matters such as preaching means that there is little to indicate the degree to which they went about demonstrating this enthusiasm. The ordination evidence suggests, however, that the appeal of the Marian restoration was in all likelihood greater in Lancashire than in Cheshire.

The Laity

Analysis of the response of the laity to the Marian efforts to restore Catholicism in the parishes has been a defining feature of the debate on the English Reformation. It has, in particular, informed the argument of revisionist scholarship that 'in most places Catholic worship returned speedily ... without compulsion' and that 'large majorities were delighted that the years of heresy had passed.'¹⁶⁴ This was a major departure from the work of earlier scholars, such as A. G. Dickens, who argued that '[i]f Mary had little trouble with the North and West, there is no evidence that she began to inspire them with any positive Catholic enthusiasm.'¹⁶⁵ In the light of this debate I will examine the available evidence in an effort to establish how the parishioners of Cheshire responded to the restoration of Catholicism. Surviving sources include records of official proceedings in the consistory court, the Chester court of great sessions and at visitation as well as churchwardens' accounts and the evidence of wills.

¹⁶³ CALS EDC 2/4, ff. 127, 121.

¹⁶⁴ Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 208.

¹⁶⁵ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (second edition, London, 1989), p. 309.

The three visitations of Mary's reign had revealed very little evidence of heresy in Cheshire's parishes, and none at all until 1557. However, there is some evidence of more subtle, passive forms of resistance to the restoration of Catholic ritual and the re-equipment of churches for catholic worship. In the 1554 visitation William Aldersey of the parish of St Oswald in Chester was presented 'for bie cause he stoppis the procession wayes with his tymber'.¹⁶⁶ There is no record of any proceedings following this presentment, and it is possible that his action was not a deliberate attempt to block the reinstatement of processions, which were very much associated with Catholic ritual and condemned by reformers. George Marsh, for example, derided 'procession gaddyng' in a long list of 'blasphemous Idolatry' restored by George Cotes during his visit to Lancaster in 1554.¹⁶⁷ It may have been that Aldersey was merely using the area for storage, but the wording of the presentment suggests that he was deliberately obstructing the procession routes. There were several branches of the Aldersey family, which was numerous and powerful in Chester and the surrounding area, providing several sheriffs and mayors and one of the city's first members of parliament. It has unfortunately not been possible to make a positive identification of the man presented, as there were at least two men of that name in the parish at that time, but he was probably the uncle of the Chester antiquarian, William Aldersey, and cousin of Christopher Goodman, both staunch Protestants.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 70.

¹⁶⁷ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1570 edition, Book 11, p. 1774) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 12 July 2012).

¹⁶⁸ C. G. O. Bridgeman, *A Genealogical Account of the Family of Aldersey of Aldersey and Spurstow Co. Chester* (London, 1899) Pedigree No. 1 (unpaginated). The religious views of the antiquarian, William Aldersey, are gleaned from his historical references such as his description of the death of Edward VI (see p. 223 above) and accession of Elizabeth (see p. 286 below). For Christopher Goodman see, for example, Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Goodman, Christopher (1521/2–1603)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 21 September 2012).

This is the only example of this kind of possible resistance revealed by the visitation returns, although at St Oswald's, the same parish, in 1557 Walter Langley rather oddly '*asportauit partem tabernaculi inuitus iconimus ab ecclesia*' (has carried away part of the tabernacle from the church in spite of the churchwardens).¹⁶⁹ It is not clear from the presentment whether he had taken it away during the reign of Edward VI and was refusing to return it or had removed it after it had been restored during Mary's reign. The motive for this action may have been economic, as much as religious, as he may have stolen it to sell. At the time of the Edwardian confiscations, parishioners were often concerned to stress that they had removed or sold parish goods with the consent of the whole parish in order to validate their actions. In this instance such was clearly not the case, and the inference is that Langley was acting in defiance of the churchwardens who were seeking proactively to support the liturgical restoration. The poor state of St Oswald's was criticised at the same visitation; '*ecclesia caret reparationem*' (the church lacks repair).

The most commonly presented offence of a religious, rather than moral, nature was absence from church services. In 1557 many more individuals were presented for not attending church than had been the case in the two previous Marian visitations for which records survive. Three shoemakers, from the parish of St Michael's in Chester, compounded their failure to attend Mass by working on Sundays.¹⁷⁰ In other parishes of Cheshire a variety of excuses was offered for not attending church and these were usually accepted. In Great Budworth, Thomas Forsant claimed that his absence was due to illness, rather than ill-will and at Thornton Joanna Gatcliff also denied that her

¹⁶⁹ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 6.

¹⁷⁰ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 7-7v.

absence was motivated by malice; both were excused with a small penance or caution and required to attend church in future.¹⁷¹ Others accused had to go to greater lengths to justify themselves, such as Anne Spark at Marbury who had to attend a session of the consistory court at Chester and clear herself by compurgation.¹⁷² Use of this procedure may have been intended to confirm that she was not locally reputed to oppose the Marian restoration. Judging by the outcome in each case, none of these offences was taken very seriously and the numbers who stayed away from church or expressed disapproval of the Mass in other ways were small in comparison with London, where 400 people were presented at Easter 1554 for various acts of religious non-observance.¹⁷³

However, the ecclesiastical authorities did not deal with all religious offenders, as a statute of Mary's first parliament authorised constables and churchwardens to report them to justices who were empowered to keep them in custody until they repented.¹⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the records of the Cheshire Quarter Sessions are no longer extant for this period. The surviving lists of prisoners in Chester Gaol in the court of great sessions files include only prisoners accused of criminal offences such as burglary or murder, although the offence is not always specified or legible.¹⁷⁵ It is thus not possible to

¹⁷¹ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 27v, 14.

¹⁷² CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 91, 94 (f. 94 is in very poor condition having suffered damage from damp and insects, but the legible parts indicate that she was able to clear herself at the consistory court, possibly with only two compurgators).

¹⁷³ Andrew Pettegree, *Marian Protestantism: Six Studies* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 100-101. The population of London was, of course, very much greater than that of any other city in England at that time.

¹⁷⁴ Gina Alexander, 'Bonner and the Marian Persecutions', in Christopher Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 164.

¹⁷⁵ For the reign of Mary these files are TNA: PRO CHES 24/93/1 - 6 and CHES 24/94/1 - 4. These prisoners included Elizabeth Jenkinson condemned to death for treason, felony and murder after being found guilty of strangling her husband while he slept; TNA: PRO CHES 24/93/2; 24/93/3 and 24/93/5; CHES 29/261 m. 18. Her execution was postponed because she was pregnant, and the procedure for confirming a stay of execution in such cases involved the only occasions on which groups of women were involved in the legal process. A condemned woman claiming stay of execution because of pregnancy

establish the extent to which the lay authorities were actively involved in the enforcement of the Marian religious regulations.

Another form of resistance by the laity to the cost of the Marian reconstruction in Cheshire is revealed in responses to the assessment and collection of compulsory church leys. Prior to the reign of Edward VI, much parish activity and equipment, particularly outside cities, had been financed by activities such as church ales or other voluntary (if sometimes playfully extorted) collections at Hocktide or Plough Monday.¹⁷⁶ Many of these practices were abandoned as superstitious following the injunctions of 1547 or specifically banned in visitation articles of 1548.¹⁷⁷ This left many parishes throughout the country in financial difficulty when faced with the cost of re-organising church buildings and buying the requisite new books during Edward's reign. Any shortfall was partly met by the proceeds of selling equipment no longer deemed to be necessary. From an examination of churchwardens' accounts Ronald Hutton concluded, however, that many customary activities 'underwent a complete revival' under Mary although many of these 'lewd practices' were not officially encouraged.¹⁷⁸

The only extant Cheshire churchwardens' accounts for this period are both from the city of Chester where the main sources of income had always been Sunday

would be examined by a group of women, presumably certified midwives, to confirm the pregnancy. All other groups involved in the legal process were men, sitting as jurors on a variety of types of jury, or as justices, lawyers etc.. These women were not involved in the process of reaching a verdict, however.

¹⁷⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 13; Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 50; 59-60; 87-9; Judith M. Bennett, 'Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), p. 34. It was the custom at Hocktide for single-sex groups of parishioners to take members of the opposite sex hostage to be released on payment of a fine.

¹⁷⁷ Hutton, *Merry England*, p. 87, gives an example from Lincolnshire of the disposal in 1547 of a plough previously used in the Plough Monday gatherings; Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 460-1.

¹⁷⁸ Ronald Hutton, 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations', in Peter Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, New York, 1997), p. 155.

collections together with laystalls and church rates.¹⁷⁹ In the seventeenth century, there was a legal distinction between two types of compulsory church rates: the rate for fittings and incidental expenses of church services, which was a personal charge on movable property, and the rate for fabric, which was a tax on lands.¹⁸⁰ This distinction also seems to have been relevant in Cheshire in the sixteenth century, although the organisation of parish finance was more fluid. At Holy Trinity in Chester, the regular charge for the operating costs of the church was the quarterage, which was, as its name suggests, a regular charge but at Holy Trinity, and probably also at St Mary's, this seems to have been levied on households, rather than being a personal liability.¹⁸¹ At Holy Trinity the Sunday collections, presumably voluntary donations, had totalled a substantial £9 15s 7d in 1532-3 but these gifts dwindled thereafter and by 1558 the only recorded income was the church rate, the charge ranging from ½d to 5d.¹⁸² At St Mary's, the surviving accounts provide fuller details of sources of income. These mainly comprised Easter offerings and payments by parishioners for laystalls and kneeling places, along with the quarterage payments. In 1553-4 the parish income was 44s 6d but

¹⁷⁹ laystall = a burial-place; *OED* (online edition accessed 28 April 2013).

¹⁸⁰ W. T. Morgan, 'Cases of Subtraction of Church-Rate before the Consistory Courts of St. David's', *Journal of the Historical Society of the Church in Wales*, ix:14 (1959), p. 72. Subsequently the two types of charge became indistinguishable as church rates, levied on property. In Cheshire these were called *ius ecclesiasticus* but were known in St David's diocese as *rata ecclesiae*. For the purposes of this discussion I have differentiated between the regular charge which I have described as 'rates' and the unusual levy, described as a 'ley'. Very little work has been done on church taxes, whereas tithes have attracted considerable attention. Inputting "tithes" into the online 'Bibliography of British and Irish History' at <<http://www.brepolis.net/>> for the period from 1500 to 1700 produced 131 hits (date accessed 26 September 2012) whereas on the same date for the same period inputting "church taxes" produced 1 hit; "church rates" produced 6 hits and "church leys" and "church lays" produced no hits. In the eighteenth century, of course, the payment of compulsory church rates became a cause of conflict between non-conformists, particularly Quakers, and the established church.

¹⁸¹ Rev. J. R. Beresford (ed.), 'The Churchwarden's Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532 to 1633', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), pp. 121, 122 for example.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 121. These accounts are admittedly abstracts, so it is possible that there were other sources of income which have been omitted.

the recorded expenditure was 45s 5d and the wardens recorded that they were owed the difference of 11d.¹⁸³ By 1557-8, however, the recorded receipts were 44s 0½d, while the expenses had escalated to 51s 9d.¹⁸⁴ The only voluntary receipts for the year were 16½d towards keeping the clock, which was always a drain on resources, but seems to have been an object of pride, and 2s towards keeping the lights in the rood loft. There is no record of how the increased shortfall of 7s 8½d (more than 17 per cent of the total income) was financed. The recorded expenditure for the year includes no outlay on replacing equipment but the growth in outgoings was largely due to the increased cost of Catholic ceremonial and ritual, including 23s 1½d on wax and candle making and 7s 11½d for the star, holly and associated candles, presumably to decorate the church at Christmas in a return to the pre-Edwardian festivities.

The parish had to resort to unusual measures to collect the money needed to pay for re-equipping the church. In the churchwardens' account book, on a page following the payments for 1576 and thus out of chronological sequence, are two lists of collectors dated 24 March 1 & 2 Philip and Mary (1555). These men were appointed to cover two different areas of the parish to collect what is described as a 'ley ... for necesaryes of the Churche'.¹⁸⁵ It seems that the account book had been opened at random to enter the names of the collectors, with their areas of responsibility. All of the collectors had been or would be churchwarden before the end of Mary's reign, so were presumably trusted and responsible men of the parish. There is also a note that that the parish had agreed

¹⁸³ Earwaker, *St Mary*, p. 240.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁸⁵ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 241. Earwaker has transcribed the role of these men as 'tipers', but, looking at the original in CALS P 20/13/1 (not paginated) the word seems to me to read 'taxers' which makes more sense following *OED* (online edition accessed 25 September 2012) *taxer* = one who determines the amount of a tax, fine, price, etc.; an assessor or one who levies a tax or taxes. This was clearly an extraordinary charge requiring specially authorised collectors and was not the same as the regular church rates.

that Robert Hatton was excused payment of quarterage for seven years ‘for the tabernacvll that stondes att the hee alter end’, presumably he had voluntarily come forward to finance its construction. On the other side of the folio, and therefore also out of date order, is a schedule for the payment of money owing to the church drawn up in September 1557 by royal commissioners, headed by the bishop.¹⁸⁶ It is probably a sign of how seriously Scott took the matter that he was personally involved in organising the scheme of payment of the arrears and signed the schedule personally, as he usually left much of the consistory court work and other administrative matters in the hands of John Hanson. Thirteen parishioners, including two widows, were to pay 1d or 2d weekly ‘vntill such tymes as xs be Fully payd in consideration & recompens of such money as they have in there hands’.¹⁸⁷

It is not clear whether each of them was to pay a total of 10s or whether this was a joint total. The outstanding question is what this money represented. It seems likely, as the two matters are dealt with on two sides of the same page, that they were connected and that the schedule of payments represents a scheme for payment of arrears of a church ley, possibly that of 1555, and that it had been levied on households, rather than individuals, since the only two women named were widows and thus more likely than

¹⁸⁶ The issue of this commission has not been traced but the lay commissioners were John Webster, Fulk Dutton, John Smith and Thomas Smith. As all of these men were mayors of Chester between 1552 and 1557 the commission probably only applied to the city; ‘*Mayors and sheriffs of Chester*’, *A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 2: The City of Chester: Culture, Buildings, Institutions* (2005), pp. 305-321 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=57341>> (accessed 21 September 2012). Dutton was a parishioner of St Peter’s in Chester and died in 1558. His will, which was the subject of protracted legal proceedings, requested a traditional funeral and bequeathed his scarlet gown for the purchase of robes and ornaments for his parish church; CALS EDA 2/1ff. 225v-229v; CALS WS 1558 Fowke Dutton; E. Kate Jarman (ed.), *Justice and Conciliation in a Tudor Church Court: The Consistory Court of Chester, September 1558-March 1559* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 146, 2012), pp. xxix-xxx, xxxvi, 12-20. Unusually, Scott heard the probate proceedings in person suggesting a strong personal link with Dutton.

¹⁸⁷ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 246; CALS P 20/13/1. The meaning of this unusual phrasing is not immediately obvious, but suggestive of the fact that they were holding money which they should have paid over.

married women or spinsters to have been heads of households.¹⁸⁸ In 1563 there were said to be 188 households in the parish.¹⁸⁹ If the list does represent arrears of church lay by household, those in arrears comprise almost 7 per cent of the households in the parish.

There are a number of reasons why parishioners might have been reluctant to pay the ley. It could be due to a natural reluctance to pay taxes, to financial exigencies or to an aversion to contributing to the costs of the restoration of Catholic ritual. Of the two women in the schedule, 'Weddo Whytbye' is probably the same as 'wedoo wederbee' (Widow Weatherby) who paid 12d for a kneeling place in 1562-3, so presumably she was not a pauper.¹⁹⁰ Of the eleven men named, William Grimsditch and John Whitehead died in 1558-9 and were buried in the church at a cost of 16d and 20d respectively.¹⁹¹ Robert Cross was warden of St Mary's in 1563 and 1564; the rood loft and altars were taken down while he was warden.¹⁹² John Anyon and George Taylor served together as wardens in 1564 and 1565.¹⁹³ In general churchwardens were expected to be men of some substance as they were required to meet any shortfall in income during their period in office, if only temporarily.¹⁹⁴ This variety of evidence is suggestive that these six people, at least, were not refusing to pay their church taxes because of poverty or lack of commitment to or affection for their parish church, but

¹⁸⁸ The two are 'Johan Ley weddo' and 'Weddo Whytbye'.

¹⁸⁹ Alan Dyer and D. M. Palliser (eds), *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603* (Oxford, 2005), p. 78. It is, of course, possible that the number of households had fallen between 1555 and 1563 in view of the incidence of plague, said to be prevalent in Chester in 1559.

¹⁹⁰ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the Hill*, p. 252.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 248.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 253.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

¹⁹⁴ Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: the Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c. 1400-1560* (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 32-3; see also pp. 48-50 for parish rates.

possibly as a way of objecting to the cost of the Marian reconstruction, an interpretation reinforced by the personal involvement of the bishop.

Unfortunately, no churchwardens' accounts survive for this period for parishes outside the city of Chester so it is possible that traditional methods of voluntary fundraising were retained or reintroduced in the country parishes. It is clear, however, that several parishes were not able to meet the cost of the Marian reconstruction through voluntary contributions or regular church taxes alone and were obliged to levy additional compulsory church leys and to sue for payment of arrears in the consistory court. This was not a new departure: for example, two parishioners had been excommunicated for refusing to pay taxes at Malpas in 1551.¹⁹⁵ No further cases of this type came before the Consistory Court in the surviving records covering the period up to the end of Edward's reign.¹⁹⁶ The next case of refusal to pay was in May 1555 when parishioners from Bunbury in Cheshire and Croston in Lancashire were summoned, by the wardens in the Cheshire case and the parish clerk in the Lancashire one.¹⁹⁷ Four further cases were commenced in 1556, one from an unidentified parish, one from Witton (a chapelry of Great Budworth) and two from Prestbury involving ten parishioners.¹⁹⁸ In 1557 and 1558 four new Cheshire causes were heard in the consistory, involving thirteen parishioners from Christleton, Sandbach, Tarvin and another Prestbury case.¹⁹⁹ The Christleton case, from May and June 1558, may have been a matter of a disagreement over assessment or procedure, since it was referred to

¹⁹⁵ CALS EDC 1/13, f. 5v.

¹⁹⁶ CALS EDC 1/13, ff. 23v – 151v. There may, however, be some gaps in the surviving records, for example there are no records of proceedings in December 1552.

¹⁹⁷ CALS EDC 1/13, ff. 109 – 209v; CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 4 – f. 29v; cases from Bunbury and Croston recorded at CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 30, 37 and ff. 30v, 39, 46, 53v and 44v. There is, however, a missing section of the court book CALS EDC 1/13 for the period from the end of November 1552 to June 1553.

¹⁹⁸ CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 134v, 136, 142v, 143, 144, 150, 150v, 151v, 182v, 189v, 197

¹⁹⁹ CALS EDC 1/14, ff. 235v, 239v, 244, 273v; CALS EDV 1/15, ff. 64v, 68v, 76.

arbitration and then dismissed ‘*sub spe concordie*’ (in the hope of agreement).²⁰⁰

However, what motivated other parishioners to risk a summons to court followed by excommunication is more problematic since none of the cause papers survive. For some, at least, refusal to pay may have been a matter of principle in opposition to the purpose of the imposition of the liability. One of those in arrears in Prestbury parish was John Legh, described variously as ‘*generosus*’ (gentleman) or ‘*armiger*’ (esquire). He is likely to have been John Legh of Ridge who died in 1578.²⁰¹ In his will he stated ‘I commende my soule to ye mercy of Almighty god beleveinge without doubt by the merites purchased for me throughe Christes bloode to be one of those that shall Inherate the kingdome of Heaven’.²⁰² This preamble does suggest that he believed in justification through faith, although the will was written some twenty years later and his beliefs might have changed in the meantime.²⁰³ It is possible, therefore, that his refusal to subsidise the restoration of the Mass was because he opposed it on principle.

In Prestbury an annual charge known as ‘serage silver’ or wax money had become customary by 1558 ‘for the use and reparacion of the Church of Prestburie ... the ornaments therein and other necessities’. In December 1558 the chargeable amount was agreed by three local gentry, ‘with the advyse and consent of dyvers of the inhabitants’ and the amount payable at the feast of St George the Martyr (23 April) was set for each township, to be collected by eleven questmen. There was also a warning that existing and future arrears of any township would be taken to the consistory court unless

²⁰⁰ CALS EDV 1/15, ff. 64v, 68v, 76. In seventeenth-century cases it was often argued that the defendant was unfairly assessed or that he had been assessed in respect of a property for which he was not liable; Morgan, ‘Cases of Subtraction of Church-Rate’, p. 72.

²⁰¹ Ormerod, iii, p. 765; Earwaker, ii, p. 448. Although the date of his birth is not known, his father died in 1533 and his eldest son was born in 1556, so he must have been an adult at this time.

²⁰² CALS WS 1578 John Leigh of Sutton, Ridge.

²⁰³ Work done by historians on the problems inherent in the use of will preambles as expressions of faith has been summarised by Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 505.

paid by the ‘feaste of the Circumcision of our Lord Jesus’ (1 January).²⁰⁴ The fact that this is referred to as customary in December 1558 and that there were some existing arrears at that time indicates that the serage silver was a regular church rate which had also been levied during Mary’s reign and that for short periods some arrears were not actively pursued. It also seems to have been levied by township. This is suggestive that the three causes from Prestbury parish relating to arrears of church taxes pursued through the consistory court in the Marian period may have related to failure to pay additional church leys, levied to meet additional costs of restoring the church furnishings and ritual and that payment was more strictly enforced than in the case of the serage silver.

The collection of church taxes was organised in at least two different ways. In some cases, collectors went from door to door around the parish. It seems that the St Mary’s ley of 1555 was probably collected in that way, as the collectors for the parish were divided into two groups, one for the area on ‘handbrygge side’ and the other for ‘Chester Vpton & others’.²⁰⁵ At this time the parish was divided, with one section, including Handbridge, lying to the south of the city and the other, including Upton, lying to the north, separated by the parish of St Oswald.²⁰⁶ In other parishes payment seems to have been collected during regular Sunday services. In the Lancashire parish of Halsall, for example, six parishioners, including one married woman and her husband, were pursued in the consistory court in November 1557 for failure to pay church taxes.

²⁰⁴ Frank Renaud, *Contributions towards a History of the Ancient Parish of Prestbury in Cheshire* (Chetham Society, old series, 97, 1876), pp. 56-9. At this time Prestbury, one of the largest parishes in the country in terms of number of townships, comprised thirty-two townships.

²⁰⁵ Earwaker, *St Mary-on-the-Hill*, p. 241. These areas are ‘the Handbridge side’ and ‘Chester, Upton and others’.

²⁰⁶ A. D. M. Phillips and C. B. Phillips (eds), *A New Historical Atlas of Cheshire* (Chester: Cheshire County Council and Cheshire Community Council, 2002), county parish map included separately; see also map at Figure 4, p. 41.

Only one of the accused, Roger Perke turned up at court and '*fatetur ipsum operatur omnis diebus dominicis*' (he confessed that was working every Sunday).²⁰⁷ This suggests both that collection of taxes in that parish was made on Sundays when he was absent from church and that his failure to make the payments was considered more pressing than his failure to attend church, as he was not accused of that offence at that time.

Haigh has discussed the question of how the replacement of the requisite parish equipment and structures was financed in Mary's reign and concluded that 'the funds were raised, in hard economic times, with remarkably little difficulty. Much of the cost ... was met by compulsory rates'.²⁰⁸ He suggests that there were 'the usual disputes' about payment, which he concludes were motivated by financial objections. Yet he did not consider the problems arising from the conflict within parishes occasioned by such refusals, or whether in some cases refusal to pay might have been a matter of principle. The churchwardens of Prestbury were summoned to the consistory court in November 1555 and ordered under pain of major excommunication to collect a levy, to state who held the money, to render an account and certify that they had done so.²⁰⁹ This suggests that what they were being ordered to collect was an additional charge, and that they were unwilling to do it. In 1556, following the 1554 visitation, the wardens were warned

²⁰⁷ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 273v.

²⁰⁸ Haigh, *English Reformations*, pp. 212-3.

²⁰⁹ CALS EDC 1/14, f. 87v. It seems that only the wardens had the power raise a church ley, once the necessity for expenditure on the church building or equipment had been established at visitation. If the wardens were reluctant, the consistory court judge could compel them to call a meeting of the parishioners and to raise a ley, with or without the consent of the parish; William Hale, *Precedents in Causes of Office against Churchwardens and Others* (London, 1841), p. viii; Morgan, 'Cases of Subtraction of Church-Rate', p. 72.

'habent ad omnia emendandum' (they have to amend everything), so presumably a lot of extra expenditure was needed.²¹⁰

There are a number of possible reasons why the wardens might have been reluctant to organise this collection. It seems unlikely that they were idle or disorganised because it must have been easier to comply than to dispute the order. The costs of attending the court in Chester are likely to have outweighed anything they would personally have saved by not raising the charge because they did not merely ignore the summons, but one of them attended court in person and the other was represented by his son. It may be that they anticipated that personal antagonism would be generated by attempts to collect an additional charge or, indeed, that they had personal objections to the levy, but they were clearly unenthusiastic about it. The authorities also took a dim view of one warden not appearing in person, and judgement against him was reserved.

The majority of the parishioners of the county probably welcomed a return to traditional religion, if only initially. The surviving churchwardens' accounts for Holy Trinity in Chester are sparse for the early part of Mary's reign, but by 1556-7 parishioners had again donated goods to beautify the church and expenditure on processions on St George's Day and Cross Week (Rogation Week) had resumed.²¹¹ By May 1553 the church goods had been reduced to one chalice and paten weighing 15¾ ounces, six linen towels, two table cloths, two surplices and the anthem bell.²¹² Four years later, on 20 May 1557, the new churchwardens recorded a long list of goods in the church containing a variety of copes and other vestments of different colours and

²¹⁰ CALS EDV 1/1, f. 113v. The use of a form of the verb *'emendare'* could mean either 'repair' or 'free from faults'. It is thus not clear whether the church needed repairs or whether the requisite Marian changes to the altars and building had not been made.

²¹¹ Beresford (ed.), 'The Churchwarden's Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester', pp. 119-120.

²¹² TNA: PRO E 117/1/47.

fabrics, including cloth of gold together with hangings, canopies, banners and altar cloths; two chalices; a censer and a variety of candlesticks.²¹³ Some of the items are recorded as gifts from parishioners, but a number of items were ‘received that was bought of Anthony Calveter’, including an image of St Anthony.²¹⁴ The meaning of this is not very clear, but it is possible that Anthony Calveley, a local gentleman, was returning to the church some items which he had bought when the goods were being sold off in Edward VI’s reign.²¹⁵ It is possible that some of the items in the 1557 inventory had been returned when the Privy Council ordered the return of items still held by the commissioners, but the majority must have come from gifts and legacies from parishioners.²¹⁶ Other testators were rather more cautious in donating valuable assets, preferring to lend rather than give such items. In September 1553, with the Edwardian confiscations a recent memory, John Whitmore of Thurstaston parish in Wirral deanery left to the churchwardens ‘ye occupacion of my chalice of siluer parcell gilte & a sute of vestments & all ye same to remain otherwise in ye order of my heres’.²¹⁷

Some parishioners in other parishes had removed church goods for safe-keeping, sometimes without payment, intending to return them when conditions were favourable. Thomas Wilbraham of Woodhey in the parish of Acton was a brother of Richard Wilbraham, servant of Queen Mary. In his will of 1556 he returned a chalice, ‘toke ...

²¹³ Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester’, pp. 120-1.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 121. This is one of the few references to images of saints being reinstated in parish churches during Mary’s reign.

²¹⁵ It was quite common for parishioners to return goods purchased in this way; Hutton, ‘Local Impact’, p. 154; ‘my lady Calverley’ had given to Holy Trinity ‘3 quissions: 2 of red velvet and one of cloth of Tyffin to make a hanginge’. The identity of ‘cloth of Tyffin’ is obscure.

²¹⁶ Hutton, ‘Local Impact’, p. 154.

²¹⁷ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 229v-230v; W. F. Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills not now to be Found in any Probate Registry. 1301-1752* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 30, 1896), p. 179.

into my handes at the rieffeling of churches which my mother delivered to serve at our Ladie alter'.²¹⁸ There can be little doubt about the religious allegiance of the Wilbraham family, and Thomas Wilbraham also requested prayers to be said for him and other souls for six years by Sir John Bushell, a former chantry priest at the dissolved college at Bunbury.²¹⁹ Bushell does not seem to have taken up a parish position following the dissolution, and presumably survived on his pension, so that the prayers were to be said at a place to be agreed between Bushell and Thomas Wilbraham's brother. It may be that as a former chantrist his prayers were particularly valued. John Bushell was reported to be still in the parish of Bunbury in 1577, when he was included in a certificate of recusants and described as 'an olde preist' and a fugitive.²²⁰

Of the 56 wills extant for the reign, the soul bequest survives in 53; in the remaining three cases the will exists only in a printed collection without the preamble or it is illegible. In the 53 available preambles 28 (or almost 53 per cent) of testators bequeathed their soul to God, Mary and the holy or blessed company of heaven. The soul bequests of the other 25 testators refer to God alone, Jesus Christ alone, or a combination of the two. However, five of these made bequests to their parish church or other beneficiary in return for prayers, suggesting a belief in the efficacy of *post mortem* prayer. The proportion of wills with either a traditional preamble or a bequest indicating traditional beliefs was thus more than 60 per cent. Five testators (or just less than 10 per cent) whose preambles make no reference to Mary or the saints, make other references or bequests which indicate that the testators may have held reformed beliefs. These

²¹⁸ Piccope (First Portion), p. 63.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ TNA: PRO SP 12/118/48; K. R. Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 19, 1971), pp. 15, 174. In 1552 he deposed that he had lived in Bunbury from birth and was then aged about 48, so he must have been about 73 in 1577; CALS EDC 2/5, f. 94.

include the will of John Whitmore, of Thurstaston, who had laid down careful rules about the loan of his chalice. He commended his soul

unto ye handes of Amighty God my Savior & jesus Christ trusting by ye merittes & blude sheding to enherit his kyngdom I will yt my body be buried in ye chaunsell of Westkirbye ... with such funurales obsequies as may be done unto Goddes glory without pompe or other foolish solomnities ... by ye discrecion of my executres.²²¹

The will of Laurence Woodnoth, written in 1558, includes just a brief soul bequest, but reveals in the rest of the wording that the testator has thought deeply about his salvation. He begins, 'Fyrste I commyt & betake my soule to almyghtie god'. He then continues with arrangements for his funeral

which buriall I will maye be done cristianly & simplie without any pompe & solempnitie without light or iij at ye most set ouer or nyghe the corse whiles it is aboute the ethe tokening yt my beleufe was in ye blessed trinitie iij persons & one god & in hope to haue euerlasting light & Joye in ye world to come throughe & by ye merites of christis passion.²²²

However, other testators such as Richard Massey requested an extravagant funeral which harked back to the elaborate arrangements popular in the time before Edward VI's reign, with lights, torches and black gowns for poor mourners.²²³ No testator at this time requested a funeral sermon.

Very few inventories, where they survive, include books, but an important exception is the library of Richard Brereton of Lea Hall, near Middlewich, who died in

²²¹ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 229v; Irvine (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire wills*, p. 177.

²²² CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 178v-182.

²²³ CALS WS 1556 Richard Massey.

1558 ‘*in partibus borealibus*’ (in the north parts) while on the Queen’s service, presumably on the expedition to the Scottish borders led by his nephew.²²⁴ His inventory included ‘a tente with ropes to the same which was left in the house of William Harryngton in New Castell apou Tyne dwellinge att the syne of the Crowne’.²²⁵ His library consisted of fifty-seven volumes, of which twenty-two were biblical or theological, including ‘A fayre byble in Laten conc’inge scripture’ and a ‘newe Testament in Englishe’. There were also eight books of various liturgies, including two communion books, two Mass books and a book of Our Lady’s service.²²⁶ His books show that this Cheshire gentleman had access to the scriptures both in Latin and English. They also reveal his range of literary interests, both modern, such as the works of Polydore Vergil, and classical, such as Vergil, together with an interest in science in the form of medicine and astronomy. He remained religiously conservative, however, and his soul bequest was to ‘Almyghtye god maker of all thinges and to our Blessed Ladie The Virgin Marye and to all the holye Companye of heaven’.

Two stories which continue to be cited and purport to reveal evidence of popular opposition to the Catholic restoration in Cheshire are, however, probably both apocryphal. The first concerns events leading up to the burning of George Marsh. One of the town sheriffs, John Cowper, is said to have rallied onlookers in an attempt to rescue Marsh, but was beaten back and fled into Wales. There is no reference to this in any of the versions of Foxe, which otherwise include a full account of Marsh’s

²²⁴ Ormerod, i, p. 556. His will is dated 23 February 1558 and the inventory 2 November 1558, he is thought to have died in August 1558; CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 306-403. A biography of his nephew, Sir William Brereton, may be found at <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/brereton-sir-william-1521-59>> (date accessed 21 September 2012).

²²⁵ Piccope (First Portion), p. 181.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-183; William E. A. Axon, ‘The Library of Richard Brereton of Ley, 1557’, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 11 (1893), pp. 103-112.

imprisonment, trial and execution. The sixteenth-century antiquarian county histories do not include this event either.²²⁷ If the story is true, it does not necessarily mean that Cowper held reformed views, since it was not uncommon for onlookers to be moved to violent efforts at rescue when witnessing the suffering of those executed in this way.²²⁸ The other relates to a visit to Chester by Dr Henry Cole, dean of St Paul's, on his way to Ireland in 1558. He had with him a commission to prosecute heresy in Ireland but during his stay the commission was secretly removed from his luggage and replaced with a pack of cards. The deception was not discovered until he reached Dublin. It was then too late for another commission to be issued before Mary died. At the end of the nineteenth century *The Cheshire Sheaf* printed a persuasive article refuting this story, which had apparently first appeared in the work of a notorious fraudster of the late seventeenth century, at the time of the anti-Catholic hysteria in the wake of the Popish Plot.²²⁹

The persisting appeal of Catholic practices is illustrated by Foxe's report of George Marsh's death. When he was on his way to his execution several of the crowd offered alms to pay for a trental of masses for his salvation, which, of course he refused.²³⁰ Clearly many of the people of Chester continued to believe in the Catholic

²²⁷ For example Aldersey's history at CALS ZCR 469/542 confirms the name of the sheriff and mentions the death of Marsh under the entry for 1554-5, but there is no reference to any rescue attempt. He gives Marsh's first name as John, however. Foxe, of course, is not always unerringly accurate. For a recent reference to the supposed intervention of sheriff Cowper see *VCH* online: 'Early Modern Chester 1550-1762: Religion, 1550-1642', A History of the County of Chester: Volume 5 part 1: The City of Chester: General History and Topography (2003), pp. 109-112 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=19196>> (accessed 6 July 2013).

²²⁸ Duffy, *Fires of Faith*, Chapter 7. Marsh's execution seems to have been botched 'by reason that the fier was vnskilfully made, and that the wind dyd driue the flame to and fro'.

²²⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, pp. 3-5. For a recent reference to the pack of cards story see Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), p. 236. The identity of the woman who removed the commission varies and is said by some to have been Lady Ann Smith, wife of Sir Laurence Smith, and by others to have been Mrs Elizabeth Mottershead, landlady of The Blue Posts Inn, said to have been awarded a pension of £40 *per annum* by Queen Elizabeth for her actions.

²³⁰ For example; John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online* (1563 edition, Book 5, pp. 1190-1) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011) <<http://www.johnfoxe.org>> (accessed 12 July 2012).

route to salvation, as the evidence of surviving wills also reveals. Foxe stated, however, that a small number of Chester people supported Marsh's reformed views and 'loued him in God for the Gospel's sake'. When he was imprisoned in a particularly unpleasant subterranean gaol in Chester they

would sometime in the euening (at a hoale vpon the wal of the citie, that went into the sayd dark prison) cal to him and aske him howe he did ... Once or twyse he had money cast him in at the same hoale, about ten pence at one tyme, and twoo shyllinges at another tyme.²³¹

Such people chose not to express their views overtly, and it may be noted that they visited Marsh under cover of darkness. In view of the amounts of money thrown to him, this was either donated by wealthy townspeople or groups of poor people.

As the diocesan hierarchy under Scott and Hanson became more determined and efficient in its efforts to punish offenders any opposition, however subtle, became increasingly difficult. Pursuing offenders through the church courts whose weightiest sanction was excommunication was in some ways self-defeating, since this would exclude from the church community parishioners whose precise aim was to oppose the reintroduction of Catholic ritual and therefore to avoid it. In the case of gentry, such as John Legh of Ridge, excommunication might scarcely matter, but if the parish community enforced the social and economic exclusion which excommunication should have entailed this may have been a daunting prospect for more humble parishioners.²³²

Opposition which took the form of obstructing ceremonial, failing to pay church taxes

²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1190.

²³² For a discussion of the effectiveness of excommunication as a sanction see Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 48-50, and from the later sixteenth century see Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 1990), pp. 340-63.

and staying away from church could be represented as motivated by something other than religious conviction, which is exactly why it is so difficult to identify and impossible to prove beyond all doubt. However, an examination of surviving evidence of the confessional identities of some of those who behaved in these ways strongly indicates that some parishioners chose to express their opposition in subtle ways.

Conclusion

The two bishops of the Marian period were faced with different problems in the diocese of Chester. Both men were probably chosen for their academic achievements and preaching ability, but Cuthbert Scott seems to have been a much more able administrator than George Cotes. Cotes was either unable or unwilling to dislodge George Wilmesley, the diocesan chancellor, whose personal connections put him in a seemingly-impregnable position. As long as he retained his position of influence in the diocese there were likely to be difficulties in enforcing the rigorous reforms which Duffy has identified as a key factor in Pole's administration.

Under Scott's leadership Wilmesley's power was eclipsed, and his replacement as the bishop's right-hand man, John Hanson, was a man of a very different calibre. Both Scott and Hanson were men of strong religious convictions and both were to leave England as religious exiles following their refusal to conform to the Elizabethan settlement. However, although both men were competent administrators each of them seems to have tried to take on too much personally, which perhaps rendered them less effective than they might otherwise have been. John Hanson was simultaneously archdeacon of Richmond, joint commissary-general and official principal of Chester and

effectively chancellor of the diocese. He almost invariably presided over the consistory court at Chester from late in 1555. In 1556 he became vicar of Bowdon, where evidence of irregularity was uncovered and presented at the 1557 visitation, probably due to his personal intervention. He was also appointed perpetual vicar of Rochdale in Lancashire following the deprivation of the previous incumbent for negligence in 1557.²³³ He was certainly not among those non-resident pluralists who enjoyed the income of their parishes while failing to undertake any of the concomitant duties but was personally involved in enforcing discipline in his local parishes.

The county's parish clergy, as a group, seem to have been of a conservative disposition, demonstrated by their general reluctance to marry during Edward VI's reign. This may be why the cathedral clergy seemingly tried to set an example in encouraging marriage. The popularity of the church, as a profession, was restored during Mary's reign and the reputation of the clergy was enhanced after the hiatus of Edward's reign. The job vacancies arising as a result of the high mortality of the late 1550s presented greater opportunities for those entering the church than had been the case for many years. During the greater part of Mary's reign, however, most parishes were held by men who were not graduates, and most of those who had graduated did not reside in their local parish. The diocesan administrators do not seem to have considered the issues of pluralism and non-residence to be as important as improving the moral standards of the clergy, although their efforts in this direction met with little success. Despite the increased appeal of a career in the church, by the end of the reign the size of the clerical establishment was much reduced, and in some ways this made the Elizabethan

²³³ There is no surviving record of Hanson's institution to Rochdale, but he was deprived of the living in March 1561; CCEd Person ID 36769 (date accessed 13 July 2012).

settlement easier as new clergy who were not associated with previous regimes came into the parishes.

There is little evidence that the Marian regime developed new systems at diocesan level to deal with the discipline of the clergy and dissent among the laity; rather they relied on the existing structures of visitation and the consistory court.²³⁴ The visitation procedure relied heavily upon the goodwill and co-operation of churchwardens and in cases where this was not forthcoming, as at Bowdon, this created problems of enforcement. It was not until the development of the ecclesiastical commission in Elizabeth's reign that any innovative approach to church discipline is known to have become a permanent feature of the diocese.

Little evidence has survived from Cheshire to support Duffy's contention that Pole had implemented a policy of persuasion at parish level. However, there was clearly some negotiation involved in the return of church assets and voluntary funding of substantial items such as the tabernacle at St Mary's. There is also some evidence of preaching, although the curate of Thornton was possibly reading a homily when his words were drowned by the ringing of bells.

The majority of the population of the county probably welcomed the return of Catholicism under Mary. The unique case of heresy uncovered in 1557, together with the restricted demonstrations of support for George Marsh, limited to nocturnal visits, indicate that those few people of Cheshire who might have been evangelicals did not court martyrdom with a public display of dissent. However, the visitation evidence reveals that an increasing number of parishioners were presented for failing to attend

²³⁴ R. B. Manning, 'The Making of a Protestant Aristocracy: the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of the Diocese of Chester, 1550-98', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 49 (1976), pp. 60-79.

church as the reign progressed. There was also escalating opposition to the financial demands of restoring Catholic liturgy. While this may reflect more rigorous investigation and enforcement, it may also suggest that by the end of the reign public attitudes were hardening and beginning to polarise.

6

THE ELIZABETHAN SETTLEMENT

William Aldersey's history of Chester related how Queen Elizabeth came to the throne in 1558 and 'restored the truthe of the gosspeil'.¹ In this chapter I will consider the efforts of the first Elizabethan bishop of Chester, William Downham, to implement the religious legislation of 1559. His period in office ended with his death in 1577, the year when Edmund Grindal was suspended for refusal to suppress the 'prophesyings'. Grindal's suspension has been seen by some historians as 'a critical turning point', a moment when royal government became more authoritarian and religious attitudes polarised.² The years of Downham's episcopate thus encompassed the period of Elizabeth's reign before this key event, while there was still a degree of uncertainty about the speed and direction of religious change. The first part of this chapter will consider the legitimacy of current assessments of Downham's character and achievements as he found himself in a position where he was required to balance opposing forces. At one extreme was a small, but powerful, number of radical reformers, such as the network of supporters of Christopher Goodman, a leader of the exile congregation in Geneva; at the other extreme were those committed Catholics whose opposition to the Elizabethan settlement persisted throughout the reign. In the middle, the majority of the population of Cheshire was probably still religiously conservative, although not necessarily Catholic. While this majority remained to be convinced by the Elizabethan settlement they were growing increasingly impatient with

¹ CALS ZCR 469/542.

² Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (paperback second edition, London and New York, 2012), pp. 132-3.

the practical implications of the Marian restoration in the form of increasing financial demands. The second section will consider the extent to which the ideal of an ‘educated resident preaching pastoral clergy’, supposedly a Marian ideal, was implemented by the first Elizabethan bishop of Chester.³ The existence of a clergy list, drawn up for the *sede vacante* visitation of 1578 following Downham’s death, has proved a useful tool in profiling the parish incumbents at the end of his episcopate.⁴ Both the Edwardian and Marian hierarchies had stressed the importance of preaching, and Downham’s success in implementing a programme of preaching will also be considered. Finally, the lay response to Downham’s initiatives will be examined, together with evidence of lay attitudes to the Book of Common Prayer after nearly two decades in use by the time of Downham’s death.

Diocesan Government

The diocese of Chester had been in existence for less than twenty years at the time of Queen Elizabeth’s accession in November 1558. During that time there had been three bishops of divergent character and ability, all of whom had had to address the problems inherent in administering a diocese which was the third largest in area but one of the poorest – if not the poorest – in terms of income.⁵ In order to raise revenue John Bird,

³ Eamon Duffy, *Fires of Faith: Catholic England under Mary Tudor* (New Haven, Conn; London, 2009), p. 26.

⁴ See Appendix.

⁵ Christopher Haigh, ‘Finance and Administration in a New Diocese: Chester, 1541-1641’, in R. O’Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church of England, 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), p. 145. In a letter to Cecil in 1568 Downham complained ‘I haue of the Bishoprick nothing but bare rent and much of it evill payd, and the least reuennue that any man of my calling haue in this Realme’; SP 12/48, f. 75v.

the first bishop, had granted numerous long leases with high entry fees and low rents which impoverished the see for future incumbents.

Scott, the second Marian bishop, was deprived of the bishopric on 26 June 1559 following his speeches in the Lords against both the Uniformity Bill and the Supremacy Bill, and his unsurprising refusal to subscribe to the royal supremacy. He was imprisoned the following year and escaped to the continent in April or May 1563 following his release on bail.⁶ Five other Marian bishops had been deprived in June 1559 and eight sees were vacant through death by the end of the year. With other deprivations and resignations Elizabeth was faced with the task of filling twenty-five vacancies among the twenty-seven English and Welsh dioceses.⁷ This presented the new government with an ideal opportunity to install a bench of bishops favourable to the Elizabethan religious settlement which had restored a liturgy based on a modified version of the second Edwardian prayer book.⁸ It seems, however, that the dioceses of the Northern Province were not a priority and on 16 October 1560 Matthew Parker, the new archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to William Cecil

to desire you to make request to the Queen's majesty that some bishops might be appointed into the north ... the people there is offended that they be nothing cared for. Alas, they be people rude of their own nature, and the more need to be looked to for retaining them in quiet and civility. I fear that whatsoever is now

⁶ Strype, *Annals*, I (ii), pp. 408-23; 438-50; Kenneth Carleton, 'Scott, Cuthbert (*d.* 1565)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 25 July 2012).

⁷ Brett Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy, 1559-1577* (Aldershot, 2003), pp. 7-8, 17; CCED <<http://ccedb.cch.kcl.ac.uk/reference/resources/azlist.html>> (accessed 10 December 2012). The two dioceses which were not vacant were Llandaff held by Anthony Kitchin and Sodor and Man held by Thomas Stanley, an illegitimate kinsman of the earl of Derby, who spent most of his time in Lancashire.

⁸ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 125.

too husbandly saved will be an occasion of further expence in keeping them down, if (as God forbend) they should be too much Irish and savage.⁹

It may have been receipt of this letter which prompted Cecil to note the possible appointment of William Downham, one of the Queen's chaplains, as bishop of Chester, probably later in October. He continued to remind her about this appointment during November and December, and it was confirmed by Christmas Day 1560.¹⁰ Although Downham had been marked down for preferment in early 1559, he was not the first choice for Chester. This had been Thomas Becon, a returning exile who headed one of the circuits of the royal visitation of 1559 but probably refused the see and never became a bishop.¹¹ The failure of the authorities to integrate many of the Marian exiles into the episcopal hierarchy, to which several objected on principle, was to cause problems later in Elizabeth's reign as they sought to establish what was, in effect, an alternative ecclesiastical structure operating within the established church.

There is a certain amount of disagreement about William Downham's origins. According to Matthew Parker, who knew him, he was born about 1511 in Herefordshire.¹² He became a brother of the College of Bonhommes at Ashridge, then in

⁹ John Bruce and Rev. Thomas Thomason Perowne (eds), *Correspondence of Matthew Parker, D.D. Archbishop of Canterbury* (Cambridge, 1853), p. 123.

¹⁰ Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, pp. 63-4.

¹¹ Seymour Baker House, 'Becon, Thomas (1512/13–1567)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012). Becon was one of those clergy suspended in 1566 for refusal to wear a surplice during the vestiarian controversy; Marshall, *Reformation England*, pp. 130-1.

¹² Samuel Drake (ed.), *Matthaei Parker Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae* (London, 1729), p.57, gives his age as 50 at the time of his consecration as bishop in May 1561 and his county of origin as Hereford. Since Matthew Parker knew him, it seems reasonable to assume that his biographical details are the most accurate. Parker's age details are confirmed by an epitaph in the choir of Chester cathedral (now lost) which gave Downham's age as 66 when he died towards the end of 1577: see, for example, R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London, 1958), p. 54. Both of these sources thus point to a year of birth of 1510/11. His age at consecration is given by Usher, without attribution, as 42, which would mean that he was born about 1519; Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, p.203. His year of birth is also given as 1519 by White without attribution; F. O. White, *Lives of the Elizabethan Bishops of the Anglican Church* (London,

Buckinghamshire.¹³ Following the dissolution of the house, which subsequently passed into the ownership of Princess Elizabeth, Downham entered Exeter College, Oxford, and gained the degrees of B.A. and M.A., becoming a fellow of Magdalen College by 1543. By 1548 he was rector of Datchworth in Hertfordshire and pension records indicate that he still held the living in early 1554, by which time he was married.¹⁴ It was probably on account of his marriage that he was deprived of this rectory shortly afterwards.¹⁵

Downham has been described by Haigh as ‘a weak man, dominated by his sharp-tongued wife, and reluctant to offend the conservative gentry among whom he made his friends’ and also as notoriously slack and ‘forbearing in his treatment of moral lapse’.¹⁶ He is also seen as ‘lazy and ineffectual’ and as having ‘proved especially weak in attacking recusancy and religious conservatism’.¹⁷ The received view now refers to his

1898), p. 167. The *DNB* entry gives Downham’s year of birth as 1510/11 and place of birth as Norfolk; C. S. Knighton, ‘Downham, William (1510/11–1577)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 30 October 2012). The register of Magdalen College, Oxford also gives his place of origin as Norfolk; W. D. Macray, *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1897), p. 84.

¹³ BL Harley 1948, f. 86v; *VCH* online: ‘House of Bonhommes: The College of Ashridge’, *A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 1* (1905), pp. 386–390. <[http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40318&strquery=Bonhommes Ashridge](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40318&strquery=Bonhommes+Ashridge)> (accessed 4 December 2012) states that Ashridge was then in Buckinghamshire, but on the Hertfordshire border, and now forms part of that county. The endowment was one of only two houses of this order in England. From the thirteenth century its attraction as a place of pilgrimage was enhanced by its possession of a phial of the Precious Blood, of which part had been given by the donor to the Abbey of Hailes.

¹⁴ ‘Disbrowe-Dyve’, *Alumni Oxonienses* (online edition <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=117056>>) (accessed 4 December 2012); G. A. J. Hodgett (ed.), *The State of the Ex-Religious and Former Chantry Priests in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1547–1574* (The Lincoln Record Society, 53, 1959), p. 96. His younger son, John, was born in 1571 at which date he would have been 60, suggesting that he may have married twice and that his second wife was some years younger than him. This may help to explain the indulgence with which she was apparently treated by him.

¹⁵ CCEd gives details of the vacancy, but gives neither the name of the deprived rector, nor the reason for his deprivation by 7 May 1554;

<<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk/jsp/DisplayVacancy.jsp?CDBAppRedID=321097>> (accessed 4 December 2012).

¹⁶ Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 210. Haigh’s analysis of Downham’s character has now become normative and is followed by, for example, Knighton, ‘Downham’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 30 October 2012). K. R. Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire* (Chetham Society, 3rd series, 19, 1971), pp. 4–5, offers a similar analysis.

¹⁷ Margaret Clark, ‘Northern Light? Parochial Life in a “dark corner” of Tudor England’, in Katherine L. French, Gary G. Gibbs and Beat A. Kümin (eds), *The Parish in English Life 1400–1600* (Manchester, 1997), p. 66; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 20.

‘continued failure to prosecute any kind of reform within his diocese’.¹⁸ This modern condemnation is in direct opposition to the nineteenth-century assessment which saw him as ‘very rigid in enforcing conformity ... many of his clergy were summoned before him, subjected to his censure, and in some instances deprived’.¹⁹ This section will consider whether either of these conflicting assessments is reasonable, and whether the differentiation between Downham and his successor, William Chaderton, whom Haigh saw as ‘a conscientious bishop and reasonably energetic in his pursuit of Catholics’ is justified.²⁰

A contemporary criticism of Downham was that he ‘was suspected of papistrie’.²¹ This is illustrated by a report of comments made at a dinner in 1581, more than three years after Downham’s death, by the parliamentary draftsman Thomas Norton. Norton had been reported to the authorities for his criticism of the church, and bishops in particular, and set out his defence of his words. The suspicion about Downham’s religion had been reported to Norton by Matthew Parker. It probably stems from Downham’s summons to London in 1571 to answer questions relating to his religious views, following which interview he was exonerated.²² In discussing this source, however, Patrick Collinson gave this suspicion a more concrete form, as a reference to bishops who ‘had been heretics, like Guest and Cheyney ... or papists like Downham of Chester’.²³ However, the fact of Downham’s marriage, which must have taken place during Edward’s reign, would argue against his having been a committed

¹⁸ Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, p. 66.

¹⁹ *Notitia Cestriensis*, i, p. 7 (assessment of Downham by Raines, the editor, not Gastrell).

²⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 270.

²¹ William Durrant Cooper, ‘Further Particulars of Thomas Norton, and of State Proceedings in Matters of Religion, in the Years 1581 and 1582’, *Archaeologia*, 36 (January 1855), p.112.

²² *APC*, vol. 7, 1558-1570, pp. 398-9; *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, p. 5; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 13; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 223-4.

²³ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London, 1967), pp. 206-7.

Catholic, since acceptance of clerical marriage 'to Protestants embodied an important statement of theological principle'.²⁴ Equivocation about religion, if not actually papistry, is one of the charges which is frequently levelled at Downham by historians, and his conformity as Elizabeth's chaplain during Mary's reign was one of the reasons why returning exiles regarded him with suspicion. His entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* concludes with a note that he had 'two sons, George Downham and John Downham, a bishop and a puritan: Downham sat so long on the fence that his seed fell either side of it.' While this may make a neat epigram, its accuracy is questionable and contributes little to a discussion of Downham's religious sympathies. The implication that George Downham, bishop of Derry, was a conservative in religion is not borne out by his strict adherence to the Calvinist doctrines of predestination and his efforts to spread Protestantism among the reluctant inhabitants of his Irish see.²⁵

Although Downham's appointment to Chester had been confirmed by December 1560, royal assent to his election was not given until May 1561. However, on 13 November 1561 he was said to be still in daily attendance upon the Queen, so it is unlikely that he was able to take up his duties in Chester and move his household north until the end of the year.²⁶ By that time the see had been vacant for almost two and a

²⁴ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 129.

²⁵ Kenneth Gibson, 'Downham, George (d. 1634)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012). His surname is often spelled 'Downame'; e.g. Peter Marshall, '(Re)defining the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies*, 48 (2009), p. 570. William Downham also had at least one, and possibly two, daughters who do not appear in his *DNB* entry. One daughter married Roger Bradshaw of Aspall: unfortunately, the forename of this daughter has not survived and she seems to have died young: F. R. Raines (ed.), *The Visitation of the County Palatine of Lancaster, made in the year 1664-5*, by Sir William Dugdale, *Knight, Norroy King of Arms*, part I, (Chetham Society, old series, 84, 1872), p. 54. The possibility of a second daughter comes from a reference to 'one Wright, the late bisshoppes sonn in lawe', quoted in Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p. 58. Which late bishop is referred to here is unclear, but if the quotation does date from a time between 1575 and 1580, as Burne suggests, it is likely to date from after 1577 and the bishop must be Downham as Scott is most unlikely to have had any children. Downham had a chaplain called William Wright, who may have been his son in law.

²⁶ TNA: PRO E 337/4; Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, pp. 80, 203-4.

half years. During most of this time the administration of the diocese had remained in the hands of Cuthbert Scott's chaplain, John Hanson. According to the consistory court records, Hanson was still legitimately deputed to preside over the court although he had been deprived of the archdeaconry of Richmond in 1559.²⁷ He continued to hear cases personally until at least February 1561, but later that year he fled overseas.²⁸ The work of the consistory court was reduced at this time, however, and at the session held on 12 December 1560 only twenty cases were heard, mostly defamation, tithe and probate matters. This may be compared with the thirty-two cases heard by Hanson on 18 March 1557.²⁹ During this period and following Hanson's departure the elderly cathedral prebendaries, Nicholas Bucksey and William Wall, both members of the original foundation, presided over the court. George Wilmesley had also made a brief return in October 1560 when he assisted at a special session relating to a divorce.³⁰ The Marian archdeacon of Chester, Robert Percival, was never as active in the diocesan administration as Hanson.³¹ He may have been deprived of the archdeaconry in 1559, but continued as a canon of Chester until his successor was appointed in June 1563.³²

²⁷ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, ff. 75-75v; J. B. Wainewright, 'Archdeacons Deprived under Queen Elizabeth', *Ampleforth Journal*, 17:1 (1911), p. 41. Hanson continued as vicar of Rochdale until March 1561; F. R. Raines, *The Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, ed. Henry H. Howarth (Chetham Society, new series, 1, 1883), p. 41.

²⁸ CALS EDC 1/16, f. 55; TNA: PRO SP 15/11, ff. 77-77v. He was still in England on 19 March 1561 when his deposition was taken in a case regarding chapel stipends, Raines, *Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 40. Coincidentally, Hanson had been bursar of Magdalen College, Oxford, when Downham was a fellow there in the 1540s; Macray, *A Register of the Members of St. Mary Magdalen College, Oxford*, vol. ii, pp. 78, 84.

²⁹ CALS EDC 1/16, ff. 37-9; EDC 1/14, ff. 215-220.

³⁰ CALS EDC 1/16, ff. 12v, 13v, 56.

³¹ E. Kate Jarman (ed.), *Justice and Conciliation in a Tudor Church Court: The Consistory Court of Chester, September 1558-March 1559* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 146, 2012), pp. xxiii, 11.

³² 'Archdeacons: Chester', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 45-47 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35846>> (accessed 10 December 2012); Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, pp. 37, 44. Burne states that Percival continued as a canon until his death.

One ordination service was held in the diocese by Thomas Bentham, the new bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, in the cathedral on 25 September 1560.³³

Therefore, during the period of vacancy even the royal visitors of 1559, who have been categorised as ‘staunchly Protestant’, can have made little headway in reversing the Marian restoration in Cheshire, as the routine correction procedures in the diocese remained under the control of the Catholic Hanson.³⁴ The royal visitors for Chester diocese were Edwin Sandys, Henry Harvey and George Browne.³⁵ However, following their appearance at Northwich in Cheshire on 20 October 1559, they soon delegated their authority to four surrogates ‘*ob certas rationabiles causas et precipue ob pestem ... tam in Ciuitate Cestrienso quam in circumvicinis*’.³⁶ The surrogates were two local gentlemen, Sir Edward Fitton and William Moreton, one cleric, Edmund Scambler, and Thomas Percy, notary public, who acted as registrar to the visitation.³⁷ Sir Edward Fitton was one of the leading gentry of the county. He was sheriff in 1558-9, which possibly explains his appointment as visitor, and he may certainly be regarded as ‘staunchly Protestant’. As Fitton was to be instrumental in the implementation of the Elizabethan religious settlement in Cheshire, it is perhaps appropriate to consider his life and character at this point.³⁸ He is known to have had scholarly interests and translated a text by Martin Luther into English, suggesting a keen interest in Protestant literature.

³³ CALS EDA 1/3.

³⁴ The quotation is from Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 130.

³⁵ Kitching (ed.), ‘Royal Visitation of 1559’, p. xxiii.

³⁶ For certain reasonable causes and especially on account of the plague ... both in the city of Chester and in the neighbouring areas; TNA: PRO SP 12/10 ff. 52-52v.

³⁷ C. J. Kitching (ed.), ‘The Royal Visitation of 1559; Act Book for the Northern Province’, *Surtees Society*, 197 (1975 for 1972), p. xviii.

³⁸ Two accounts of his life may be found online; one by Bernadette Cunningham, ‘Fitton, Sir Edward (1527–1579)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012) the other ‘FITTON, Edward (1527-79), of Gawsworth, Cheshire’ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/fitton-edward-1527-79>> (accessed 10 December 2012).

His religious views are well-documented. It was reported to Cecil in 1571 that ‘he dothe beare a good vprighte and godlie concyence, A wyse and sober man he is, and such a one as dothe not shewe to be moved with passyones ... and will for no respecte offende his conscience’.³⁹ Fitton served for many years in Ireland at great personal expense, and enjoyed the support of William Cecil, through whom he secured personal meetings with Queen Elizabeth and favours for his family.⁴⁰ He also presented two Puritan clergy to livings in his gift. Christopher Goodman, returned Marian exile, was appointed by him to the parish of Aldford in 1567.⁴¹ He presented Robert Rogers, successor to Robert Percival as archdeacon of Chester, to the family living of Gawsworth.⁴²

³⁹ Cunningham, ‘Fitton’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013); TNA: SP 63/32, f. 124. Susan Guinn-Chipman has stated that Sir Edward Fitton engaged in litigation in 1582 to recover lands which had been settled on a family chantry at Gawsworth. This was the eponymous son of the man considered here. Her statement that the family were ‘suspected of Catholic recusancy’ seems to be based on Wark’s contention that Francis Fitton, who was ordained as a Catholic priest at Douai in 1600, was the son of the older Sir Edward Fitton: Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 175. Francis was thus the brother and not the son of the 1582 litigant, as Guinn-Chipman asserts. Sir Edward Fitton the younger was charged in his father’s will with the task of providing for the support or marriage of his six sisters and supporting two of his brothers until they finished their education: TNA: PRO PROB 11/61/ 561 Sir Edward Fyton. He was also concerned in the 1580s to raise funds for a lease of 12,000 acres of land in Ireland. He was described as “sufficient” in religion in 1587 and three years later of “good conformity”, though not “commended for any forwardness in the cause of religion”; ‘FITTON, Edward (c.1548-1606), of Gawsworth, Cheshire’ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/fitton-edward-1548-1606>> (accessed 10 July 2013). Guinn-Chipman considers that Fitton’s attempt to recover family land ‘was undoubtedly motivated, in part, by economic considerations. For the elite Catholic families of Cheshire, such as ... the Fittons, however, resistant responses also had religious roots’: Susan Guinn-Chipman, *Religious Space in Reformation England* (London; Vermont, 2013), p. 57. To describe the Fitton family as ‘Catholic’ at this time, based merely on the evidence of the later ordination of Francis Fitton, is perverse in the light of contemporary accounts of their own religious views. There is nothing to suggest that the litigation in connection with the concealed lands in which the younger Sir Edward was involved so long after the dissolution was motivated by anything other than economics.

⁴⁰ Cunningham, ‘Fitton’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013).

⁴¹ He was admitted to the living on 30 December 1567; CALS EDP 3/1/1. Goodman was distantly related to Fitton through his mother; Ormerod, iii, pp. 88-90; 552-3.

⁴² Earwaker, ii, p. 588. Earwaker comments ‘He is thought by some to have been one of the ten children of John Rogers’, the Marian protomartyr. This seems unlikely as John Rogers came from Deritend, near Birmingham, and was a pastor at Meldorf in Germany from 1543 until 1548 at the time when Robert Rogers is thought to have been at school in Chester (David Daniell, ‘Rogers, John (c.1500–1555) *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013). Additionally, the *Cheshire Sheaf* printed a lengthy and convincing refutation of the claim; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, xxix, pp. 10-11. Robert Rogers was a Puritan and a member of Christopher Goodman’s circle. He was also a noted antiquarian and author of one of the ‘Annals of Chester’.

At the 1559 royal visitation there was more criticism by parishioners of the failings of the parish clergy than had been seen at previous visitations. However, this may merely reflect the emphasis of the visitation articles. Scott's articles for the 1557 visitation, for example, had not raised the issue of non-residence, but the royal visitors of 1559 were directed to enquire into this.⁴³ The vast majority of the presentments

Table 6 – Religious offences recorded in 32 Cheshire parishes and 10 chapelries by the royal visitors in 1559.⁴⁴

BUILDING OR EQUIPMENT	
no register book	2
fabric in decay	8
CLERGY	
cure not served	2
incumbent not resident	5
service read negligently	3
incumbent does not give alms or hospitality	4
financial irregularity	1
sexual immorality	3
drunkenness	2
PARISHIONERS RELIGIOUS OFFENCES	
keeping images etc.	2
not attending church	1
TOTAL	33

of 1559 involved moral offences on the part of the laity, however. As indicated in Table 6 above there were no reports of failure to remove images, pictures and 'monuments of

⁴³ Greater Manchester County Record Office E7/12/1/2; W. H. Frere and W. P. Kennedy (eds), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation* Alcuin Club Collections (1910), iii, p. 3.

⁴⁴ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, ff. 117v-135. Each type of offence has been counted separately, even if it occurred in the same parish or relates to the same person. The clerical offences of immorality include the report by the parishioners of Frodsham that Mr Richard Gerrard, rector of the next-but-one parish of Grappenhall, kept a concubine in their parish. No presentments at this visitation have survived for the other Cheshire parishes and chapelries.

... idolatry and superstition' from churches.⁴⁵ Furthermore, only two parishioners were reported to be 'secreatlye' keeping images, books and a rood, both in Chester. Apparently, only one man, also in Chester, failed to attend church regularly, following the re-introduction of the English services in June 1559.⁴⁶ Although it may have been rather early to uncover evidence of failure to attend the revised church services because they had only been made compulsory a few months before, any failure to remove the forbidden items from church buildings should have been obvious. However, the royal visitors must have failed to detect a number of offences in Cheshire as subsequent evidence indicates that several parishes had still not complied with the 1559 visitation articles many years later. For example, at Church Lawton the wardens were ordered in December 1563 to 'cause all Alters images and all ther monumentes of Idolatry of supersticion to be removed'.⁴⁷ It is likely that the wall pictures at St Mary's in Chester were not covered up until 1562-3 when the churchwardens' accounts record a payment of 2s 6d for 'whyte lyminge & dresynge the chorche' and 14d for 'the ten commavndements' in the same year that the rood loft and altars were taken down.⁴⁸ At Coddington it was reported as late as 1592 that there were still 'Idolatrie pictures' in the rood loft.⁴⁹ The failure of the visitors to uncover these offences in 1559 illustrates the problems of enforcing discipline if the churchwardens failed to present offenders.

⁴⁵ Frere and Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii, p. 2.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 1; TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 134v. At St Peter's parish it was presented that 'Thomas Byldon thelder commethe seldom to the churche'.

⁴⁷ CALS EDA 12/1, f. 13.

⁴⁸ J. P. Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill Chester* (London, 1898), p. 253.

⁴⁹ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 84.

Furthermore, the disciplinary process of visitation was ineffective if offenders did not attend for correction.⁵⁰

When Downham arrived in Cheshire to take up his duties, possibly in December 1561, a metropolitan visitation was underway. This had begun in the autumn, when the cathedral accounts record a payment of 31s 11d for a dinner on the first day of the visitation.⁵¹ The authority of the bishop was inhibited from at least 25 September 1561, when Thomas Young, archbishop of York, is recorded as the presiding authority in the Chester consistory court '*ratione visitacione sue metropolicane*' (by reason of his metropolitan visitation).⁵² This inhibition continued until at least 19 March 1562 and during this time the bishop was legally prohibited from exercising jurisdiction, correcting offences, conferring orders or making appointments.⁵³ Although in practice the visitor might choose to 'indulge' the ordinary, the fact that the consistory continued under the nominal authority of the archbishop throughout this period suggests that in this case he had chosen not to relax the inhibition, or at least not fully. This would have meant that Downham was probably not in a position to make any appointments from autumn 1561, when he had not yet had the opportunity to visit Chester, until late March 1562. He has been criticised for not having appointed a chancellor until March 1562, but in fact it is likely that he made the appointment as soon as he was in a position to do so.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 232.

⁵¹ R. V. H. Burne, 'Chester Cathedral in the Reigns of Mary and Elizabeth', *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), p. 57. Burne states that it was the bishop who was holding the visitation at this time, but the reference to 'my L.' in the accounts must relate to the archbishop since Downham was still in London.

⁵² CALS EDC 1/16, ff. 60v, 103.

⁵³ Richard Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law* (London, 1767), iv, pp. 14-5; Dorothy M. Owen, *The Records of the Established Church in England* (London, 1970), pp. 30-5.

⁵⁴ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 211; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 20.

Thus on 28 March 1562 he appointed Robert Leche as chancellor.⁵⁵ Leche was from Chester, probably a layman and a definitely a graduate, holding several degrees including Doctor of Civil Law.⁵⁶ He had presided over the Chester consistory court from at least September 1561, when he was acting as commissary to the visitation.⁵⁷ He was well qualified for the position of chancellor, and there is no evidence that he exercised the office otherwise than with diligence and integrity.

The first recorded contemporary criticism of William Downham as bishop relates to the metropolitan visitation of 1561. This comes in a letter from James Pilkington to Matthew Parker, dated in the edition of Parker's correspondence as 'possibly' 1564.⁵⁸ However, the letter is more likely to have been written in October 1561, as Pilkington travelled north to his new see of Durham, probably taking the opportunity to visit his home county of Lancashire on the way.⁵⁹ Having complained about the standard of some of the local parish clergy, Pilkington went on to condemn the

⁵⁵ EDA 2/2, ff. 52-3.

⁵⁶ 'Labdon-Ledsam', *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* (1891), pp. 868-892 < <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=119367> > (accessed 13 November 2012). It is not entirely certain that Leche was a layman. He always referred to himself as '*legum doctor*', and is never referred to as '*clericus*' in diocesan records, not even in the patent for his appointment as Chancellor drawn up in March 1562; CALS EDA 2/2, ff. 52-3. This patent also appointed him rural dean of Chester, Wirral and Malpas deaneries. He is, however, designated '*clericus*' in the list of parishes and officials of Chester diocese drawn up by Downham in 1563 in which he appears as dean of those deaneries; BL Harley 594, ff. 89-90. We have seen that laymen could be appointed as rural deans and Leche is elsewhere referred to as 'gentleman' in deeds relating to land; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, xliii, p. 41; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, xlix, p. 31. I incline to the view that he had not been ordained, as he is unlikely to have referred to himself as 'gentleman' in legal documents concerning the transfer of land if he had been. Why, in that case, Downham described him as '*clericus*' in 1563 is obscure.

⁵⁷ The records of the proceedings of the consistory court for the period from March 1561, when Nicholas Bucksey presided, until September 1561 are missing so it has not been possible to establish when he first presided.

⁵⁸ Bruce and Perowne (eds.), *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, pp. 221-2.

⁵⁹ David Marcombe, 'Pilkington, James (1520-1576)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012); Raines, *The Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 51. Pilkington probably visited Lancashire between his resignation as master of St John's in October 1561 and his visitation of Durham cathedral later that month. A further indication that the letter dates from 1561 is that it includes recommendations for appointment to the vicarage of Rochdale. John Hanson had resigned as vicar there on 17 March 1561 (CCEd person ID 79798), but there was a new incumbent by 27 November 1561 so the living was vacant between these two dates; Raines, *Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 42. The next vacancy did not occur until 1595; Raines, *The Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 68.

bishop of Chester who ‘has compounded with my lord of York for his visitation, and gathers up the money by his servant; but never a word spoken of any visitation or reformation; and that, he says, he does of friendship, because he will not trouble the country, nor put them to charge in calling them together.’⁶⁰ This criticism has been taken at face value by subsequent historians and is probably the origin of subsequent claims that he was ‘reluctant to offend the conservative gentry among whom he made his friends.’⁶¹ Precisely this charge was levelled by contemporaries at Chaderton, Downham’s successor who ‘enterteyneth greatlie many of those gentlemen whose houses are vehemently infected with Popery, and he likewise very much resorteth vnto those gentlemens houses & pretendeth that he doth so for theire Reformacon, but yet neuer reformed any’.⁶² Two factors cast doubt on the accuracy of Pilkington’s complaint and suggest that Downham had not compounded and that Young’s metropolitan visitation continued. Firstly, Downham’s authority was still inhibited by Young some five months later and secondly, records of corrections survive from this time for one deanery in Cheshire and three in Lancashire.⁶³ The Macclesfield deanery corrections are dated 12 February 1561/2 and must, therefore, relate to this visitation. Unfortunately, the name of the presiding official has not been recorded. The majority of the offences related to personal morality, but there are several reports of church buildings in need of repair and at Macclesfield there was a repetition of the complaint to the royal commissioners in 1559 that the chapelry was not served.⁶⁴ There were also other

⁶⁰ Bruce and Perowne (eds.), *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, p. 222.

⁶¹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 210.

⁶² TNA: PRO SP 15/27/2, f. 170v; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 50; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 269-70.

⁶³ CALS EDV 1/2a, ff. 105-159v.

⁶⁴ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 112.

complaints of irregular behaviour at service time such as fighting in church at Mobberley; this type of offence was referred to the rural dean for correction.⁶⁵ At Stockport three women were presented for failure to attend church; they were also referred to the dean.⁶⁶

Another contemporary report arising from a visitation has given rise to Downham's reputation as a hen-pecked husband. In February 1573, the dean of Chester, John Piers, had offered a vacant prebend to Thomas Purvis, a teacher at the cathedral school in Chester. However, during the metropolitan visitation of 1571 Purvis had criticised Downham, although the grounds of his complaint have not survived. When Purvis visited the bishop to have his appointment confirmed, Downham 'gently admitted' Purvis, but not without uttering a 'sharpe expostulacion'. In an intervention worthy of Trollope's Mrs Proudie, however, Mrs Downham 'start [sic] from her stoole, and said, if I were a man he shold not have it' to which the bishop replied 'why woman the writinges be soe, it muste be soe. Cotgreave make out his institucion. Mr parvis leave your writinges with me yt he may make it.' Purvis thanked the bishop but, after he had left, Mrs Downham reportedly persuaded the chancellor to find an irregularity in the 'writinges', so Purvis lost his opportunity and Edward Bulkeley was presented to the vacant prebend.⁶⁷ This is the only surviving recorded incident in which Mrs Downham appears and she certainly appears as a forceful woman who exerted a powerful influence over her husband and his officials. However, the incident also indicates that

⁶⁵ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 109v.

⁶⁶ CALS EDV 1/2a, f. 107.

⁶⁷ BIY V/1578-9 Visitation Papers of Chester; deposition of Thomas Parvis; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, pp. 48-9. Randle Cotgreave was the bishop's registrar.

Downham was not vindictive and was kind-hearted; both of these characteristics would probably have been viewed by contemporaries as signs of weakness.

Downham's early actions in Cheshire indicate that he unfortunately had little understanding of the society in which he found himself, and the place that the leading gentry families occupied within that society. Thus his early attempts to correct the morals of some of the gentry not only alienated certain individuals and made him powerful enemies, but were almost inevitably doomed to failure. In particular, he probably did not appreciate the considerable local power and influence still wielded by the Cheshire baronies, notably by the Venables family as barons of Kinderton.⁶⁸ He attempted the moral reform of Sir Thomas Venables of Kinderton through the medium of the ecclesiastical commission.⁶⁹ This commission had been issued for the diocese of Chester in July 1562 and had much greater powers of correction than the consistory courts, including the power to issue fines and imprison offenders for an indefinite period. It was also authorised to take recognisances from offenders 'aswell for their personall apperaunce ... as also for the performaunce and accomplishment of ... orders and decrees'.⁷⁰ The issue of the commission was a tacit acknowledgement that it would be difficult to control the diocese of Chester by existing methods.⁷¹ In a series of increasingly stringent orders and recognisances the commissioners attempted to force Venables to 'put away from his Cohabitacion and company Anne Broke his pretended wief' and to take back his legal wife. One order bound him in the enormous sum of

⁶⁸ Tim Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State, 1480-1560* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, 2000), pp. 51-2. The importance of the baronial tradition to the status of local landowners continued into the seventeenth century.

⁶⁹ CALS EDA 12/2, ff. 7, 7v, 8, 9v, 43v, 45, 48, 49, 50v, 51.

⁷⁰ TNA: PRO SP 12/23, ff. 125-130.

⁷¹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 233.

1,000 marks and committed him to Chester Castle indefinitely for failure to comply, although as this has been crossed through it was probably never put into effect.⁷² Dame Maude Venables had also been ordered to return to her husband, a procedure astutely instigated by Sir Thomas, presumably in the knowledge that her return was unlikely.⁷³ When she failed to comply, the matter seems to have been quietly dropped, although his licentious lifestyle continued and in 1571 he was presented at the metropolitan visitation and ordered 'to put from him Jane Varnam and to abstain from Lewde company with all women'.⁷⁴ Venables had been Member of Parliament for Cheshire in 1563, and a justice of the peace since the first known commission. Although Downham reported him in 1564 as a justice 'not favourable' to the religious settlement, an indication of his power and influence is that he continued on the commission of the peace.⁷⁵ In attempting to enforce episcopal authority Downham had alienated this powerful family. He further annoyed them by blocking their attempts to present to their living of Eccleston, near Chester, an 'ignorant and vnlearned clerk' so that they could 'enioye the profittes' of the living themselves.⁷⁶ He instituted his own chaplain, William Wright, M.A., to the parish instead.⁷⁷ In March 1573 Wright went to Eccleston to preach to his congregation, but he was not onely Imprisoned in the Stockes by yonge Mr Venables without auctoritie but also forcyblie vused to his great daunger and perill of his lyef. The

⁷² CALS EDA 12/2, f. 48.

⁷³ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 45.

⁷⁴ BIY HC.AB.6 1571/2, ff. 106v-107v.

⁷⁵ 'VENABLES, Sir Thomas (by 1513-80), of Kinderton, Cheshire'

<<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/venables-sir-thomas-1513-80>> (accessed 10 December 2012).

⁷⁶ BL Additional MS 32091, f. 268v.

⁷⁷ CCEd person ID 23961 (accessed 10 December 2012).

people were manie with Mr Venables. The woomen cast at him Rotten egges,
and other despites they did him.⁷⁸

Although one motive for this attack may have been religious, it is likely that there was also an element of personal animosity to the bishop in this palpable flouting of his authority.

Other influential local gentry were summoned to appear before the commission for moral and matrimonial offences. For example, Sir Rowland Stanley was accused of adultery and ordered to ‘bringe in the bodie’ of his mistress and ‘not at any future tyme hereafter resort unto company wherin the said Sibell shall fortune to be’.⁷⁹ Sir John Holcroft was ordered ‘that he should put away Anne Moreton from his Cohabitacon’ and Charles Mainwaring was ordered to ‘take and Receive into his Cohabitacon Elizabeth his weif’.⁸⁰ Such orders do not support the idea of a concerted effort by Downham to ingratiate himself with the local gentry.

The ecclesiastical commission was potentially a powerful instrument for the enforcement of discipline and the evidence suggests that Downham used it to supplement the consistory court and attended the commission hearings assiduously.⁸¹ For example, in 1563, in the period from June to the end of the year sixty-three cases were heard for which the names of the commissioners have survived and Downham

⁷⁸ BL Additional MS 32091, f. 268v; White, *Lives of the Elizabethan Bishops*, p. 170. Although the main Venables lands were in Kinderton, some twenty-five miles from Chester, they also held the manor and advowson of Eccleston, about two miles from Chester; Ormerod, iii, p. 195.

⁷⁹ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 89v.

⁸⁰ CALS EDA 12/2, ff. 46v, 69v.

⁸¹ The survival of Chester ecclesiastical commission records is, however, patchy. Surviving records are to be found in CALS EDA 12/2; EDA 12/3 and EDA 12/4. The majority date from the 1560s, but the fact that entries are not in chronological order and the large gaps between dates of proceedings suggests that there are lost entries even within a period for which the record is apparently complete.

attended every session.⁸² At the same time, however, he seems to have been attempting to maintain the authority of the consistory court with the assistance of the new chancellor, Robert Leche. He attended almost all the general sessions of the court from his arrival in Chester until he left for London for the opening of parliament on 12 January 1563; no previous bishop of Chester had attended so regularly.⁸³ He usually left the exercise of the court process to Leche, however.⁸⁴ There is also evidence that excommunication, as the main sanction of the court, was in regular use for contumacy, and several clergy suffered this penalty.⁸⁵ More importantly for the effective function of the court, however, was that several of the parties who had been excommunicated are recorded as attending the court for absolution and payment of the resulting fee so that the cause could progress, rather than merely ignoring the matter.⁸⁶ Although some clergy were summoned to appear before the consistory court on *ex officio* matters and penance imposed there, punishment was sometimes dispensed elsewhere. Thus in August 1562 Robert Houghton, from an unidentified parish, was named in the consistory court as having fathered an illegitimate child five years previously and was ordered to appear before the bishop in his palace.⁸⁷ The following November it was recorded by the ecclesiastical commissioners that he had done his penance for this offence, but he was then ‘monished that he shall not hereafter frequent the Tavernes and alehouses’.⁸⁸ Such assiduous attendance by Downham at sessions of the commission and consistory court suggests that accusations of laziness on his part are misplaced.

⁸² CALS EDA 12/2, ff. 3-58 *passim*.

⁸³ *LJ*, pp. 581-2 (accessed 10 December 2012).

⁸⁴ CALS EDC 1/16, ff. 128-294.

⁸⁵ See for example CALS EDC 1/16, ff. 77, 86v.

⁸⁶ See for example CALS EDC 1/16, f. 135v, f. 153.

⁸⁷ CALS EDC 1/16, f. 223.

⁸⁸ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 81.

The ecclesiastical commission was also used for disciplining both clergy and laity in matters of religion. While the complaints against individuals are not always specified, some clergy were disciplined for what appear to have been conservative practices. In November 1562 several of the clergy of Chester deanery were summoned before the commissioners and penances were imposed. Henry Snape, curate at St Mary's in Chester, was required to 'reade a declaracon for his shaven Crowne' and Thomas Finlow, curate of St Michael's in Chester, was required to 'recant openly in the pulpitt for the holy water'.⁸⁹ At the same session a number of laymen appeared, many of whom also came from Chester. They were charged with a range of offences such as failing to attend church and using beads.⁹⁰

Christopher Goodman was also summoned to appear before the commissioners at Chester in 1569, while he was rector of Aldford. The relationship between Goodman and Downham was crucial to Downham's episcopate, and its evolution is revealed in a series of letters and notes kept by Goodman.⁹¹ Goodman had been joint leader of the English exile church in Geneva with John Knox, who remained a lifelong friend. Goodman's resistance tract of January 1558, aimed against Queen Mary, *How Superior Powers Oght to be Obeyd of their Subjects*, argued for violent resistance to tyrannical

⁸⁹ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 81-81v.

⁹⁰ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 81-82v.

⁹¹ DA DD/PP/839. This source is part of the Plas Power collection and has not been widely used by historians, although David Mills used it in his work on Puritan opposition to the Chester plays; David Mills, "'Some precise Cittizins': Puritan Objections to Chester's Plays", *Leeds Studies in English*, 29 (1998), pp. 219-33. More recently, Jane Dawson and Lionel Glassey have transcribed and commented on correspondence with John Knox which is included in the collection; Jane Dawson and Lionel K. J. Glassey, 'Some Unpublished Letters from John Knox to Christopher Goodman', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 84 (2), (2005), pp. 166-201. I am grateful to Prof. Bruce Durie for drawing my attention to this article. This material survives in a book, probably dating from the eighteenth century, which comprises copies of original papers. The provenance of the book is discussed by Dawson and Glassey at pp. 170-3 and they were satisfied that the copies represent an authentic transcription of the original letters from Knox. There is no reason to suppose that the other transcriptions are not also authentic. Other contemporary papers of Goodman's survive at DD/PP/840-849.

rulers.⁹² He also questioned the legitimacy of female sovereigns and both of these arguments understandably alienated Queen Elizabeth who regarded him with abhorrence. He worked in Scotland and Ireland after his return from Geneva, but possibly embittered by his failure to gain important preferment, he subsequently returned to Chester where his family was influential.⁹³ Knox stayed with him at Aldford in 1567 and at that time they discussed the vestiarian controversy. Goodman emphasised his opposition to 'those Italische clothes' which he would not wear 'lest god wold forsake' him.⁹⁴ He remained implacably opposed to the wearing of the surplice. In 1571 he was summoned to London and induced to retract his resistance theories, which he claimed to have regretted publishing, and was also obliged to agree to use the surplice and Prayer Book.⁹⁵ He was suspected of having written the *Second admonition* in November 1572, during the Admonition Crisis, but the work appeared anonymously as Goodman's name was 'a lasting liability'.⁹⁶

On 4 May 1569 Downham had written to his chancellor ordering the suspension of Goodman because he 'had communion att his parish at Audford after the Genevians manner contrary to the laws of this realm'.⁹⁷ Goodman then wrote a long, conciliatory

⁹² Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Resistance and Revolution in Sixteenth-Century Thought: the Case of Christopher Goodman', in J. van den Berg and P. G. Hoftijzer (eds), *Church, Change and Revolution* (Leiden, 1991), p. 72.

⁹³ Jane E. A. Dawson, 'Goodman, Christopher (1521/2–1603)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012).

⁹⁴ Dawson and Glassey, 'Some Unpublished Letters from John Knox', pp. 177, 192-5. Knox stayed with Goodman probably sometime in the first half of May 1567 and refers to walking in 'your garden at Aldford', although Goodman was not admitted to the living until December 1567. The rejection of surplices by some London clergy in 1566 led to their deprivation and to what became known as the 'Vestiarian Controversy': Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 131.

⁹⁵ J. E. Bailey, 'Christopher Goodman, Archdeacon of Richmond, Rector of Aldford; a Native of Chester', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological and Historic Society*, new series, 1 (1887), p. 149-50; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 118. There are detailed notes on Goodman's response at this time in the Plas Power papers; DA DD/PP/839, ff. 108-110.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁹⁷ DA DD/PP/839, f. 105.

letter to Downham stating that he was not prepared to wear the surplice, but hoping that they could find some common ground.⁹⁸ It seems that Downham authorised him to use ‘common bread’ at communion, rather than wafers, perhaps in an effort at compromise.⁹⁹ The following Easter, 1570, Goodman was again in trouble and a series of complaints was laid against him by Downham to be heard by the justice of Chester. These included a claim that Goodman had held another Geneva communion service at Aldford, at which the congregation had remained seated and passed round the bread and wine, rather than receiving from the minster. Forty people from outside the parish had attended ‘to the great offence of many’. He had also preached a seditious sermon in the cathedral ‘wherein he inveighed very sore’ against various aspects of the communion service as set out in the Book of Common Prayer. He was also accused of claiming that a sermon by the bishop on the subject of ‘things indifferent’ was dangerous and blasphemous.¹⁰⁰ Downham also sent a copy of these articles to Matthew Parker, and they formed part of the objections against Goodman which he was required to answer in London in 1571.¹⁰¹

Downham’s insistence on conformity was described by John Trafford, a man with similar views to Goodman’s, who appears to have held the living of Tarporley in the 1570s.¹⁰² The bishop, he said, ‘commanded me to follow my book in all respects, as

⁹⁸ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 119v; DA DD/PP/839, ff. 170-4.

⁹⁹ DA DD/PP/839, f. 111. Goodman also claimed that Downham had agreed, before witnesses, that those communicants who so wished could receive the communion sitting, rather than kneeling, although in view of Downham’s recorded views on other matters, this seems unlikely.

¹⁰⁰ DA DD/PP/839, f. 106-7.

¹⁰¹ DA DD/PP/839, f. 108.

¹⁰² DA DD/PP/839, ff. 135-6. Trafford seems to have been the incumbent of Tarporley on 4 October 1577, when he describes it as ‘my cure’ and may have been appointed after the deprivation of the previous incumbent for negligence in 1570. He says in his letter to Goodman that ‘I shall be displaced from my cure shortly, unless I minister these wafers, as I am unwilling to do’. By the time of the metropolitan visitation in 1578, he was serving as curate there; BIY V.1578-9 call list for Chester deanery.

Crossing at Baptism, bowing my knee at the name of Jesus, & to minister wafer cakes if I would serve in any place within his diocese'.¹⁰³ Perhaps the most contentious of these requirements was the insistence on the use of wafers at communion, but all were entirely orthodox, if rather conservative.¹⁰⁴ From Goodman's radical viewpoint, Downham's insistence upon these observances was conservative to the point of papistry and he also embodied certain other factors to which Goodman took exception. In an undated series of notes he set out the reasons why bishops were unnecessary in the Church of England and also called for the abolition of the offices of archbishop and archdeacon, although this did not prevent him from accepting the position of archdeacon of Richmond.¹⁰⁵ He also questioned whether clergy ordained 'according to the Pope's law' should be admitted to the ministry.¹⁰⁶ Although there is no surviving record of the date of Downham's ordination, Parker recorded that his orders were those of a regular priest, which means that he was probably ordained prior to Henry VIII's break with Rome.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, he had remained in England as Elizabeth's chaplain and therefore conformed under Mary. Goodman's opinion of Downham is expressed in a letter addressed to Ambrose Dudley, Leicester's brother, dated 16 April 1572, but apparently

¹⁰³ DA DD/PP/839, f. 135.

¹⁰⁴ The use of the cross at baptism was required by the prayer book, bowing at the name of Jesus was an obligation of the 1559 Royal Injunctions; Frere and Kennedy, *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii, pp. 25 and Matthew Parker sometimes insisted on the use of wafers; Bruce and Perowne (eds.), *Correspondence of Matthew Parker*, p. 240. It may be that Downham's experience of the extremes to which Goodman went once he had been given permission to use ordinary bread at communion had made him wary of extending this usage.

¹⁰⁵ DA DD/PP/839, f. 101; 'Archdeacons: Richmond', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 47-49 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35847>> (accessed 10 December 2012).

¹⁰⁶ DA DD/PP/839, f. 95.

¹⁰⁷ Drake (ed.), *De Antiquitate Britannicae Ecclesiae*, p. 57 He was probably ordained while at Ashridge as all the brothers there were priests; *VCH* online: 'House of Bonhommes: The College of Ashridge', A History of the County of Buckingham: Volume 1 (1905), pp. 386-390. <[http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40318&strquery=Bonhommes Ashridge](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=40318&strquery=Bonhommes+Ashridge)> (accessed 4 December 2012).

not sent. In this he referred to the bishop's 'accustomed coldness in promoting true religion'.¹⁰⁸

Goodman, however, had acquired powerful patrons in members of the Dudley family, possibly via his Geneva connection with Anthony Gilby.¹⁰⁹ Gilby had become influential through his position in the household of the earl of Huntingdon, brother-in-law of Robert and Ambrose Dudley. Huntingdon seemingly intended that Gilby should evangelise the entire county of Leicestershire and by 1576 it was noted that he had come to wield the influence of a bishop there.¹¹⁰ Downham's dealings with Goodman may have been aimed at preventing him acquiring similar influence in Cheshire.

Other clergy also appeared before the Chester commission accused of irregular practices. On 7 May 1569, the same day that Goodman was first summonsed, George Sedgwick was ordered 'to vse no other rite ceremonie & forme in celebrating the commvnion otherwise then is set forth ... in the booke'.¹¹¹ In June 1573 Edward Rawlinson, rector of St Peter's in Chester, admitted that he had not been wearing his surplice at service time 'for the space of a moneth last past And also that he hath not vsed to saye suche praiers as by the booke of common praier are appointed'.¹¹² He was ordered to conform on pain of deprivation. The correction of these clergy, representing a Puritan element among the clergy of the Chester deanery, shows that Downham was attempting to steer a middle course in disciplining both Catholic and Puritan activities among his clergy, in accordance with official policy.

¹⁰⁸ DA DD/PP/839, f. 118.

¹⁰⁹ DA DD/PP/839, f. 116; Bailey, 'Christopher Goodman', p. 141. Gilby refers to Goodman's wife, Alice as 'my dear sister', but this may be intended figuratively, rather than literally.

¹¹⁰ Claire Cross, 'Gilby, Anthony (c.1510–1585)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 25 July 2012).

¹¹¹ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 119v. It is possible that Sedgwick was using Catholic, rather than Puritan, ceremony but it has not been possible to identify him. He does not, however, appear in Wark's list of 'recusant priests' active in Cheshire at the time, Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, Appendix II.

¹¹² CALS EDA 12/3, f. 26v.

Downham's approach to discipline of the laity suggests that he favoured a policy of persuasion, rather than compulsion. At a hearing which took place probably in June 1573, Robert Hothersall from Lancashire appeared in place of his father, John, who was too ill to travel. He brought in

two primer bookes defaced & broken thone in latine & englishe & thother in latine seme [sic] to be set furth in king henrie theight his daies on which bookes the said John othersll is accustomed to saie his praiers, which bookes the said reuerend father doeth not like it is ordred that the said Robert shall leaue the said bookes in this Court & shall deliuer vnto the said John othersall a booke of praiers and psalmes which the said reuerend father hath presently appointed him.¹¹³

A major problem for the authorities was how persistent offenders who could not be converted should be punished, and imprisonment was one option. However, available prison accommodation was limited. In 1569 the commissioners were obliged to release William Singleton, a Lancashire gentleman who had been imprisoned in Northgate Prison for religious reasons. He claimed to have 'fallen into vehment Sicknes' and the chief gaoler stated that 'the said prison is pestered with manie prisoners and ... he hathe no seuerall or convenient chamber or lodginge for a sicke person'. So Singleton was released on bonds, and, confident about the value of preaching, Downham ordered him to attend all sermons within three miles of his home.¹¹⁴ There is no indication of how this was to be enforced, however.

¹¹³ CALS EDA 12/3, ff. 28-28v. The date clause at the top of the page is torn, but the report of the proceedings appears between other cases in June and July 1573.

¹¹⁴ CALS EDA 12/2, ff. 129v-130v. In this context 'several' is used to mean 'separate'.

The government was not satisfied with the efforts of the Chester ecclesiastical commissioners in dealing with ‘disordred practises’ in Lancashire. On 3 February 1568 the Queen wrote to Downham, the earl of Derby and other leading gentry, and gave orders for the punishment of ‘some of these perverse headsure Men of some more value than those Kinds of Persons which have appeared before you’. Three commissioners, of whom Downham was to be one, were instructed to consider who should be dealt with at the Lancaster assizes in accordance with this instruction. Other persistent offenders were to be summoned to Chester to be examined by the bishop, ‘the more value the Person is accompted of, being evill disposed, the meeter he is to be corrected’.¹¹⁵ Within three weeks, however, on 21 February 1568 the Queen wrote again to Downham. This time she complained that he had not lived up to her expectations: ‘we find great lack in you being sorry to have our former expectation in this sort deceived’, while pointing out that the earl of Derby ‘hath vpon small motion made to him caused all such persons as haue been required to be apprehended, and hath showed himself therein according to our assured expectation, very faithfull and carefull for our service’. It is difficult to know from this in what way Downham was considered to have failed, since if all those suspected had been arrested by Derby, this left no-one for him to deal with. However, the Queen went on to complain that Downham had neglected his duty of visitation in his diocese and ordered him to make an immediate visitation of the whole see, ‘by repaying into ye remoter partes and specially into Lancaster’.¹¹⁶ It may be noted that both of these letters refer to problems in Lancashire, rather than in Cheshire, and that by

¹¹⁵ TNA: PRO SP 12/46, ff. 45-6.

¹¹⁶ TNA: PRO SP 12/46, f. 69.

this time failure to conform in matters of religion was equated with disloyalty to the crown, if not treason.

The instruction in the second letter to carry out a visitation is cited by some historians as evidence that Downham was failing in his duty.¹¹⁷ At this time it was usual for a bishop to undertake a primary visitation on arriving in his diocese, followed by ordinary visitations at intervals of three or four years.¹¹⁸ Downham had made his primary visitation in 1562 and partial records survive of a visitation by him three years later in the summer of 1565, which probably covered the entire diocese.¹¹⁹ By 1568 he had carried out two visitations, which is all that might have been expected, and the claim that he was not fulfilling his duty of visitation is not supported by the evidence.

The two letters from the Queen in February 1568 show that her attitude to Downham had changed in less than three weeks: on 3 February 1568 he appears as a trusted agent of the crown who had written to the Privy Council about problems in Lancashire and was trusted to select the most dangerous dissidents to be sent for trial in Lancaster and to examine others himself. By 21 February he is a disappointment. The explanation may lie in an undated note by William Glaseor, vice-chamberlain of Chester

¹¹⁷ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, pp. 10-11; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 223, 251; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 20; Knighton 'Downham', *DNB* (online edition accessed 30 October 2012).

¹¹⁸ Owen, *The Records of the Established Church*, pp. 30-31.

¹¹⁹ CALS EDV 1/3, ff. 36-74 dated June and July 1565. This fragmentary record includes one page of a timetable for visiting 12 deaneries from Bangor in the south of the diocese to Richmond and Boroughbridge across the Pennines in the north-east. This includes details of some overnight resting places, such as one night at the house of Sir Edward Fitton at Gawsworth. It also includes clergy details stated to have been prepared for the bishop's visitation for a further 2 deaneries, there are no references to the remaining 6 deaneries. It may be that these were not visited, but the deaneries which were visited cover most of the diocese. Downham certainly did not restrict this visitation to the deaneries 'easiest to reach from Chester'; Caroline Anna-Maria de Vere, 'The Parish Clergy in the Diocese of Chester, 1500-80' (MPhil thesis, University of Manchester, 1994), p. 176.

and, with William Gerrard, member of the Council in the Marches of Wales.¹²⁰ This note has been tentatively dated to 1 November 1568, and does refer to events in 1568.¹²¹ Glaseor described how Sir Edward Fitton and William Gerrard had threatened to report the bishop to the Privy Council if he refused either to hold a session of the ecclesiastical commission in Lancashire or to delegate his commission to them. There followed a dispute, which resulted from a difference of opinion among the commissioners as to how they should proceed, but the change of attitude by Elizabeth suggests that Fitton and Gerrard had carried out their threat to report Downham and that their report had been believed. They wanted suspected Lancashire men to be referred to the assizes, but Downham, as he had been instructed, had summoned ‘dyvers papists priestes and some gents’ to Chester where the gentlemen had attended church and thereby ‘the Cause of suspicion was satysfyed’, although according to Glaseor it was Gerrard, rather than Downham, who found this satisfactory.¹²²

Downham carried out a personal visitation of his entire diocese during the summer of 1568, and cannot have taken his reprimand very seriously as he did not feel the need to report back on his actions to the Privy Council until the following November.¹²³ Downham was optimistic about the results of his visitation and ‘fownd the people verie tractable and obedient’; although with hindsight his optimism was misplaced. He was also enthusiastic about a preaching tour of the county by the dean of St Paul’s, Alexander Nowell, a Lancashire man. Nowell had brought ‘many obstinate

¹²⁰ TNA: PRO SP 12/48, f. 73; ‘GLASIER, William (c.1525-88), of Chester and Lea by Backford, Cheshire’ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/glasier-william-1525-88>> (accessed 10 December 2012).

¹²¹ *CSPD* (1547-1580), p. 321.

¹²² TNA: PRO SP 12/48, f. 73.

¹²³ Unfortunately no records survive at Chester of this visitation.

and wilful people vnto conformitie and obedience, and hathe gotten great comendacion and prayse ... even of those that haue bene great enemies to the Religion I beseche you to be a meane to the Queenes majestie and to her honorable Counsell to geve him thanks for his great paynes that he hathe taken emongst his contremen'.¹²⁴

Downham was again in trouble with the Privy Council in November 1570 when he and the earl of Derby were summoned to London and Downham was rebuked for his slackness regarding problems in Lancashire, particularly in the archdeaconry of Richmond. The origin of this complaint against him is obscure. He was ordered to bring with him 'such matter for declaracion of his procedinges towards suche as have refused to cume to Common Prayer as may best serve for his purgacion and for the aunswering of all other thinges committed to his charge'.¹²⁵ It may be noted that the problem again did not seem to lie in Cheshire and that the government was understandably nervous following the Northern Rebellion when large numbers from the Richmond area had joined the rebels in November 1569.¹²⁶ Richmond and Middleham, which were among the towns which contributed the largest numbers of commons rebels, were both in the diocese of Chester, although Middleham was a royal peculiar.¹²⁷

Following Downham's reprimand late in 1570 the Privy Council wrote to Parker, archbishop of Canterbury, on 14 January 1571 instructing him to examine Downham, and on 19 February Parker, with three other bishops, wrote to the Council to

¹²⁴ TNA: PRO SP 12/48, f. 75.

¹²⁵ *APC*, vol. 7, 1558-1570, pp. 398-9; *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, p. 5; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 13; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 223-4.

¹²⁶ Anthony Fletcher and Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Tudor Rebellions* (revised fifth edition, Harlow, 2008), pp. 105-6.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 113; CCEd location IDs 5886 (Richmond) and 8998 (Middleham).

request that he should be examined by convocation, rather than in parliament.¹²⁸ This time he did not find it so easy to exculpate himself, although in April and May 1571 he attended some sessions of parliament, which sat concurrently with the session of convocation.¹²⁹ The taint of disloyalty lingered, and meant that in 1573 Downham was obliged to accept the appointment of Goodman as archdeacon of Richmond in return for Leicester's support.¹³⁰ It seems that he initially tried to block the appointment. William Whittingham, a fellow Cestrian exile in Geneva during Mary's reign who was then dean of Durham, wrote to Goodman,

Of your Archdeaconry I am very glad. And though he seem to make a stay; yet in law, for as much as he is not able to charge either your doctrine, or life, he cannot refuse you. Yet if you use my L.'s letter as David's harp to quiet the Bishop's anger, I like it best.¹³¹

Following the appointment Downham wrote to Leicester in an apparent attempt to disassociate himself from Goodman's future actions. Although the bishop must surely have been aware that Leicester sympathised with the new archdeacon's views, he asked him to use his influence to keep him in check 'percase he is somewhat singular by fervent zeal of God's truth, which now more temperately he useth and by your lordship's

¹²⁸ *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, p. 5; TNA: PRO SP 15/20, f. 25. The other three signatories to the letter were Robert Horne, bishop of Winchester; Richard Cox, bishop of Ely and Nicholas Bullingham, bishop of Lincoln.

¹²⁹ *LJ*, pp. 668-701 (accessed 10 December 2012).

¹³⁰ Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, p. 66. 'Archdeacons: Richmond', *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1541-1857: volume 11: Carlisle, Chester, Durham, Manchester, Ripon, and Sodor and Man Dioceses* (2004), pp. 47-49 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35847>> (accessed 10 December 2012) states that he was instituted on 17 March 1574. However, Downham's letter to Leicester confirming the appointment is dated 21 March 1572/3. The previous archdeacon, John Hurleston, had died by 3 October 1572 when his will was proved; J. P. Earwaker (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories at Chester, with an Appendix of Abstracts of Wills now Lost or Destroyed Transcribed by the Late Rev. G. J. Piccope*, (Chetham Society, new series, 3, 1884), pp. 47-8.

¹³¹ DA DD/PP/839, f. 125. Although Whittingham does not name names 'he' is probably Downham and 'my L.' might be Leicester or perhaps Huntingdon. Whittingham assumed that Goodman would move his household north following this appointment but he seems to have had no intention of leaving Chester.

good means and advertisement to him will be more easily reformed'.¹³² By early in 1574 the relationship between the two men had grown so acrimonious that Downham threatened Goodman with imprisonment following a sermon 'inveighinge ... against Tradicions' and, in particular, the wearing of surplices.¹³³

In May 1571 the new archbishop of York, Edmund Grindal, began his primary visitation of his province and Richard Barnes, bishop of Carlisle, was appointed as his visitor in the diocese of Chester.¹³⁴ An inhibition had been directed to Downham on 23 March 1571 in anticipation of the commencement of the visitation.¹³⁵ Wark considered that the appointment of Barnes was 'the final shame for Downham' and Haigh reported that 'despite his protests to archbishop Grindal, his authority was inhibited from April 1571 until the summer of 1572'.¹³⁶ In fact, it was common practice for an archbishop to authorise a suffragan to carry out his visitation.¹³⁷ It was also normal for the authority of the ordinary to be inhibited during the visitation of his superior.¹³⁸ The authority of the archdeacon of Nottingham, which was also in the province of York, for example, was probably similarly inhibited for the period from May 1571 to March 1572.¹³⁹ The

¹³² BL Additional MS 32091, f. 268; Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy*, p. 66; Simon Adams, 'Dudley, Robert, earl of Leicester (1532/3–1588)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 December 2012).

¹³³ DA DD/PP/839, f. 124; DA DD/PP/841. The second reference is to a contemporary version of the articles of complaint, with marginal notes, probably by Goodman. It is dated 3 January 1573, but as the Chester ecclesiastical authorities normally reckoned the years from 25 March, it is probably safe to assume that it dates from 1574, using modern chronology.

¹³⁴ *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, pp. 26-8.

¹³⁵ Frere and Kennedy (eds), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions*, iii, p. 294.

¹³⁶ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 13; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 223-4.

¹³⁷ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 36, 190. Barnes was a native of Lancashire and had been a suffragan of the archbishop of York before his promotion to Carlisle in 1569; David Marcombe, 'Barnes, Richard (1532?–1587)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 April 2013).

¹³⁸ Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, iv, pp. 14-5; Owen, *The Records of the Established Church*, pp. 30-5.

¹³⁹ This assumption is made on the basis that the business of the archdeacon's court was usually transferred to York during a metropolitan visitation. No records survive from the archdeacon's court for this period suggesting that his authority was inhibited.

<<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/manuscriptsandspecialcollections/collectionsindepth/archdeaconry/history>.

first note in the Chester consistory records that the metropolitan visitation was in progress is on 27 April 1571.¹⁴⁰ On 20 January 1572 Downham wrote to Grindal reminding him that he had already asked for a relaxation of the inhibition so that he could make ecclesiastical appointments, as having to apply to York was causing difficulties because of the distance. It also seems that Grindal had already promised the relaxation.¹⁴¹ There is a gap in the Chester clerical institution book after 10 February 13 Elizabeth (1571) following which a large part of the page of the book is empty; a new page begins with an institution by Downham on 24 March 14 Elizabeth (1572) suggesting that the inhibition had been lifted, if only partially, a few weeks after Downham's letter to Grindal at the end of January.¹⁴² Rather than being some sort of punishment, therefore, the inhibition of Downham's authority at this time was an entirely normal procedure in the course of what was probably a routine primary metropolitan visitation.

By 1574 Downham was seemingly back in royal favour and on 28 June he was authorised by the Privy Council to look into 'certein disorders in the countie of Lancashire'. By 22 November he had reported on the proceedings taken by the ecclesiastical commission and the commission was given further instructions for the

aspx> (accessed 10 December 2012). It is possible that records may have been lost for part of the period, however.

¹⁴⁰ CALS EDC 1/19, f. 38.

¹⁴¹ BIY HC.CP 1572/2. The reference for these cause papers, as given by Haigh, was BIY, R VII, G 1673. This reference has been superseded and I am grateful to the staff at the Borthwick Institute for their assistance in tracing the updated reference; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 223-4. This source includes the letter setting out the 'protests' about the inhibition to which Haigh refers.

¹⁴² CALS EDA 1/1, ff. 3v-4. The note following the institutions on f. 3v possibly reads '*Inth*' or '*Intb*'. It may be noted that Grindal continued to make presentations to Chester parishes after 24 March 1572, for example he presented John Caldwell, chaplain to the earl of Derby and a celebrated preacher, to Mobberley on 27 April 1572; CCEd person ID 35648.

arrest of ‘Popishe persons ... and by their diligence herein they shall deserve thanckes at her Majesties handes’.¹⁴³

However, the influence of Christopher Goodman within the diocese was growing following his 1571 retraction of his resistance theories and with the protection and patronage of Robert Dudley. It was probably at his instigation that an ‘ecclesiastical exercise’ was established in the diocese of Chester in 1574.¹⁴⁴ This was among the earliest of these arrangements, which evolved into the public preaching conferences, known as prophesyings, which were highly unpopular with Queen Elizabeth and led to Grindal’s suspension.¹⁴⁵ The arrangements for the Chester exercises were agreed in convocation and were intended as a means to educate the parish clergy with biblical study and to improve standards of clerical behaviour. Unauthorised absence was to be punished by fine at the following exercise and failure either to pay or to appear at subsequent exercises would result in suspension. The proceedings were to be concluded with prayer, rather than a sermon, as was the case elsewhere.¹⁴⁶ By the time of the metropolitan visitation following Downham’s death in 1577 Goodman and John Lane, his close associate, were appointed by the visitors to have ‘conference’ with a number of

¹⁴³ *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, pp. 258, 317.

¹⁴⁴ David Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae: A Synodo Verolamiensi A.D. CCCCXLVI ad Londinensem A.D. MDCCXVII. Accedunt Constitutiones et Alia ad Historiam Ecclesiae Anglicanae Spectanti* (London, 1737), iv, p. 280.

¹⁴⁵ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 129-30.

¹⁴⁶ Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae*, iv, p. 280; Strype, *Annals*, II(ii), pp. 544-6; Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 169. These educational exercises were set up almost a decade before the preaching exercises of the 1580s discussed by R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972), p. 65.

detected recusants, indicating the influence they had come to wield in the diocesan correction process.¹⁴⁷

Assessments of Downham's episcopate by subsequent historians have varied widely. But as I have shown, some criticisms are not supported by a closer examination of the evidence while others continue to be debateable. It may also be noted that he was certainly not the only Elizabethan bishop of Chester to be reprimanded by the government; Chaderton was rebuked by the Privy Council in 1590 for inactivity.¹⁴⁸ The most serious criticisms of William Downham are that he was lazy and lax, and equivocal in his prosecution of Catholics to the point of being a quasi-papist himself. However, he began his period in office with enthusiasm, sitting in on sessions of the consistory court, perhaps to familiarise himself with procedure, and he made regular use of his ecclesiastical commission. The lack of extant diocesan visitation records and of records of the ecclesiastical commission after the late 1560s mean that there is little evidence of any action he may have taken against Catholic survivalism among his parish clergy, while the survival of Goodman's papers helps to foster the view that Downham was harder on Puritans than on Catholics. His apparent failure to act decisively against the perceived threat from religious conservatives, particularly in Lancashire, probably stemmed from his desire to convert, rather than coerce. His ability to act was also hampered by the poor endowment of the see. There were no episcopal manors, so that he was based entirely at Chester in the south-western corner of the diocese and he was obliged to rely on the hospitality of local gentry while conducting visitations, perhaps

¹⁴⁷ BIY V 1578-9 CB/2, ff. 10-10v, 16v, 36; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 19. This was a common method of attempting to persuade recalcitrant recusant Catholics to conform during the late Elizabethan and Jacobean period; Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 172-3, 177.

¹⁴⁸ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 270.

contributing to the accusations that he was over-friendly with them. Chaderton, his successor, was appointed warden of Manchester College which gave him much easier access to Lancashire. Conversely, there is little evidence to support the nineteenth-century view that he was an energetic persecutor of Catholics, which seems to have stemmed from another misunderstanding on the part of Canon Rupert Morris in his history of Chester.¹⁴⁹ Rather, he sought to enforce the Elizabethan settlement with moderation, but got little government support. Opposition to this policy from within the county of Cheshire came from Puritan gentry and clergy, led by Christopher Goodman, supported by Leicester, and was probably responsible for provoking government censure and undermined his authority. The appointment of Goodman to the archdeaconry of Richmond, the establishment of the exercises, and the disciplinary processes delegated to Goodman and other Puritan clergy indicate that by the time Downham died in early December 1577 the Puritan element among the clergy was becoming increasingly influential.

Downham's critics are probably correct in saying that he was an unsuitable person to hold the see of Chester, however. He had almost no pastoral experience and does not seem to have been a gifted administrator. In character he was also not well suited for the position, described by David Rogers, son of the Elizabethan Puritan archdeacon of Chester, as 'a milde, courteous & loueing man, wisheinge well vnto all'.¹⁵⁰ These were not necessarily useful attributes for an Elizabethan bishop. Unlike many of his contemporaries on the episcopal bench, he did not advance his family at the

¹⁴⁹ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy*, p. 11, considered that Morris had over-estimated the number of recusants prosecuted at the Chester city quarter sessions because he treated some recognisances taken there as relating to recusants when there is nothing to indicate that they were, and his dating is unreliable.

¹⁵⁰ BL Harley 1948, f. 87.

expense of more suitable candidates for office and he tried to live within his means. In the absence of any personal papers it is difficult to re-create his personal faith, but he does seem to have been a pious, if conservative, man with a belief in the redemptive power of preaching and a promoter of conformity. He was, moreover, the only Elizabethan bishop of Chester to attempt to follow a middle way between extremes, probably in accordance with his interpretation of the religious settlement; after Downham, ‘Chaderton prosecuted recusants while Vaughan went after the Puritans.’¹⁵¹

The Parish Clergy under William Downham

The parish clergy throughout the country occupied a crucial position in the implementation of the Elizabethan religious settlement. As Peter Marshall has put it, if the country were to become a “nation of Protestants” ... the primary impetus would need to come from a reformed ministry, able to preach the Word, and instruct parishioners in the essentials of the protestant faith.¹⁵² Further, during the reign of Henry VIII opposition to the royal supremacy had been defined as treason and, by extension, acceptance was associated with loyalty to the crown.¹⁵³ This conflation of religious and secular compliance continued and was expanded by Elizabethan legislation. The 1559 visitors required all clergy to acknowledge the royal supremacy, with the ‘abolishing of all foreign power repugnant to the same’.¹⁵⁴ Haigh claimed that

¹⁵¹ R. B. Manning, ‘The Making of a Protestant Aristocracy: the Ecclesiastical Commissioners of the Diocese of Chester, 1550-98’, *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 49 (1976), p. 62. The fourth Elizabethan bishop, Hugh Bellot, held the position for less than a year before his death.

¹⁵² Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 159.

¹⁵³ Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 51-2.

¹⁵⁴ Quotation from Philip Hughes, *The Reformation in England* (London, 1950-1954), iii, pp. 38-9, where he discusses the nature of the submission required during the visitation, concluding that an oath was probably not required at this time.

Downham allowed ‘massive evasion’ of subscription to the royal supremacy by the Lancashire clergy; in this section I will consider whether this was the case in Cheshire. The importance of the parish clergy went far beyond their personal acceptance of the Elizabethan settlement, however. Given the degree to which religious conformity was identified with loyalty to the crown, the conversion of parishioners was of political as well as religious significance. In this section I will consider whether Downham’s episcopate saw a movement towards the establishment of a reformed ministry on the lines set out in Marshall’s paradigm.

The number of parish clergy throughout the kingdom who were deprived for refusal to subscribe to the royal supremacy in 1559 must be a matter of speculation, as the visitation returns survive only for the four sees of the Northern Province and the subscriptions lists are extant only for six dioceses of the Southern Province.¹⁵⁵

Rosemary O’Day suggested that ‘Elizabeth I found it necessary only to deprive a few hundreds of the clergy serving her 9,000 parishes.’¹⁵⁶ The commissioners were empowered to consider cases where incumbents had been deprived for marriage under Mary, with a view to restoring married clergy. In the Northern Province 28 such cases were considered, only one of which involved a Cheshire parish.¹⁵⁷ This involved Nicholas Hyde of Mottram in Longdendale. The commissioners restored him to his living which had been transferred to David Ithell by 1554, although Hyde had remained

¹⁵⁵ Hughes, *Reformation*, iii, pp. 39-43.

¹⁵⁶ Rosemary O’Day, *The English Clergy: the Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979), p. 26. It may be noted that this estimate is intended to cover the whole reign, not just deprivations in 1559 and the number quoted seems to be arbitrary as no reference is given in support of the assertion.

¹⁵⁷ Kitching (ed.), ‘Royal Visitation of 1559’, pp. xxiv-xxv.

in the parish and continued to assist there.¹⁵⁸ The parish of Mottram occupied the ‘panhandle’ at the north-eastern border of the county and comprised some of the wildest and least-accessible parts of the county.¹⁵⁹ Hyde came from the contiguous parish of Glossop in Derbyshire, and is not known to have attended university.¹⁶⁰ The confessional significance of clerical marriage and the low incidence in Cheshire during the reign of Edward VI has already been noted. Nicholas Hyde’s marriage and consequent loss of his parish suggest that he may well have had evangelical sympathies. Where he encountered these ideas can only be a matter of conjecture, but a major trade route, particularly notable for the transport of salt, ran the length of the parish of Mottram.¹⁶¹ It may also be noted that Edmund Shaw, the Lord Mayor of London, who was partly responsible for the popularisation of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus in east Cheshire in the late fifteenth century came from the area. The chapel of ease at Woodhead, which he founded, was in Mottram parish. Haigh suggests that at that time, ‘Protestantism was taken into Lancashire not by anonymous traders but by Lancashire-born, university-trained theologians, who worked on their own initiative to convert their friends and relations’.¹⁶² It is quite plausible, however, that the flow of new ideas into this remote area of Cheshire did owe a great deal to trade links.

When Nicholas Hyde died in 1575 he was succeeded by his son, John, who held the parish for more than sixty years. John Hyde was assisted by his own son, Hamnet, acting as curate. Hamnet was something of an invalid, however, and predeceased his

¹⁵⁸ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 75; CALS EDV 1/1, f. 29. The surname of the intruder appears variously as Ithell, Ythell and Ethell.

¹⁵⁹ See the parish map at Figure 4.

¹⁶⁰ CCED person ID 33321; BIY CP.G.1118, deposition of Nicholas Hide.

¹⁶¹ W.B. Crump, ‘Saltways from the Cheshire Wiches’, *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 54 (1940), pp. 84-142.

¹⁶² Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 163.

father. Following the death of John Hyde in 1635 the living passed out of the family.¹⁶³ John Hyde's will survives, and his soul preamble indicates that he might have undergone a personal experience of conversion; 'I give bequeathe & betake my soule into the handes of Almightye God my Creator & maker, trusting only by the merites of Christ his death & passion to be one of his elect & chosen Children'.¹⁶⁴ This suggests not only a belief in justification by faith, but also an acceptance of the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Mottram parish was thus held by members of the Hyde family for ninety years and must have been one of the first in which successive generations formed a parochial dynasty of the type which became such a feature of the late-Elizabethan and early-Stuart Church of England.¹⁶⁵ David Ithell was probably previously the curate of Tarporley in 1534 and 1542, and probably subsequently the 'Oulde priest from Cholmeley' of that name buried at Malpas in 1574.¹⁶⁶ Although Ithell does not appear in Wark's list of active Elizabethan recusant priests in Cheshire, his geographical analysis of recusancy in the county indicates that the parish of Malpas was one of the centres and Ithell may have contributed to the continuance of Catholic practice there.¹⁶⁷ He would have been eligible for a pension or compensation following his deprivation, so may not have taken up formal employment in the church subsequently.¹⁶⁸ The men involved in this one case of restitution in Cheshire thus illustrate many features of the nature of the parochial clergy of the English church following Elizabeth's accession.

¹⁶³ Earwaker, ii, pp.127-8. Earwaker records that Hamnet Hyde travelled to London to be touched for 'the king's evil', a disease of the lymph glands, supposed to be curable by the touch of the monarch; *OED* (online edition accessed 27 February 2013).

¹⁶⁴ CALS WS 1637, John Hyde of Mottram.

¹⁶⁵ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, pp. 161-2; Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, pp. 115-7.

¹⁶⁶ BL Harley 594, f. 147v; witness will of William Witter, parson of Tarporley in 1542, TNA: PRO prob 11/29/153 William Wytto; burial on 17 October 1574 from Malpas parish register CALS P 21/3607/1/1, f. 28v.

¹⁶⁷ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, Appendix II and p. 132.

¹⁶⁸ Kitching (ed.), 'Royal Visitation of 1559', p. xxv.

None of the Cheshire clergy who appeared at the royal visitation refused to subscribe, but thirty-one parish clergy are noted as having failed to attend.¹⁶⁹ These clergy consisted of eighteen rectors, seven vicars, four curates, one stipendiary and one unspecified non-resident indicating that official concern to secure subscription extended beyond incumbents to all clergy. The non-attenders comprised between 15 and 18 per cent of the county's parish clergy, a substantial proportion.¹⁷⁰ There were, however, a number of valid reasons why clergy may not have attended. Some may have been ill, as plague was prevalent at the time of the visitation, while pluralists might appear elsewhere in the course of the visitation and although those who did not appear were pronounced contumacious, none were punished for non-appearance.¹⁷¹

In 1563 a further effort was made to ensure conformity with the obligation to swear the oath of supremacy and some of those who did not appear to subscribe in 1559 certainly later swore the oath, as required.¹⁷² Of the twenty-five rectors and vicars who are recorded as failing to attend in 1559, two had died by the end of 1563 and two had resigned.¹⁷³ One of these was Thomas Bulkeley of Cheadle, who resigned by 25 April 1563.¹⁷⁴ He was the brother of Katherine Bulkeley, previously abbess of Godstow, to

¹⁶⁹ TNA: PRO SP 12/10, ff. 157-9. W. F. Irvine has examined the careers of these men; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, pp. 29-30, 31-2, 33-43, 36, 38-9.

¹⁷⁰ Irvine estimated that there were between 200 and 220 parish clergy at the time; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 9; however in 1554 there were 208 clergy named at the visitation and in 1563 this number had fallen to about 170. The estimated percentages of non-attenders given here are based on these totals, derived from CALS EDV 1/1 for 1554 and CALS EDV 1/3 for 1563. There is no extant clergy list for 1558.

¹⁷¹ Kitching (ed.), 'Royal Visitation of 1559', p. xxii.

¹⁷² *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, p. 33.

¹⁷³ Those who died were William Collingwood, rector of Christleton, who was also a prebendary of Chester and who died in 1560; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p. 37 and William Wilbraham, rector of Aldford, who died in 1561. His will was proved 24 September 1561; TNA: PRO prob 11/44/319 William Wylbram.

¹⁷⁴ *Earwaker*, i, p. 220.

whom he had leased Cheadle rectory and who died in 1559.¹⁷⁵ His appointment as rector of Leyland in February 1563 was probably the incentive for his resignation, although he had been granted a dispensation on 24 November 1560 to hold three benefices.¹⁷⁶ The other who resigned was William Hill, rector of a moiety of Malpas, who left by 13 February 1562 on a pension of £16 *per annum* from his successor.¹⁷⁷ Hill was a considerable pluralist, holding the archdeaconry of Salop in addition to his parish appointments, and seems to have visited his Cheshire parish seldom, if ever. The pension was not paid for long, however, as Hill had died by January 1563, and there is no indication that he had given up any of his other appointments in the period immediately prior to his death.¹⁷⁸ Irvine concluded that these two Cheshire incumbents were deprived, but this conclusion is not supported by the evidence of their resignation and their continuing tenure of other livings.¹⁷⁹

Of the other twenty-one incumbents only two are not recorded as holding the same parishes in 1563. These two are Thomas Davye of Backford and Peter Prestland who had been presented to Sandbach by Queen Mary in 1554. This vicar of Sandbach was probably the man of that name who paid his First Fruits as vicar of Middlewich, a parish adjoining Sandbach, in February 1568.¹⁸⁰ There is no evidence of where he was based between 1559 and 1568, but in 1562 the unnamed vicar of Sandbach was

¹⁷⁵ Piccope, (First Portion), pp. 54-6; *Notitia Cestriensis*, pp. 270-1.

¹⁷⁶ CCed person ID 35836; *VCH* online: 'The Parish of Leyland', A History of the County of Lancaster: Volume 6 (1911), pp. 3-10 <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=53059>> (accessed 8 February 2013); TNA: PRO SP 12/76, f. 10.

¹⁷⁷ Ormerod, ii, p. 608; CALS EDP 186/1/1.

¹⁷⁸ CCed person ID 26890.

¹⁷⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 38.

¹⁸⁰ Walford D. Selby (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Records Preserved in the Public Record Office, London* (part II) (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 8, 1883), p. 398.

presented for non-residence.¹⁸¹ The only known reference to Davye as vicar of Backford appears in this 1559 visitation record.¹⁸² It is possible that the entry is a mistake, as Richard Garrett was vicar in 1554 and remained there until at least 1557 and from 1563 until at least 1578 the incumbent was Hugh Morrey.¹⁸³

The only incumbent known to have been deprived by 1563, therefore, is David Ithell of Mottram, removed so that the previous married incumbent could be restored. However, two other incumbents had left their parishes by 1563 but are not included in the list of those who failed to attend at the visitation. One of these was John Hanson, rector of Bowdon, who was deprived of the archdeaconry of Richmond at the 1559 visitation and probably resigned the living of Bowdon in 1561, when he resigned Rochdale.¹⁸⁴ The other was Richard Smith, a theologian of national reputation who had been appointed vicar of Frodsham in 1557 and who fled abroad on Elizabeth's accession.¹⁸⁵ Deprivation was thus not the only reason for parochial vacancies resulting from Queen Elizabeth's accession.¹⁸⁶

Of the four non-attending curates named in 1559, three either appeared at the 1563 visitation and swore the oath, or subscribed to the local 1563 declaration of support for the Elizabethan settlement.¹⁸⁷ The fourth, James Brooke of Wilmslow, was

¹⁸¹ CALS EDV 1/2b, f. 8v.

¹⁸² *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 30.

¹⁸³ Ormerod, ii, pp. 370-1; CALS EDV 1/3, ff. 31, 53v.

¹⁸⁴ Raines, *Vicars of Rochdale*, vol. i, p. 40. Hanson's successor at Bowdon, Robert Vaudrey, paid his first fruits on 21 October 1561; Selby (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Records*, p. 398. Hanson may well have attended at the visitation in connection with the deprivation of the archdeaconry.

¹⁸⁵ CCEd person ID 37384; J. Andreas Löwe, 'Smyth, Richard (1499/1500–1563)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 10 April 2013). He does not, however, seem to have been replaced as vicar until 1567; William Beamont, *An Account of the Ancient Town of Frodsham in Cheshire* (Warrington, 1881), p. 228.

¹⁸⁶ Haigh has not attempted to calculate how many Lancashire clergy may have been deprived at this time, but stated that three clergy of south Lancashire had been deprived by 1563; *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 210.

¹⁸⁷ The movements of curates are not as easy to trace as those of incumbent clergy, however. Richard Swayne remained at Goostrey (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 34); Henry Roper is probably Henry

the ex-chantry priest who had reported Hugh Dickon in 1547 for denying the real presence. He was not named at the 1563 visitation, and may have managed to avoid swearing the oath, although he was again included in the list of parish clergy in 1565 when he is marked '*extra*' (missing).¹⁸⁸ The last man named as a non-attender was the stipendiary, Thomas Dickson of Wybunbury, who does not appear in any other clergy list. Thus in the short term, in the period immediately after the 1559 visitation, the majority of the clergy of Cheshire stayed put, whether or not they were reluctant to accept the Elizabethan settlement. This is hardly surprising as the conservative John Hanson remained in nominal charge of diocesan discipline until early 1561. It was not until the more stringent requirements of the 1563 legislation were introduced, when Downham had been in his diocese for just over a year, that efforts began to deal with the recalcitrant.

The 1563 act which required all clergy to take the oath of supremacy came into force on 1 April of that year. Many of the clergy of Chester diocese responded by subscribing to a public declaration accepting the royal supremacy, denying papal authority and acknowledging that

the Boke of Comon Prayer ... is agreable to the Scriptures word of God and the Order of the Primitive Church and that hit is Catholicke Apostolicke and to the advaunsinge of Goddis glorie and the edyfieinge of Goddis people ... for that hit is is a Tonge that may be understyanded of the people.¹⁸⁹

Cowper of Ince (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, iii, p. 34); Thomas Clarke of Mobberley in 1559 is assumed to have moved to Stockport by 1563 (*Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, pp. 33-5; CALS EDV 1/3, f. 32).

¹⁸⁸ TNA: PRO CHES 24/92/2; CALS EDV 1/3 ff. 32, 63.

¹⁸⁹ This has been transcribed by W. F. Irvine; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, i, pp. 33-5.

Since the names are entered on one piece of parchment, it is reasonable to suppose that the clergy had travelled to the same place, presumably Chester, in order to subscribe. This probably explains why the majority of the signatures are of clergy from Cheshire and the southern Lancashire deaneries of Blackburn and Manchester.

Later that year, however, a visitation of the diocese was held and a list of clergy was drawn up on which a note is made of those who swore the oath of supremacy.¹⁹⁰ This is, however, a difficult source because it is heavily amended and it is not always easy to date the amendments. It is clear, however, that there was a considerable loss of clergy during Mary's reign and that the diocesan authorities were not entirely certain about which personnel remained in the parishes. At Great Budworth, for example, the name of Randle Stretton is marked '*non est talis*' (no such person).¹⁹¹ The only surviving list of Marian clergy for Cheshire dates from early in the Queen's reign, from a visitation of 1554, and names 208 parish clergy. By 1563 this number had fallen to just under 170, a fall of almost a fifth. There was thus a serious shortage of clergy to serve the county's 82 parishes and numerous chapels.¹⁹² It is now generally accepted that there was a national recruitment crisis at this time.¹⁹³ While fewer clergy were needed for the Elizabethan liturgy, there were clearly barely enough resident clergy in Cheshire to

¹⁹⁰ CALS EDV 1/3. The call book also includes schoolmasters, as they were also required to swear the oath of supremacy. They have been ignored for the purposes of this discussion.

¹⁹¹ CALS EDV 1/3, f. 26v.

¹⁹² The total of about 170 does not include incumbent clergy who held more than one Cheshire parish simultaneously. It is also difficult in cases of non-incumbent clergy where the same name appears in two locations to know whether this is two people or one person who had perhaps either moved or was serving in two places. The suggestion in the *VCH* (*VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 21) that 'the count [sic] had lost 75 per cent of its clergy between 1554 and 1563' is not supported by the evidence. The subsequent assertion that 'the loss was most severely felt in Nantwich deanery which had 36 clergy in 1554 but only 15 in 1563', a fall of about 58 per cent, suggests that if this was the most severe loss the overall loss cannot have been anywhere near as high as 75 per cent. The figure of 75 per cent is thus, perhaps, an unfortunate second misprint in the sentence. According to my reading of the sources, there were 34 clergy in Nantwich deanery in 1554, so that the reduction in numbers to 15 represents a slightly smaller loss than suggested in the *VCH*.

¹⁹³ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 160.

serve every church and chapel, so that chapels were often left vacant. Failure to appoint chapel curates may also have depended upon who was responsible for paying them, but lack of service at chapels was a regular cause of complaint by the laity for decades. In 1592, for example, it was presented on behalf of Daresbury chapel in the parish of Runcorn that '[t]he Chappell hath bene destitute of a curat manie times and the Vicar doth not catechize, but once in Lent last.'¹⁹⁴ A continuing shortage of clergy also obliged Cheshire parishes to look far afield when making appointments and in the late 1580s William Hickocks, originally from Buckinghamshire, found temporary employment at St Peter's in Chester when his London employment was terminated.¹⁹⁵

In summoning the parish clergy to swear the requisite oath, therefore, Downham faced something of a dilemma, since a critical shortage of manpower would have resulted from widespread refusal to swear with its consequent deprivations and suspensions. In the event only one of the Cheshire clerics who appeared refused the oath. This was Magister William Sutton, listed under St Mary's in Chester.¹⁹⁶ It is recorded that he was punished for refusal to swear, although the nature of his punishment is not documented and he makes no further recorded appearance in Cheshire. The majority of the clergy did attend and swear, as required, although this was not an overwhelming majority, as only 109 or about 65 per cent took the oath. A variety of notes give some details about those who did not appear. Four had died, four were described as 'decrepit' and seven were ill. Sixteen clergy either failed to appear or have

¹⁹⁴ W. F. Irvine, 'The Bishop of Chester's Visitation Book, 1592', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for the County and City of Chester and North Wales*, V (pt. IV) (1895), p. 416.

¹⁹⁵ H. Gareth Owen, 'Parochial Curates in Elizabethan London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 10 (1) (1959), p. 71.

¹⁹⁶ CALS 1/3, f. 31v. He was not, however, the rector as this was the absentee Charles Duckworth at this time; Earwaker, *St. Mary-on-the-Hill*, pp. 81-2. A 'Mr. Sutton' was buried at St Mary's in 1598; *ibid.*, p. 113.

no entry beside them, but a further twelve are marked as having been cited to appear. In some cases this is defined as a citation ‘*viis et modis*’ (served by any possible means), but this course of action seems to have been reserved for the persistent absentee incumbents such as Arthur Dudley of Malpas and Alan Chorlton of Tarporley who was deprived in 1570 for persistent failure to answer summonses and for neglecting his cure.¹⁹⁷ Some were cited to appear before the ecclesiastical commissioners, but no records of proceedings in these cases have survived.

Three men are marked as ‘excused’ by the bishop. There seem to have been a variety of reasons for this. William Hornby ‘*capellanus*’ of Prestbury parish was chaplain at Pott in 1578 and at Poynton in 1592.¹⁹⁸ Both these chapelries were in Prestbury parish, so he seems to have moved around within the parish, and presumably had a valid excuse for not appearing in 1563. John Croxden, curate of Baddiley, also went under the surname of Oliver, and under that surname is listed as one of those who had failed to attend the 1559 royal visitation.¹⁹⁹ By 1565 he no longer held the cure.²⁰⁰ William Leigh, rector of Gawsorth was deprived on 17 October 1564.²⁰¹ Proceedings leading to deprivation could be lengthy, involving common law as well as ecclesiastical law, since a benefice might be freehold property.²⁰² It is thus possible that these proceedings had already commenced in 1563, and in the circumstances Downham may

¹⁹⁷ CALS EDC 5 1571.12 Tarporley.

¹⁹⁸ CCed person ID 31990; BIY V 1578/9 call lists, Macclesfield deanery.

¹⁹⁹ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st Series, iii, p. 232; TNA: PRO SP 12/10, f. 157.

²⁰⁰ CALS EDV 1/3, f. 58v. He was an ex-monk of Combermere, a litigious man who seems to have been involved in some underhand dealings; see for example TNA: PRO C 3/157/35, involving a property which had been held in trust by Croxden. About 1570 Croxden was living in the parish of Audley in Staffordshire and drawing his pension of £5 *per annum*; James Hall, *A History of the Town and Parish of Nantwich or Wich – Malbank, in the County Palatine of Chester* (Nantwich, 1883), p. 293. He may be another example of a Marian priest who was allowed to withdraw from service in the church and live in retirement.

²⁰¹ TNA: PRO SP 15/12, f. 240.

²⁰² Burn, *Ecclesiastical Law*, ii, pp. 123-4.

thus have seen little point in compelling him to swear, although the reason why Leigh was removed from his living has not survived. Leigh died shortly after his deprivation and was buried as ‘parson of Gawsworth’ in February 1565.²⁰³ Downham’s motives for excusing clergy from the 1563 oath were thus varied, and not necessarily a result of leniency on his part, as Haigh suggests.²⁰⁴ It took some years to ensure that all non-resident incumbents had either conformed or been deprived, however. It was, for example, nearly a decade before Arthur Lowe, absentee rector of Stockport, appeared before the York High Commission in 1572 and it was accepted that he conformed to the established religion.²⁰⁵

The 1563 oath of supremacy represented something of a watershed for the parish clergy and following attempts to administer the oath there were further losses of parish clergy during the early years of Downham’s episcopate. Following a visitation, probably in 1563, Randle Antrobus, a clerk at Great Budworth, was presented ‘*ex officio*’ for refusing to attend church. Antrobus appeared and confessed that he had fathered a child with ‘*quandam Elenam* [blank] *ignotam*’ (a certain Ellen, an unknown woman). The penance was for him to kneel in the body of the church and for the vicar to read a declaration of his repentance ‘and because he is aged and the matter not openly knowne here for the redemption of his penance he hath paid to the Reparacion of the cathedral Church xs’.²⁰⁶ It is entirely possible that Antrobus had suddenly recalled an incident

²⁰³ CALS P193/4467/1, f. 48v.

²⁰⁴ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 211.

²⁰⁵ BIY HC.AB.6 1571/2, f. 76. I am grateful to Dr Paul Dryburgh at the Borthwick Institute for assistance in deciphering this Act Book entry.

²⁰⁶ CALS EDV 1/2b, f. 3v. The other man accused did not appear. These pages of corrections do not carry a contemporary date, but have been assigned a date of 1562-3 by Irvine who sorted and bound much of the visitation material. Antrobus was probably over 60 by this time, and was possibly the clerk of that name who had been part of a mob involved in the fracas stemming from the disputed presentation to Rostherne parish in 1529, during which it was alleged that the vicar had been pulled from his stall; R.

which seems to have happened some years previously, suggested by the fact that the full name of the woman was not known and that the matter was not common knowledge, but it is also possible that he felt it safer to invent a sin which kept him from attending church rather than to admit that he was kept away by religious scruples. He is marked as suspended in the list of those required to swear the oath of supremacy in 1563 and was bound in a recognisance of £20 to appear before the Ecclesiastical commissioners on 10 November (probably 1564) for an unspecified reason.²⁰⁷ In February 1570 he was reported to still be in Great Budworth parish as ‘an old papist priest and doth not mynister’. He had presumably either withdrawn from the established church or been dismissed.²⁰⁸ He was buried at Great Budworth as ‘Sir Rondle Antrobus’ in January 1576.²⁰⁹

Other assistant clergy of Cheshire withdrew from the church after 1563, but probably continued to minister Catholic rites in secret. Thomas Houghton was ordained deacon in September 1558 and seems then to have served as curate of Marbury after 1563 and then of Warmingham before 1565.²¹⁰ He was presented at the metropolitan visitation of 1578 for failing to attend church or to receive communion in the neighbouring parish of Acton where he ‘doth make his most abode’, suggesting that he moved around, perhaps ministering to Catholics.²¹¹ By 1581 he was a prisoner in

Stewart-Brown (ed.) *Lancashire and Cheshire Cases in the Court of Star Chamber* (part I) (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 71, 1916-17), pp. 110-2.

²⁰⁷ CALS EDV 1/3, f. 26v; CALS EDA 12/2, f. 24.

²⁰⁸ James Croston, *County Families of Lancashire and Cheshire* (London, 1887), p. 232.

²⁰⁹ CALS P41/1/1, f. 109.

²¹⁰ CCEd person ID 32012. He was ordained to the title of John Bromley of Basford, who died in 1564, leaving no heirs, but was distantly related to Hugh Bromley of Hampton Post, accused of being a prominent papist and harbourer of priests; Ormerod, iii, p. 505; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 142.

²¹¹ BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 10.

Chester Castle and was then transferred to the New Fleet, Salford.²¹² John Maddocks was probably the curate at Tilston in 1534 and 1541 and subsequently schoolmaster at Malpas in 1563, when he failed to turn up to take the oath and is marked as having been cited, presumably to appear in the consistory.²¹³ In April 1582 he helped to prepare for a mass at Agden, Malpas, and by December 1586 he had been committed to the Wood Street Counter in London and was described as ‘an old poore fellow and malicious but no Seminarye’.²¹⁴ It was thus possible for Marian parish clergy to retire quietly without formally accepting the royal supremacy, but whether they were tolerated by the authorities as long as they avoided attracting attention to themselves or whether such toleration depended upon the prevailing attitude in the parish where they lived is a matter of conjecture. However, it is likely that after his presentment Ralph Antrobus attended church sufficiently frequently to avoid further censure. Thomas Houghton was not prepared to conform even to that extent, while John Maddocks actively participated in forbidden Catholic rites, which inevitably led to punishment.

The behaviour of some of the Marian clergy who stayed in the church also caused problems for the diocesan hierarchy, both in matters of religion and of morals, although sometimes an accusation linked the two offences. This was the situation in the case of Robert Kinsey, rector of Barthomley, who, in September 1565, confessed ‘hymself to have comitted fornycacion’ but was also reported ‘to be a favorer of the

²¹² Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, pp. 175-6.

²¹³ BL Harley 594, f. 148v; W. F. Irvine (ed.), ‘List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester, 1541-2; Together with a List of the Tenths and Subsidy Payable in the Deaneries of the Archdeaconry of Chester’, *Miscellanies Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 3 (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 33, 1896), p. 5; CALS EDV 1/3, f. 23.

²¹⁴ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 176; TNA: PRO SP 12/195, f. 129v. In March 1584 he was reported to have been at the house of Hugh Bromley at Hampton Post, which may be a connection between him and Thomas Houghton.

masse and of suche papisticall tradicions'.²¹⁵ One clerical offence which continued to be regularly committed, particularly by impoverished curates seeking to supplement their income, was the performance of clandestine marriages.²¹⁶ The authorities objected strongly and participating clergy could be suspended from office for three years.²¹⁷ One concern was that secrecy might indicate that the participants were attempting to avoid marriage in the Church of England with ceremonies conducted according to the old rites.²¹⁸ In 1563 Hamlet Taylor, curate of Witton, thought that he had been punished too severely for the offence, the proceedings 'shuld be but a check of my Lord for it and amendment not to do the Like againe or els he wold not haue done it yf [sic- perhaps for 'if he had known'] the ponishment had bene so gret'.²¹⁹

Other evidence suggests that, as well as imposing sometimes unexpectedly harsh punishment for misbehaviour, from the beginning of his episcopate Downham had hoped to improve the situation of his clergy, in terms of morals, discipline and education. On 13 November 1562 the Chester clergy had been assembled in the chapter house of the cathedral before the Ecclesiastical commissioners. Ten of them were warned about aspects of their behaviour such as inordinate frequenting of the alehouse and consorting with suspect women. Some of the clergy were also admonished for offences such as administering communion to parishioners who could not say the Lord's

²¹⁵ EDA 12/2, ff. 30, 102.

²¹⁶ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 238. This reference is to be found in the index (p. 364) under 'Marriages – by papist priests', but there were many reasons why parties sought clandestine marriage.

²¹⁷ Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (paperback edition, Cambridge, 1990), p. 215.

²¹⁸ Hugh Aveling, 'The Marriages of Catholic Recusants, 1559-1642', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 14 (1963), pp. 71, 73.

²¹⁹ Frederick J. Furnivall (ed.), *Child-Marriages, Divorces and Ratifications in the Diocese of Chester*, Early English Text Society (old series) 108 (1897), p.lxxvii; CALS EDC 2/7, f. 117v. Unfortunately, the nature of his punishment has not survived. In 1563 a man named Hamlet Taylor was rural dean of Middlewich and as such responsible for penalising transgressions by his fellow clergy; BL Harley 594, f. 90.

Prayer and failure to teach the catechism to parish children. Robert Barker, who was not ordained priest until 1564, was ordered to ‘come daylie to the grammer scole to here the Lesson redd there’, presumably to prepare him for his coming ordination.²²⁰ The reputation of the clergy was probably low at this time and there are repeated references in proceedings to the need for discretion in cases of clerical misdemeanours.

Recent historians have accused Downham of responding to the shortage of clergy by indiscriminately ordaining unsuitable candidates. It has been claimed that although ‘[a]dequately trained clergy were successfully attracted in other dioceses ... of the 176 priests ordained by Downham between September 1561 and October 1568 ... none was a graduate.’²²¹ There is, however, no contemporary evidence that Downham ordained ‘all sorts of mechanics and unworthy men’, as William Overton was alleged to have done later in the neighbouring diocese of Coventry and Lichfield.²²² Although not all Downham’s ordinands would go on to live a blameless life, there is no evidence that his policy was to ordain men with no thought of their character or abilities. Haigh has pointed out that 56 ordinands between 1562 and 1569 are marked ‘*tolerantia domini episcopi*’, which he considered ‘presumably means that they were ordained despite their failure to come up to the prescribed standards.’²²³ If this is what it does mean, since it may have had a number of other implications such as a fault in the candidate’s title, it at

²²⁰ CALS EDA 12/2, ff. 81-81v; Barker CCEd person ID 35552. There were, however, several men of this name working in the diocese at this time and Haigh has identified him as a Manchester curate; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 240.

²²¹ *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 21, referring to the ordination register (CALS EDA 1/3, ff. 2-11) and to Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 239. There seems again to be some confusion about statistics, however. Haigh claims that 176 priests were ordained by Downham ‘from his own diocese’ in the period from 1562 to 1569, whereas the author of the *VCH* claims that 20 of the 176 were ordained on letters dimissory, which means that they must have come from outside the diocese of Chester.

²²² Felicity Heal, *Of Prelates and Princes: A Study of the Economic and Social Position of the Tudor Episcopate* (Cambridge, 1980), p. 217.

²²³ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 239.

least indicates that he had examined them and considered their suitability. Furthermore, the 1604 canons decreed that candidates should not be ordained deacon and priest on the same day.²²⁴ The stated reason for this delay before ordination to the priesthood was that ‘there may ever be some time of trial of their behaviour’. After 1562 Downham very rarely ordained men deacon and priest on the same day, so was already observing this principle, unlike some other Elizabethan bishops.²²⁵ If Downham failed to ordain any graduates before 1568, he made up for it thereafter, as several of those ordained priest after that date were not only graduates, but held a higher degree.²²⁶ This may, perhaps, be a reflection of the increasing appeal of the priesthood as a career.

Between 1562 and 1578, during Downham’s time at Chester, 60 of the county’s 80 livings fell vacant at least once (see Table 7 below). This means that three quarters of parishes had a change of incumbent during this time. The percentage of vacancies varied between the deaneries. The proportion of known graduates appointed also varied between the deaneries, but one of the lowest was Wirral which probably reflects the number of poor livings there, in parishes which were wholly impropriated, mostly by the Dean and Chapter of Chester Cathedral.²²⁷ The appointment of a young graduate rector or vicar was not always necessarily advantageous to the parish since there were still many pluralists and non-residents. Some gentry families continued to view a parish

²²⁴ Canon 32.

²²⁵ Ian Green, ‘Career Prospects and Clerical Conformity in the Early Stuart Church’, *Past and Present*, 90, 1981, pp. 103-4. Details of Downham’s ordinations may be found in CCed Ordinary Tenure ID 124.

²²⁶ Examples include: William Dorington ordained priest by Downham on 7 March 1574, held the degrees of B.A. and M.A. from St Catharine’s, Cambridge, he had also been a fellow of King’s (CCed person ID 33202); Andrew Brednam (or Lacy) ordained priest by Downham on 16 March 1573 held the degree of B.A. from St John’s, Cambridge where he was a fellow in 1566 (CCed person ID 23118).

²²⁷ Some of the impropriated livings may not have been perpetual curacies and thus may not strictly have been regarded as incumbencies but evidence of the changing nature of these livings is scanty. Many were held for decades by the same curate, such as John Carter who was curate of Shotwick from at least 1565 until his death in 1587; CCALS EDC 1/5, f. 53v; CALS WS 1587 John Carter.

appointment as a way of funding a son's university education. These included the incumbents of two parishes in 1578. Richard Puleston at Astbury never seems to have taken up residence in Cheshire and resigned by 1587.²²⁸ Richard Gerrard of Stockport, however, did move to Stockport after finishing his studies. He married the daughter of a local gentry family and took an active part in the religious life of the county.²²⁹

Table 7 – Graduate appointments during Downham's episcopate²³⁰

Deanery	Total incumbents	New appointments		Graduates		Non-graduates		Not known	
		Number	% of total	Number	% of new	Number	% of new	Number	% of new
Chester	18	13	72%	6	46%	1	8%	6	46%
Frodsham	10	7	70%	3	42%	2	29%	2	29%
Macclesfield	10	6	60%	3	50%	3	50%		
Malpas	8	7	88%	2	29%	3	42%	2	29%
Middlewich	10	8	80%	2	25%	4	50%	2	25%
Nantwich	9	6	67%	1	17%	3	50%	2	33%
Wirral	15	13	87%	3	23%	3	23%	7	54%
Total	80	60	75%	20	33%	19	32%	21	35%

In Nantwich deanery, where relatively few graduates are known among those presented, none are known to have been pluralists and the nine incumbents, both new and established, developed an *esprit de corps* and seem to have met regularly to exchange books and possibly to socialise. This is suggested by the will of John

²²⁸ See Appendix for biographical details.

²²⁹ See Appendix.

²³⁰ The numbers include both parts of the two divided rectories of Malpas and Lymm, which have each been counted as two livings but exclude the four poorest Chester parishes which tended to be run by the petty canons of the cathedral; M. J. Crossley Evans, 'The Clergy of the City of Chester, 1630-1672', *Journal of the Chester Archaeological Society*, 68 (1985), p. 98. The details of changes are derived from clergy call lists at CALS EDV 1/3, ff. 21v-32 for 1563 and BIY V 1578/9 deanery call lists. Some livings may have fallen vacant more than once but in view of the lack of call lists between these two dates and the incomplete diocesan institution book for the period, any incumbencies which began and ended within the period are not included within these figures. Details of graduates come from clergy lists, where graduates are referred to as 'Mr' or '*magister*' and from a clergy list drawn up by Chaderton in 1592 which specified whether incumbents were graduates or not; Lambeth Palace Library CMXIII/47 (CCEd Ordinary tenure ID 125 (accessed 8 March 2013) for William Chaderton at Chester). Biographical details of the clergy of 1578 will be found in the Appendix.

Smallwood, rector of Coppenhall.²³¹ His relationship to other clergy of the deanery is revealed by the bequest to ‘Mr Woodde vicar of Wybunbury the booke which he hathe of myne for remembraunce’ and a bequest of books and other items to Thomas Elcock, Puritan rector of Barthomley.²³²

It is, of course, difficult to recover the personal religion of the majority of the clergy at this time, but one indication of adherence to Catholic doctrine was opposition to clerical marriage. The attitude of some clergy and laity towards clerical marriage remained ambivalent and could be a cause of discord and a general discussion could rapidly deteriorate into accusations of ‘contempt of religion’. Thus in 1576 William Ball seems to have been having a general conversation about clergy remuneration which escalated in an alarming way. Those present included William Dorington, rector of St Peter’s in Chester, whose will suggests that he was independently wealthy and that he never married. The personal responses by Ball to the articles of complaint state that

Master dorington articulate that he had but x^{li} a yere this respondent said vnto him that was but a smalle lyvinge to kepe a Gennet, wherevnto the said Master dorington said vnto this respondent you meane by that, that the mariages of mynisters be vnlawfull And this respondent answered vnto him that he wold finde no fault with their mariages let them marrie in godes name

²³¹ CCEd person ID 324731 (accessed 26 January 2013); CALS WS 1584 John Smallwood.

²³² Elcock’s religious convictions are deduced from his presentment in 1611 for baptising a baby in a pewter basin quoted in Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England*, p. 28. It was Elcock whose fornication was kept quiet by Downham ‘forasmuch as Mr Elcock was an honest gentleman and a preacher’, giving rise to accusation of forbearance in matters of clerical immorality; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 242.

Ad v respondet that he knoweth not what a Gennet is & therefore he cannot
answere therevnto.²³³

The conversation seems to have taken a rather surreal turn, and it seems that Dorington may have over-reacted; perhaps he was sensitive to the public perception of his own unmarried state. Ball, however, then found himself accused of using a Latin primer in church and failing to ensure that his children and servants were catechised.

The marital state of some of the clergy of the county can be established from the evidence of wills and parish registers, the latter survive in some numbers from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. It is not possible to establish whether each cleric in the county was married, but the evidence suggests that about half of the incumbents of 1578

Table 8 – Marital status of 1578 incumbents²³⁴

Deanery	Total incumbents	Married		Not married		Marital status unknown	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Chester	22	9	41%	2	9%	11	50%
Frodsham	10	5	50%	1	10%	4	40%
Macclesfield	10	5	50%	4	40%	1	10%
Malpas	8	4	50%	1	12%	3	38%
Middlewich	10	6	60%			4	40%
Nantwich	9	4	45%	2	22%	3	33%
Wirral	15	4	27%	3	20%	8	53%
Total	84	37	44%	13	15%	34	40%

were married, although it has not been possible to establish the date of marriage in most cases (see Table 8 above). Large clerical families were becoming increasingly common.

²³³ CALS EDC 5 1576.4 Chester; 1576.14 Chester. Elsewhere in the depositions there is clearer indication that the creature meant was a jennet = a small Spanish horse *OED* (online edition accessed 8 March 2013). The verbal exchange seems to have been quite bizarre, but may possibly have involved a pun on the name 'Janet'.

²³⁴ Biographical details of the clergy of 1578 will be found in the Appendix.

For example, Matthew Wood, vicar of Wybunbury, had ten surviving children and was a frequent tithe litigant. Possibly his litigiousness was motivated by the costs of keeping a large family.²³⁵

The final source of evidence about the personal faith of the clergy is their wills. Only thirteen wills have been traced for Cheshire clergy who died between 1559 and 1577. This small sample indicates an evolution of faith through the period. Two wills from 1561 mention Mary in the soul preamble, and that of Matthew Heaton, chaplain at Sutton Hall, leaves a specific bequest of a rosary and 12d towards painting the high chancel at Macclesfield.²³⁶ The other surviving will from 1561 is that of John Bird's chancellor, George Wilmesley, which reflects a mixture of traditional and reformist characteristics.²³⁷ It is headed 'Jesus Maria' in an echo of the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, and as well as the traditional soul bequest the will also requests 'the blessed Virgin Marye mother off owr Lord Jesus Christ withe all the whole celestial companye to prey ffor me'. Then follow bequests to his wife and his children, both legitimate and illegitimate. It is noticeable that between 1561 and 1577 no clerical will mentions Mary or requests intercessory prayers.

The wills of twenty-seven clergy who were parish incumbents at the time of Downham's death have been traced, of these sixteen relate to men who died after 1600, decades after Downham's death so it is possible that their views may have changed during this long period. Only three specifically requested a funeral sermon. Henry Trafford of Wilmslow, who died in 1591, wanted a sermon by the celebrated Puritan

²³⁵ Records of his tithe cases include CALS EDC 5 1582.24 Wybunbury; EDC 5 1583.7 Wybunbury; EDC 5 1583.13-17 Wybunbury.

²³⁶ CALS WS 1560 Matthew Heaton.

²³⁷ Piccope (First Portion), pp. 115-124. The original is not known to have survived.

preacher John Caldwell, rector of the neighbouring parish of Mobberley for which he was to be paid a fee of 6s 8d.²³⁸ Robert Rogers, the Puritan rector of Gawsworth and archdeacon of Chester, wrote his will in 1580 and requested a sermon ‘made by some godly wise learned man, wherein he is to exhort the people to prepare them selues towardes heauen to despise this world to amend their liues and to repent and he to haue for his paynes xs’.²³⁹ Thomas Elcock, Puritan rector of Barthomley, offered 10s in his will of 1617, to ‘the Preacher that shall preach at my buryall’.²⁴⁰ Bequests for funeral sermons were thus not widely popular, even among the clergy, at this time and seem to have been restricted to ‘the hotter sort of Protestants’.

The majority of these clergy wills indicate a belief in solifidianism in their soul bequest, although some, like Robert Danald of Handley, include a brief, and thus possibly ambiguous, preamble merely stating ‘Firste I bequeth my soule to Almightye god my maker and redemer’.²⁴¹ Danald had been rector of Handley since 1530, and may not have fully accepted the religious changes of Elizabeth’s reign, but his will is short and he may not have felt the need for more. Others took the opportunity to set out a long personal statement of faith. John Robinson of Ashton on Mersey, who had been presented to his living in 1550, wrote such a statement in his will dated October 1579.²⁴² The statement takes up more than one page, as printed, and expressing his confident belief that his only hope of salvation lay in his faith. He said, ‘I will bestowe noe parte of my goods temporall that god haithe lent me to th’entente that any manner of person

²³⁸ CALS WS 1591 Henry Trafford; Piccope (Second Portion), pp. 18-20. Caldwell himself died suddenly on a journey home from visiting his birthplace in Burton on Trent, his own will is nuncupative and has no soul bequest; Ormerod, i, p. 412; CALS WS 1595 John Caldwell.

²³⁹ CALS WS 1595 Robert Rogers.

²⁴⁰ CALS WS 1617 Thomas Elcock.

²⁴¹ CALS WS 1578 Robert Dannelde. The will exists only as an office copy and does not state who wrote it, so it may have the work of a scribe.

²⁴² Earwaker (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Wills and Inventories at Chester*, pp. 92-6.

shulde saye or doe to the helpe of my soule' and later 'yff I have any temporall goods thosse most I leve to the powre flocke of christ not by cause they scholde pray for me which am saved alredi bot rather yt they may know yt they schall not lacke yf they put ther trust in christ Jesus'. Clearly, he had personally experienced conversion and so expounded his faith at length. Interestingly, however, there is no indication in his will that he had ever married or had any children.

During Mary's reign relatively few of the county's clergy had shown any opposition to the re-imposition of Catholicism, and initially Downham went to some lengths to secure conformity. However, he was obliged to adopt methods which were not too draconian in view of the shortage of clergy in the early days of his episcopate. His own character would have favoured persuasion over coercion. Some parish clergy were deprived for persistent failure to conform. The majority of those who remained were reconciled to Protestantism, although there may have been a slow start to the process of conversion. By the time of Downham's death there were still 8 of the 84 parish incumbents who had held their parishes since the reign of Henry VIII.²⁴³ The evidence suggests, however, that men such as these were able to reconcile themselves to all the changes they were required to embrace. For example, in September 1588 Richard Lowther, who was born about 1512 and had been a curate of St Bridget's in Chester since at least 1541, was buried with the simple tribute in the parish register '*vir bonus*' (a good man).²⁴⁴ It may be noted that the Goodman family were parishioners of St

²⁴³ See Appendix, the 8 were: Gowther Mossock at Alderley, Richard Lowther at St Bridget's in Chester, Robert Danald at Handley, James Walker at Plemstall, Nicholas Fiddler at Taxal, Thomas Sharpe at Thustaston, John Barlow at Warmingham and Henry Trafford at Wilmslow.

²⁴⁴ His date of birth has been estimated from his given age of 36 in 1548, TNA: PRO E 301/8/1; Irvine (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries', p. 2; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd Series, xv, p. 37.

Bridgets and Christopher Goodman was buried there in 1603.²⁴⁵ Lowther occupied this poor parish for over forty years but must have conformed to the extent that he was acceptable to a radical Puritan like Goodman, and yet had retained the affection of his parishioners. Downham's period in office saw changes of incumbent in the majority of the county's parishes and while it cannot be said that all the new appointments conformed to any ideal, many were committed, resident, pastoral ministers. While he was bishop the parish clergy as a body gradually developed to the point where the parish ministry seems to have been quite effectively Protestantised.

The Lay Response to the Elizabethan Settlement

In his seminal book on Lancashire Christopher Haigh argued that the Elizabethan settlement encountered difficulties in that county because 'old ways of thought and practice died hard in an area which had experienced a flowering of conventional piety.'²⁴⁶ This is, in effect, a summary of the revisionist position which Haigh's book helped to pioneer. Haigh concluded that the problems of enforcement of conformity were intensified in Lancashire and that the implementation of religious change was further obstructed there because it was 'an impoverished county possessed of weak institutions and unsympathetic officials.'²⁴⁷ Given that the counties of Lancashire and Cheshire were both in the diocese of Chester and that the south of Lancashire was in the same archdeaconry as Cheshire, these perceived difficulties of enforcement should apply equally to both counties if the institutional weakness stemmed from failures in

²⁴⁵ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 2nd Series, i, p. 123.

²⁴⁶ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 225.

²⁴⁷ Quotation from Rosemary O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (paperback edition, London and New York, 1986), p. 151.

ecclesiastical administration, although not necessarily if the unsympathetic officials in question were laymen. The role of the gentry was thus crucial since they supplied the majority of local government lay officials. Furthermore, contemporaries considered that ‘the meaner sort of people are ledd & seduced’ by ‘principall gentlemen’ so that the intermittent government-inspired drives to secure conformity tended to concentrate on the gentry.²⁴⁸ However, Haigh has pointed out that in Lancashire by 1567 there was ‘an already established circuit of gentry households providing shelter for at least seventeen mass-priests, mainly in south-west Lancashire.’²⁴⁹ Conversely, it is generally understood by historians that ‘there were few recusants in Cheshire in the second half of the sixteenth century.’²⁵⁰ It would thus appear that the gentry of the two counties responded differently to official efforts to implement the Elizabethan settlement within the same diocese. In this section I will consider why this may have been the case. The aim of official policy was to coerce recalcitrant gentry, but to win over the hearts and minds of the ‘meanest sort’ by ‘courtesie’.²⁵¹ However, as Ethan Shagan has pointed out, ‘in practice Catholicism and Protestantism could both be remarkably fluid, expanding socially, culturally, and politically to fill any available space’.²⁵² A key question is whether among Cheshire parishioners of the early decades of Elizabeth’s reign confessional identities had become fixed or were still evolving.

²⁴⁸ Instructions from the Privy Council to the Council of the North concerning Lancashire dated 10 June 1580, Francis Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa, or, a Collection of Divers Scarce and Curious Pieces (Relating Chiefly to Matters of English History) in Six Books* (London, 1779), i, p. 85; Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 265; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 28.

²⁴⁹ Haigh, *The English Reformation Revised*, p. 189.

²⁵⁰ Quotation from Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 130; *VCH Cheshire*, iii, p. 88.

²⁵¹ Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa*, i, pp. 90-1; Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 28.

²⁵² Ethan Shagan, ‘Introduction: English Catholic History in Context’, in Ethan H. Shagan, (ed.), *Catholics and the ‘Protestant Nation’* (Manchester, 2005), p. 16.

It was certainly not the case that all of Cheshire's leading gentry co-operated fully with the ecclesiastical authorities. Downham's attempt at reformation of the morals of some gentry through the medium of the ecclesiastical commission was met with contempt for him and his authority. The actions of some gentlemen also suggest that they deliberately set out to humiliate him and flout his authority. Sir Thomas Venables, for example, had disregarded attempts to reconcile him with his wife. In November 1570 a commission was sent from the consistory court to John Smallwood, rural dean of Middlewich, for the examination of witnesses in the parish church of Middlewich in a defamation case. These witnesses included Venables. The letter of summons from Smallwood to the witnesses charged them: 'fayle not to appeare as you & euery of you will answere to the Contrarye at your perele'. Venables did turn up, as required, but together with the vicar of Middlewich and Charles Mainwaring refused to be sworn because he had already attended the consistory court in Chester about the matter.²⁵³ He thus did the bare minimum to comply, without observing the spirit of the summons, leaving Smallwood at a loss to know how to proceed. This disdainful response was, in effect, a rebuff to the authority of the rural dean and thus to his superiors. We have also seen already that conflict between Downham and the Venables family continued in the 1570s with the bishop's refusal to admit the Venables family's 'ignorant and vnlearned' candidate to their living of Eccleston.²⁵⁴

Sir Rowland Stanley had also ignored the attempts of the ecclesiastical commission to regulate his behaviour. It was said that he sought the shrievalty of the county in 1573 partly in order to deflect the legal processes of the commission in their

²⁵³ CALS EDC 5 1571.10 Davenham.

²⁵⁴ BL Additional MS 32091, f. 268v.

efforts to enforce his compliance and partly to pack the jury in a dispute about the living of the parish of Bebington. Strype stated that he was not made sheriff because 'he was doubted to be corrupt in religion'.²⁵⁵ The dispute about Bebington arose following the death of the incumbent, Roger Sefton, in December 1570.²⁵⁶ It does seem that there was genuine uncertainty about who had the right of next presentation. The advowson of the church had passed to the Dean and Chapter of Chester cathedral following the dissolution of St Werburgh's monastery, but had then passed with other property to Sir Richard Cotton in 1553.²⁵⁷ The advowson had subsequently passed through several owners and various grants of next presentation had been made. It is also possible that Cotton had sold the advowson to more than one person.²⁵⁸ Stanley had appealed to York in defence of his right to present and on 6 April 1571, while Downham's authority was inhibited during the metropolitan visitation, he petitioned the archbishop of York to admit Thomas Bennett to the rectory.²⁵⁹ Bennett was curate of the parish of Upton at that time and in 1541 had served the same parish in the pay of Sir William Stanley, probably the father or grandfather of Sir Rowland. He was clearly a client of, and

²⁵⁵ John Strype, *The History of the Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmund Grindal in Two Books* (Oxford, 1821), ii, p. 265. Stanley was to come under further suspicion following the surrender of Deventer by his eldest son, Sir William, to the Spanish in 1587; Thomas Heywood (ed.), *Cardinal Allen's Defence of Sir William Stanley's Surrender of Deventer, January 29, 1586-7* (Chetham Society, old series, 25, 1851), pp. ii-iii. Sir Rowland Stanley's second son, John, became a Jesuit priest. The Stanleys of Hooton prided themselves on being the senior branch of the family of the Stanley earls of Derby; Peter Edmund Stanley, *The House of Stanley from the 12th Century* (Edinburgh, 1998), p. 61.

²⁵⁶ Francis Sanders and W. Fergusson Irvine (eds), *The Parish Registers of Bebington, Co. Chester from A.D. 1558 to 1701* (Liverpool, 1897), p. 11.

²⁵⁷ William Williams Mortimer, *The History of the Hundred of Wirral with a Sketch of the City and County of Chester* (London, 1847), p. 181. Cotton was suspected of speculation on several occasions and acquired extensive property belonging to the Dean and Chapter of Chester by nefarious means; 'COTTON, Sir Richard (by 1497-1556), of Bedhampton and Warblington, Hants.'

<<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/cotton-sir-richard-1497-1556>> (accessed 27 March 2013); Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, pp. 24-5.

²⁵⁸ BIY CP.G.513.

²⁵⁹ Manchester, John Rylands University Library, RYCH/1456.

probably chaplain to, the Stanley family.²⁶⁰ By 1573 Sir Rowland had abandoned his backing for Bennett in favour of ‘one Myrrick, an unlearned Welsh Doctor of Law, and one who had lived long *in concubinato*’.²⁶¹ A rival claimant wanted to present Luke Gilpin, later to be archdeacon of Derby, and as Grindal, the archbishop, supported Gilpin he was duly presented.²⁶² Sir Rowland Stanley did manage to secure a lease of the tithes of one of the townships of Bebington from Gilpin, and his motive in attempting to advance his own candidate may have been primarily economic.²⁶³ On much the same basis, Downham thought that the Venables family hoped to secure the income of Eccleston parish by presenting their own candidate.²⁶⁴ These incidents illustrate that unsympathetic gentry could create considerable difficulties for the ecclesiastical authorities since most of the parochial patronage of the diocese was in the hands of the gentry.

Not all the local gentry were so intransigent. In October 1564 all bishops were required by the Privy Council to classify the justices of the peace in their dioceses according to their attitude to the religious settlement.²⁶⁵ Mary Bateson calculated that throughout the country roughly 431, or approximately half, the justices named were favourable; 264, almost one third, were indifferent or not favourable and the remainder,

²⁶⁰ Ormerod, i, p. 416; Irvine (ed.), ‘List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries’, p. 4.

²⁶¹ Strype, *Edmund Grindal*, ii, p. 266. This was probably John Merrick, at that time vicar of Bangor Monachorum in Flintshire in Chester diocese; CCed Person ID 36328 (accessed 27 March 2013).

²⁶² CCed Person ID 26328 (accessed 27 March 2013). Luke Gilpin was born at Kentmoor in Westmorland, as was Bernard Gilpin, and it is probable that they were related. Bernard Gilpin had also briefly held a Cheshire parish, Thornton le Moors, CCed Person ID 7777 (accessed 27 March 2013). Luke Gilpin was one of the commissaries of the archbishop of York, and unlikely to have resided at Bebington; (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 12v). Presumably Grindal knew this when supporting his candidacy. See also Appendix for other biographical details.

²⁶³ Manchester, John Rylands University Library, RYCH/1588.

²⁶⁴ BL Additional MS 32091, f. 268v.

²⁶⁵ Mary Bateson (ed.), ‘A Collection of Original Letters from the Bishops to the Privy Council, 1564’, *Camden Miscellany*, IX, Camden Society, new series, 53 (1895); Chester diocese pp. 73-80.

totalling 157, were ‘hinderers or adversaries’.²⁶⁶ The report for the diocese of Chester does not differentiate between those who were indifferent and those who were ‘hinderers’ but for the county of Cheshire, including the city of Chester which is listed separately, exactly half of the 34 named were ‘favorable’ and half were ‘Not favorable’. This is in line with the position nationally: in Suffolk, for example, about half of the bench were identified as conservatives in 1564, much the same proportion as five years earlier.²⁶⁷ In the county of Lancashire, however, the favourable were outnumbered by the unfavourable 6 to 19. Those considered suitable to be appointed justices totalled 23 in Cheshire, but only 11 in Lancashire and of these 5 lived in Salford hundred, always anomalous in Lancashire as it included the town of Manchester where the people were ‘founde to be generally well affected in religion’.²⁶⁸ In the Lancashire hundreds of Amounderness and Lonsdale no-one was considered to be a suitable replacement, and in Amounderness there were problems recruiting appropriate men throughout the reign.²⁶⁹ Thus one crucial difference between the two counties was the proportion of justices who did not support the religious changes. Haigh certainly considered this an important point of differentiation between Lancashire and neighbouring counties.²⁷⁰ This has two main implications. The first is that if the justices were representative of the gentry as a whole, then by 1564 at least half of the Cheshire gentry were in favour of the religious settlement, while the majority of the Lancashire gentry did not support a Protestant settlement. The second is that the reliance of central government on justices for certain

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. iii.

²⁶⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors: Politics and Religion in an English County 1500-1600* (Oxford, 1986), p. 84.

²⁶⁸ Peck, *Desiderata Curiosa*, i, pp. 110-1; report of 1581.

²⁶⁹ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 296, 285-6.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

aspects of enforcement of that settlement was thereby compromised in Lancashire to a much greater extent than in Cheshire.

One key difference between the gentry of the two counties was the influence of Edward Stanley, third earl of Derby. Derby's equivocal behaviour during the Pilgrimage of Grace has already been considered, and there were later accusations that he had harboured a papal agent in 1569 and would not allow Prayer Book services to be said in his house.²⁷¹ There is little doubt that he was a conservative in religion and that he was able to protect his conservative clients among the gentry. This is particularly notable in the case of Richard Sherburne of Stonyhurst.²⁷² Sherburne was steward to the earl of Derby and deputy-lieutenant of Lancashire; he thus controlled much of central Lancashire on Derby's behalf.²⁷³ Although a number of Lancashire gentry were called before the ecclesiastical commission in Chester on several occasions in the late 1560s, and some sent from there to London, despite their occasional conformity, Sherburne was never among them. It was not until after Edward Stanley's death in 1572, and the succession of his Protestant son, Henry, that Sherburne was charged in 1591 with a number of offences.²⁷⁴ These included receiving Jesuits and seminary priests, failing to apprehend such priests although he claimed to be in a position to do so, and that he and his family 'did stoppe their eares with woll' rather than hear sermons in their parish church.²⁷⁵ The number and range of complaints against Sherburne in 1591 strongly suggest that he had been protected by the third earl's influence during his lifetime and,

²⁷¹ Louis A. Knafla, 'Stanley, Edward, Third Earl of Derby (1509–1572)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013); Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, pp. 219, 253.

²⁷² I am grateful to Dr. Janet Hollinshead for drawing my attention to the relationship between Sherburne and Derby.

²⁷³ Charles David Sherborn, *A History of the Family of Sherborn* (London, 1901), pp. 28–9.

²⁷⁴ For details of Henry Stanley's Protestantism see Louis A. Knafla, 'Stanley, Henry, Fourth Earl of Derby (1531–1593)', *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013).

²⁷⁵ TNA SP 12/240, f. 226; Sherborn, *A History of the Family of Sherborn*, p. 29.

by extension, such protection may well have extended to others of Derby's clients. Michael Questier has drawn attention to the importance of the entourage of first Viscount Montague in the survival of Catholicism in Sussex, where he was able to offer some protection and shelter to his clients when they came under suspicion.²⁷⁶ There was, however, no influential aristocratic family in Cheshire, where Derby's influence was negligible.²⁷⁷ The influence of the third earl of Derby in the survival of Catholicism in Lancashire was crucial.

Additionally, the political position of Cheshire was unusual. The tenure of the earldom of Chester by the crown continued to be a relevant factor in securing the loyalty of some of the gentry. Furthermore, the county's palatine status and relationship with the Council in the Marches of Wales meant that individuals had potential access to local government positions which were not available in other areas of the country. This must have encouraged at least outward conformity in religion in those seeking such preferment. A similar argument has been used by Brendan Bradshaw to explain the success of the reformation in Wales. Welsh empathy with the 'British' Tudor monarchy, together with the Act of Union of 1536, resulted in local identification with Crown interests and involved a 'patronage bonanza' which provided opportunities for amenable local gentry.²⁷⁸ As has been pointed out in the case of the Catholic Sir John

²⁷⁶ Michael C. Questier, *Catholicism and Community in Early Modern England: Politics, Aristocratic Patronage and Religion, c.1550-1640* (Cambridge, 2006), Chapter 6.

²⁷⁷ The extent of Stanley influence in Cheshire is, however, the subject of some debate among historians; see Thornton, *Cheshire and the Tudor State*, pp. 17-23, for a convincing discussion. The failure of the Stanley aim to extend their family influence in Cheshire by the acquisition of ecclesiastical patronage has been discussed in Chapter 2. The inability in 1536 of Lady Dorothy Stanley to enforce her claim to the advowson of the parish of Stockport, Cheshire, which she wanted for her chaplain, exemplifies this failure; *LP* xi, 51.

²⁷⁸ Brendan Bradshaw, 'The English Reformation and Identity Formation in Wales and Ireland', in Brendan Bradshaw and Peter Roberts (eds), *British Consciousness and Identity: The Making of Britain, 1533-1707* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 72-83.

Throckmorton, Justice of Chester, his career required him to be an ‘occasional conformist’. Such Church papistry ‘did not bar one from participation in public life’.²⁷⁹

The careers of three Cheshire gentlemen illustrate the importance of religious conformity in the context of this local patronage. Leicester was appointed Chamberlain of Chester in 1565, replacing Edward Stanley. William Glaseor had been appointed deputy chamberlain by the earl of Derby, he was a client of Leicester, who had brought him into parliament for St Ives in 1563 and so he continued as Leicester’s deputy as well as a member of the Council in the Marches.²⁸⁰ In 1564 he was included in the list of justices of Wirral hundred who were considered favourable, although he was later included in a list of about 1583 as one of those ‘not knowen to be of any religion, and therefore suspected to be Papistes’.²⁸¹ ‘Mrs Glasier’, either his wife or daughter-in-law came under suspicion of having entertained two recusant prisoners and after his death his daughter-in-law was presented as an absentee and non-communicant.²⁸² It may be that Glaseor was a Church papist, but he had made many enemies and the accusation of suspected papistry may have been motivated by malice, but he conformed to an extent which was sufficient to protect his career.²⁸³

The Council in the Marches also afforded opportunity to Sir Hugh Cholmondeley who was appointed to the council in 1560, and became vice-president in

²⁷⁹ Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott, ‘Introduction: The Catholic Gentry in English Society’, in Peter Marshall and Geoffrey Scott (eds), *Catholic Gentry in English Society* (Farnham, 2009), pp. 10-11.

²⁸⁰ ‘GLASIER, William (c.1525-88), of Chester and Lea by Backford, Cheshire.’ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1558-1603/member/glasier-william-1525-88>> (accessed 27 March 2013); Penry Williams, *The Council in the Marches of Wales under Elizabeth I* (Cardiff, 1958), pp. 348-9.

²⁸¹ Bateson, ‘A Collection of Original Letters’, p. 76; TNA SP 15/27, f. 170.

²⁸² Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 150.

²⁸³ W. J. Jones, ‘The Exchequer of Chester in the Last Years of Elizabeth I’, in Arthur J. Slavin (ed.), *Tudor Men and Institutions* (Baton Rouge, 1972), p. 130.

1569.²⁸⁴ During a ‘long but colourless career ... spent in diligent local service to the crown’ the best that could be said in 1579 of his religious loyalties was ‘no man knowethe, but obedient’.²⁸⁵ The ‘godly conscience’ of Sir Edward Fitton, on the other hand, is well-documented.²⁸⁶ Christopher Goodman reported to his wife in 1567 that ‘the Gentlemen of the shire are (for the most part) favourers of the gospell; & of me in that respect, & therefore would be lothe to see me sopressed’.²⁸⁷ While the conformity of the majority of the Cheshire gentry may have been motivated in part by self-interest, it does also seem that many were genuine supporters of Protestantism.

Bradshaw has also pointed out that the determined support of government religious policy by the Welsh elite ‘went hand in hand with a generally indulgent attitude ... towards those “survivalist” accretions ... which persisted to scandalise Puritan evangelists’.²⁸⁸ Such survivals were also a feature of contemporary accounts of Cheshire. Cheshire people were seen by William Smith and William Webb as ‘true, faithful and obedient to their Superiors’ and ‘In Religion very zealous, howbeit somewhat addicted to Superstition, which cometh through want of Preaching’.²⁸⁹ To contemporaries, therefore, popular responses in the county were apparently contradictory. Since the solution to this ‘superstitious’ survivalism was seen as more preaching, this was, however, possibly a function of the ‘pessimistic hyperbole’ which

²⁸⁴ ‘CHOLMLEY (CHOLMONDELEY), Sir Hugh (by 1513-97), of Cholmondeley, Cheshire.’ <<http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/cholmley-%28cholmondeley%29-sir-hugh-1513-97>> (accessed 27 March 2013).

²⁸⁵ Basil Morgan, ‘Cholmondeley, Sir Hugh (c.1513–1597)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013); TNA: SP 12/165, f. 78.

²⁸⁶ Cunningham, ‘Fitton’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013); TNA: SP 63/32, f. 124.

²⁸⁷ DA DD/PP/839, f. 105.

²⁸⁸ Bradshaw, ‘The English Reformation and Identity Formation in Wales and Ireland’, p. 77.

²⁸⁹ William Smith and William Webb, *The Vale-royall of England or The County Palatine of Chester* (London, 1656), p. 19; (see Epigraph). William Smith was a native of Cheshire, and although this work was not published until 1656 parts were written in the 1580s: David Kathman, ‘Smith, William (c.1550–1618)’, *DNB* (online edition accessed 27 March 2013).

has been seen as a feature of Puritan complaint literature.²⁹⁰ Such ostensible superstition may have had much to do with ‘a way of life and especially a pursuit of pastimes and pleasures which had lived happily alongside the old religion but found that it could not put up with the new.’²⁹¹ One such pleasurable pastime was the celebration of wakes, for which Cheshire was a ‘notorious centre’.²⁹² Wakes originated as patronal festivals, and continued to be celebrated as such in the county despite the 1536 abrogation.²⁹³

Although condemned by Puritan commentators such as the local minister, William Hinde, as ‘popish and profane’, interestingly, these celebrations seem not to have been seen as entirely reprehensible by Smith and Webb who viewed them as illustrative of the hospitable character of local people.²⁹⁴

A traditional form of entertainment which became a cause of conflict was the Chester plays. In the 1570s several mayors of Chester insisted on performance of the plays, in spite of opposition from the ecclesiastical authorities and from some of the inhabitants of Chester. Downham had been a signatory to a letter from the archbishop of York to the mayor of Chester in May 1572 commanding him to ‘surcease from further preparation for setting forth the said plays and utterly forbear the playing thereof’.²⁹⁵ Despite this Goodman expressed doubts to the archbishop about the bishop’s

²⁹⁰ Steve Hindle, ‘Custom, Festival and Protest in Early Modern England: The Little Budworth Wakes, St Peter’s Day, 1596’, *Rural History*, 6 (2) (1995), p. 159.

²⁹¹ Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England*, quoted in Hindle, ‘The Little Budworth Wakes’, p. 159.

²⁹² Hindle, ‘The Little Budworth Wakes’, p. 160.

²⁹³ Christina Hole, *Traditions and Customs of Cheshire* (London, 1937), p. 89.

²⁹⁴ William Hinde, *A Faithfull Remonstrance of the Holy Life and Happy Death of John Bruen of Bruen-Stapleford in the County of Chester, Esquire* (London, 1641), Chapter XXX ‘Nine Reasons against Popish and Profane Wakes’, pp. 92-6. Smith and Webb, *The Vale-royall of England*, p. 20: ‘Touching their House-keeping; It is bountiful, and comparable with any other Shire in the Realm. And that is to be seen at their Weddings and Burials, but chiefly at their Wakes, which they yearly hold (although it be of late years well laid down).’

²⁹⁵ DA DD/PP/839, ff. 119-120.

commitment to preventing the entertainment.²⁹⁶ The plays went ahead anyway that year, but it was not only the ecclesiastical hierarchy which opposed them and some of the townspeople of Chester were imprisoned by the mayor for refusing to contribute to the cost.²⁹⁷

Lack of preaching was seen as a problem by the hierarchy, concerned to promulgate the message of the Elizabethan settlement. Preachers were deterred by several incidents of violent attacks which were reported in Cheshire in the 1570s. In 1571 the Privy Council wrote to several local gentlemen asking them to investigate a 'fowle disorder' at Nantwich in which a preacher had been 'assaulted and sore hurt'.²⁹⁸ Downham's belief in the redemptive power of preaching has already been discussed and he reported in 1573 'great nede of preachers ... in these parties ... I feel the want to my no litle grief'. He had tried to initiate a programme of preaching but:

The seuerall offences late at Manchester and agayne at Northwiche within my diocese where these preachers were beaten and euelye [evilly] treated haue greatly discouraged others preachers so as they be nowe verie scante in these parties.²⁹⁹

The establishment of the diocesan exercises in 1574 may partly have been a response to the perceived lack of preaching. Violence against preachers was not always motivated solely by religion, however, as we have seen in relation to the attack on Downham's chaplain at Eccleston. The Nantwich riot may also have had a personal element.

Following the dissolution of Combermere Abbey the town's chapel was staffed by

²⁹⁶ DA DD/PP/839, f. 120.

²⁹⁷ DA DD/PP/839, f. 121.

²⁹⁸ *APC*, vol. 8, 1571-5, pp. 40-1.

²⁹⁹ BL Additional MS 32091, ff. 268-9.

appointees of ‘gentellmen & others off the towne without the Consent or approbation eyther of the Lorde Bishopp or enye other parson [person]’.³⁰⁰ Sometime before 1572 the curate, William Ward, had been replaced by a clerk from Warrington, whose first name was John, but whose surname has not survived. He was removed in 1572 and Ward was reinstated. Unfortunately, the date when ‘John’ was appointed has not survived, but it is possible that he took over about 1571 and was for some reason so unpopular as to provoke a riot. It may be that, following the investigation instigated by the Privy Council, William Ward was restored the next year and he ministered to the people of Nantwich until 1583.³⁰¹ This is, of course, speculative, but the reinstatement and length of service of William Ward does suggest that he was popular with the town.

A consideration of the wills of Cheshire testators for the period of Downham’s episcopate gives some indication of a society in transition. Cheshire wills survive in increasing numbers from about 1570, and 247 wills written in the period from 1559 to 1577 have been traced.³⁰² Testators continue to mention Mary in their soul bequest into the early 1560s, the last surviving such reference being that of Anthony Calveley, whose will was written in May 1563 and also incorporates requests for *post mortem* prayers.³⁰³ References also continued to the possibility of *post mortem* prayers by the deceased. In 1560 Richard Leigh asked his friends not to forget him ‘as I (if the departed from this life have power to pray for the lyvers here upon earthe) will have you in continual

³⁰⁰ Hall, *Nantwich*, p. 291.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

³⁰² Wills at Chester and in The National Archives are catalogued according to the date of probate, rather than when they were written and, of course, there may have been a gap of some years between the two events. Where identified, wills which were written between these years have been examined, but I have not undertaken a comprehensive trawl to trace wills proved after 1577, but written before.

³⁰³ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 333-5v; Piccope (First Portion), pp. 138-43.

remembrance'.³⁰⁴ Reference to the Virgin Mary or intercession by the saints or the departed was not the only evidence of traditional piety, however. In 1565 Sir John Warburton of Arley, headed his will 'Jhus', reminiscent of the use of the Holy Name of Jesus by adherents of the pre-Reformation cult.³⁰⁵ He also left £3 6s 8d to Sir William Keye, his chaplain, to say divine service for him for one year.³⁰⁶ Among these early wills, however, are some which suggest that the Protestant doctrine of salvation had gained ground by the beginning of Elizabeth's reign. In 1559 Richard Marbury, gentleman of Appleton, bequeathed his soul 'vnto almighty god my maker Feithfullye trusting to be one of them that shal be saved throwghe Feythe and the merite off christes passion'.³⁰⁷ The will contains no other provisions of a religious nature and was proved by John Hanson, the Catholic archdeacon of Richmond, in the Chester consistory court.

One noticeable factor in Cheshire wills is the gradual permeation of the language of the 1559 Prayer Book. This is illustrated, for example, in the soul bequest of Thomas Birkenhead of Chester in 1572:

First and principallie I doe bequeath and yelde my soule into the handes of my Savioure and redeamer Jhesu christ with most humble mynde and contrite hearte requiring him of his habundant and infinite mercie that it maye be his pleasure at the last daie when he shall come to iudge the quick and the deade to vouchsafe to

³⁰⁴ W. F. Irvine, (ed.), *A Collection of Lancashire and Cheshire Wills not now to be Found in any Probate Registry. 1301-1752* (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 30, 1896), p. 93; the editor suggests that this will had been cancelled as the seal is gone and it is cut through in two or three places.

³⁰⁵ CALS WS 1565 Sir John Warburton.

³⁰⁶ Key was ordained in 1558 (CCed person ID 33626: accessed 27 March 2013) and was probably the clerk of that name who later became chaplain to the conservative family of Legh of Lyme and curate at Disley Chapel.

³⁰⁷ CALS EDA 2/1, ff. 267v-268; CALS WS 1558 Richard Marbury; Piccope (Third Portion), pp. 124-5.

place the same my soule amongst the number off his elect with Abraham

Isaacke and Jacob.³⁰⁸

This includes phrases reminiscent of a number of services. Morning Prayer began with one of a number of sentences including from Psalm 51 ‘despise not, O Lord, humble and contrite hearts’, which is referred to, although not directly quoted, here. Other phrases are more direct quotations. The visitation of the sick involved the recitation of the creed, including the belief that Jesus ‘shall come againe at the end of the world, to iudge the quicke and the dead’ and the burial service includes a prayer to the Almighty that the deceased will ‘shortelye ... accomlishe the numbere of thyne electe’.³⁰⁹

Hope for resurrection is included in the reading from 1 Corinthians 15 appointed for the burial service, which speaks of the dead ‘as not so much departed as asleep and awaiting ... resurrection’.³¹⁰ This hope is echoed in a number of wills, which from the 1570s often include more about the testator’s hopes for corporal resurrection than had been the case previously. This hope, plus other phrases from the burial service, is referenced in the 1577 will of Marion Forster

secondly I bequeath & comend my body to the earth therein to rest vntil the day of Judgment, at which tyme I surely trust to recayue it agayne being transformed into a gloriouse body by the mighty powre of god whereby bothe I & all the faythfull in Christ shalbe exalted to the kingdome of heaven to lyue there euerlastingly.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ TNA: PRO PROB 11/55/319 Thomas Brickenes.

³⁰⁹ Phrases from the various services of the 1559 Prayer Book are taken from *The Book of Common Prayer* <http://justus.anglican.org/resources/bcp/1559/BCP_1559.htm> (accessed 27 March 2013).

³¹⁰ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 61.

³¹¹ CALS WC 1577 Marion Forster.

This is a fundamental change of emphasis from the uncertainties of the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Although it is likely that these introductory phrases were composed by someone other than the testator, nevertheless they do indicate that the language of the Prayer Book was becoming normalised.

However, even into the 1570s some wills demonstrate a mix of conservative piety and acceptance of religious change. The will of Anthony Grosvenor from March 1575 is interesting in this context since subsequent depositions shed light on how his will came to be written.³¹² In June 1575 Robert Grey, clerk, deposed that he had visited the sick man on a number of occasions and written his will, as directed.³¹³ He had also encouraged him to recite the creed, with some prayers and psalms and as he grew weaker ‘the said Robert sondrey tymes did putt him in mynd to call upon almighty God for his mercies and to have a sure truste in the merites of the deathe and passion of our saviour Christe, whereat the said Anthony wold sometimes devoutly lifte upp his hands, sometye his eyes to the great comfort of standers bye.’ Despite the deathbed recital of the creed, presumably from the Prayer Book, the will contains a bequest to his ‘Sister Ridgley one of my best mares and one old Aungell desring her to praie for me’ and ‘to the poore to be distributed amogest them at the daie of my buriall v^{li} or more to praie for me’. However, he also left ‘to the parsons weif xs’, this must indicate that he acknowledged the Protestant practice of clerical marriage as legitimate. It is the only example of such a bequest among the wills of this period.

³¹² CALS WC 1577 Anthony Grosvenor; *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, i, pp. 294-5. The CALS reference indicates that this will was subsequently the subject of litigation, and the surviving copy is an office copy which does not include any preambles, other than ‘In the name of god amen’. It is thus not possible to know whether the original included anyother preambles.

³¹³ *Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, xxi, pp. 28-9. This is the only reference to Robert Gray (Graie) which I have found, he may have been curate at Dodleston; the rector of the parish also made a deposition in this case regarding the lands which were the subject of the suit.

About a quarter of testators during the period left money to their parish church. Even small amounts were designated for specific purposes, such as in the case of William Higson who left 2d for the repairs of Over church in 1575.³¹⁴ This proportion had declined from about a half of testators leaving such bequests in the period from 1536 to 1546. This decline, and the proportion of bequests after 1558, is in line with general trends throughout the country.³¹⁵ It was still necessary for wardens to levy church lays, and although some parishioners objected to the charge, this was not always for religious reasons. In the case of Plemstall, certain parishioners ‘grudged to paie as they were assessed’ because one of the previous wardens still held some money which he refused to hand over. The matter was referred to ‘Mr hurleston of pickton beinge one of the best of the parishe’, demonstrating, as the government believed, that the gentry played a vital role in the politics of the parish.³¹⁶ Although church buildings were regularly reported at visitation as being in need of repair, the changes in buildings and equipment required by the Elizabethan injunctions were much less costly than the Marian changes had been, since they generally involved removal, rather than reinstatement. Financial, rather than religious, factors may have motivated the parishioners of Great Budworth church to bury, rather than destroy, their stone altar with the cost of the Marian changes fresh in their minds and while there was clearly still some uncertainty about the permanence of the Elizabethan settlement (see Figure 14 below).

³¹⁴ CALS WS 1575 William Higson.

³¹⁵ Ralph Houlbrooke, *Death, Religion and the Family in England 1480-1750* (paperback edition, Oxford, 2000), p. 127.

³¹⁶ CALS EDC 5 1576.45 Plemondstall, deposition of Richard Dale. The missing money possibly amounted to 16s.

The speed with which the parishes of Cheshire implemented the Elizabethan changes varied, as was the case throughout the country, since visitors continued to find Catholic survivals throughout the 1560s.³¹⁷ In Chester the churchwardens' accounts illustrate the pace of change. At St Mary's the rood was removed, the communion table installed and the 'comenyon boke' purchased in 1559, although the rood loft and the altars were not taken down until 1562.³¹⁸ At St Michael's the altars were taken down in



Figure 14 – Stone altar at Great Budworth parish church, discovered buried under the floor during recent renovation work.

(Photograph © Patricia Cox September 2008.)

³¹⁷ Marshall, *Reformation England*, p. 190. The only extant churchwardens' accounts for the period before 1580 for any Cheshire parish outside Chester are for Prestbury. These begin with a consolidated account for nine years from 1563 to 1572 so it is not possible to establish exactly when work was carried out but by 1572 they had taken down the high altar and the rood loft; whitewashed the church; set up a communion table; purchased books of homilies and Jewel's *Apology*. (These accounts were deposited with Chester Record Office at the end of July 2013 and had not been allocated a reference at 30 August 2013. The reference is, however, likely to begin P 287.)

³¹⁸ Earwaker, *St. Mary-on-the-Hill*, pp. 250, 253.

1561, although there is no evidence that the rood loft was demolished until 1568, when timber which had formed a part of it was sold.³¹⁹ The rood itself was probably taken down some time before, since in 1564 the wardens received 3s when they ‘Sould the clothe that hanggid ouere the Roude and the clothe of xij of a posteles’.³²⁰ At Holy Trinity they noted that ‘Q. Eliz. began’ in 1560 and in the same year they removed the images and took them to ‘the mynster’, the cathedral, which perhaps served as a central depot for receiving and disposing of such items. In the same year they took down the altars and acquired a communion book, and in 1566 their rood loft was demolished.³²¹ The Ecclesiastical Commissioners dealt with some wardens who had delayed in removing forbidden items and on 10 December 1563 the wardens of Church Lawton were bound over in a recognisance of £20 to

take downe their Rood lofte... to the Lowest beame of the same and ... also to cause all Alters images and all other mounmentes of Idolatry of supersticion to be removed out of their Church and leaue destriod and do also prepare and ordeine a decent table whereon the Communion shalbe said

by Christmas.³²² This gave them very little time to complete the work, perhaps in recognition of the fact that it should have been carried out some time previously. The following February the wardens of Bromborough were bound in a similar sum to arrange for the destruction of their rood loft ‘according to the Iniunctions set furth bie the said Commissioners’.³²³ This suggests that the commissioners may have been

³¹⁹ CALS P 65/8/1, ff. 12, 40v.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, f. 27.

³²¹ Rev. J. R. Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity, Chester, 1532 to 1633’, *Journal of the Chester and North Wales Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society*, 38 (1951), pp. 123-4.

³²² CALS EDA 12/2, f. 13.

³²³ *Ibid.*, f. 26.

working their way around the county in an effort to ensure that all parishes had complied with their instructions. Despite this, even by 1592 the rood loft at Coddington was still intact and ‘full of idolatrie pictures’.³²⁴

The authorities also encountered some difficulties in ensuring that parishes had the requisite books. The wardens of Holy Trinity were presented, probably following the 1568 visitation, and fined 16d for ‘want of bookes in the church ... a bible, a parafrase of Erasmus & first tome of homilies’.³²⁵ The acquisition of a copy of Erasmus’s *Paraphrases* had been required during the reign of Edward VI, so it must have been galling to the parishioners to have to pay for a new copy, having presumably suffered the destruction of the Edwardian copy during Mary’s reign. Downham later seems to have adopted a policy whereby he or his officials distributed the requisite books and collected payment later. In 1568, the wardens of St Michael’s recorded a payment of 11s to ‘Mr Chansseller for Mr Joels booke colyd the diyffents [defence] of the apologee to be Repayd to the stachuite thatt Came from yorke’.³²⁶ The suggestion that Jewel’s *Apology* was supplied in this way is supported by the payment in the same year by the wardens of Holy Trinity of 5s 6d (half of 11s) for ‘on halph of the booke called the defense of the appology’.³²⁷ In Prestbury the wardens paid 36s 6d to ‘Thomas Browne the syngynge man for the mayntenaunce of the Queere’, suggesting some enthusiasm for the use of music in the new liturgy.³²⁸

³²⁴ Irvine, ‘The Bishop of Chester’s Visitation Book, 1592’, p. 414. There can be little doubt that these survivals were due to the influence of the Masseys, a local gentry family ‘greatlie infected with popery’; Wark, p. 49.

³²⁵ Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity’, p. 125.

³²⁶ CALS P 65/8/1, ff. 12, 40v.

³²⁷ Beresford (ed.), ‘The Churchwarden’s Accounts of Holy Trinity’, p. 125.

³²⁸ The year of this payment is unknown but was sometime between 1563 and 1572; CALS reference not yet allocated.

While parishes were required to spend money on books, equipment and structural alterations, they were also selling off church goods which were no longer required, particularly vestments. However, there is no suggestion in surviving accounts that the parishes feared a recurrence of the confiscations of Edward VI's reign. Some vestments were sold to actors; other goods were sold to merchants from Spain; something of an irony in the light of future religious conflict. The wardens of Holy Trinity sold some things to 'Jo. Curton of Bilbow for 770 Royals, at vjd le Royal w'd come to 19lb 5s'.³²⁹ The Spanish market for redundant religious items was used as an excuse to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners by Margaret Aldersey when she claimed in November 1562 that she had sold to a Spaniard an image which she was accused of concealing.³³⁰

The co-operation and goodwill of the churchwardens was extremely important to the government in ensuring the success of their religious policy. There is some evidence that men were becoming reluctant to serve since the position had acquired additional responsibilities which might bring them into conflict either with their fellow-parishioners or with the authorities.³³¹ At the 1563 episcopal visitation the names of the wardens of the parish of Acton written in the call book are crossed out and there is a note inserted '*habent parochiani ad assignandum iconimos citra festum nativitatis Johnnis Baptiste sub pena*' (the parishioners must choose wardens before the feast of the

³²⁹ *Ibid.* The arithmetic is correct as at this rate of exchange the proceeds would amount to £19 5s. This was a considerable sum in relation to their usual income, the 'Pascall money' normally came to less than £1, and there is no evidence of what the parishioners did with it.

³³⁰ CALS EDA 12/2, f. 81v.

³³¹ Such reluctance had been noted in other areas; Eric Carlson, 'The origins, function, and status of the office of churchwarden, with particular reference to the diocese of Ely', in Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 188-9.

nativity of John the Baptist under penalty).³³² The men elected as wardens for the parish of Grappenhall were presented at the 1577 visitation, seemingly because they were refusing to serve. At the same visitation the rector was presented for non-residence and for failing to provide sermons. He said that he was not resident because he was chaplain to the attorney general and claimed that he had preached at least six times in the last twelve months, which the wardens then accepted. The wardens were presented next for allowing a cross to stand in the churchyard. The wardens-elect were then presented by name and ordered to swear on the Gospels that they would serve in the office to which they had been elected. Their reluctance to serve is probably explained by the other presentments at this visitation which suggest that serious conflict had arisen within the parish.³³³ The enforcement of the recusancy laws depended on the co-operation of the churchwardens in presenting non-attenders, so their support was crucial, but not always forthcoming. It may have been concern about the co-operation of the wardens in reporting recusants which prompted the rector of Thurstaston on the Wirral to include a list of those ‘who do not come to the church or Receue’ with his transcript of the parish register entries sent in for 1581.³³⁴ The manor of Thurstaston was at this time held by John Whitmore, described by Wark as ‘the leading Cheshire recusant’.³³⁵

At the time of William Downham’s death in 1577 there are signs that Cheshire society retained a degree of confessional fluidity. The wills of the period indicate that religious faith was evolving: many illustrate that some elements of change had been

³³² CALS EDV 2/5, f. 34.

³³³ BIY V 1578/9 CB2, f. 22. I am grateful to Catharine Otton-Goulder for her assistance in translating these entries in the York Act Book.

³³⁴ CALS P 48.

³³⁵ Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire*, p. 169.

absorbed, while simultaneously old habits and customs lingered. Despite some pockets of recusancy, there was in Cheshire nothing like the perceived problem of Catholic survival which pre-occupied the authorities in relation to Lancashire. The key point of divergence seems to have been the much greater number of Lancashire gentry who retained their Catholic faith, protected by the third earl of Derby. These gentry in turn were able to shelter their clients and to ensure that Catholic priests were available to minister to them, supporting the government view that the gentry played a crucial role in the conversion process.

This begs the question of why the gentry of the two counties differed so greatly. One of Haigh's suggestions was that a late flowering of 'conventional piety' in Lancashire sustained a continuance of traditional Catholic faith. There had been a similar resurgence in Cheshire, where the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus was popular in the east of the county. However, the political situation in Cheshire meant that the gentry there had much to gain from conformity. The replacement of the conservative earl of Derby with the Protestant earl of Leicester as Chamberlain of Chester in 1565 increased the potential benefits of compliance. In the short term a pragmatic approach on the part of many of the gentry secured the political loyalty of the county and for the long term, initiatives such as preaching campaigns and the exercises meant that the gradual process of conversion had been instigated.

Conclusion

The period of Downham's episcopate covered the first decades of Elizabeth's reign before attitudes had hardened as Puritanism became entrenched. However, this fluidity meant that he faced conflicting pressures in his efforts to secure acceptance of the religious settlement and it was inevitable that he would be unable to satisfy all shades of opinion. Furthermore, the Queen showed her usual inconsistency in delaying the arrival of a new bishop in Chester for nearly three years and then blaming that bishop for the entrenchment of Catholicism in parts of his diocese. Downham's gentle disposition probably meant that he favoured persuasion over coercion and he certainly did not take the aggressive attitude towards enforcement which characterised bishops such as Pilkington in Durham and which caused bitter resentment. The less aggressive stance adopted by Downham may have contributed to the preservation of public order throughout most of his diocese during the Northern Rebellion. His policies of installing preaching ministers and his instigation of a preaching campaign were hampered by some violent responses, but the gradual assimilation of the language of the Prayer Book into the wording of wills indicates the success of the new liturgy in permeating the consciousness of the county's inhabitants. This suggests that conformity had become a genuine option by the time of Downham's death.

The shortage of clergy at the beginning of Downham's time at Chester was a pressing problem which also necessitated a conciliatory approach towards clerical discipline, if only in the short term. He gave the recalcitrant many opportunities to conform, but was eventually obliged to deprive some parish clergy for persistent failure to do so. However, his moderate approach may have enabled some clergy who were

committed Catholics at the end of Mary's reign to be reconciled gradually to the Elizabethan settlement. Some of the clergy presented during Downham's tenure at Chester were later committed Puritans, notable among these was Christopher Goodman, whose appointment to the archdeaconry of Richmond at Leicester's instigation was the occasion of some alarm to Downham. Although diocesan exercises were established and Goodman and his associates were beginning to instigate 'conferring' with the recalcitrant, there was no open conflict with Puritan elements among the clergy during Downham's time, although he did strive to enforce conformity.

A crucial question about this early period of Elizabeth's reign is why Lancashire and Cheshire evinced such different responses in matters of religion. Separating the gentry from 'the meaner sort' is to some extent an artificial construct, but one considered relevant by contemporary authorities. We have seen how political factors operated to link the Cheshire gentry with religious conformity, but this does not explain the compliance of the other inhabitants of the county. Undoubtedly, the return to Catholicism under Mary was initially welcomed but as the economic implications of the restoration became increasingly apparent and the regime became increasingly draconian in enforcing conformity a reaction began to set in. This may help to explain why the population exhibited some ambivalence in religious matters, as described by Smith and Webb. There was a lingering attachment to traditional habits and pastimes, but this was linked to a reluctance to see the return of Catholicism which had been somewhat discredited in the last years of Mary's reign.

7

CONCLUSION

As we have seen, Elton's observation that '[i]n general, Cheshire behaved more like northern counties: independent, backward, ill governed, it somewhat resembled Lancashire' has proved to be enduring.¹ This present study has shown that as an assessment of Reformation responses in Tudor Cheshire, such a view is no longer tenable.

This dissertation begins with a discussion of the historiography of local Reformation studies and proposes that there continue to be conclusions of value and of general relevance to be drawn from new local studies. The seminal study of religious developments in part of the diocese of Chester in the sixteenth century, as well as one of the most celebrated local histories of the Reformation in any county, is Haigh's study of Lancashire which attempted to explain the enduring appeal and survival of Catholicism there.² One aim of this dissertation was to elucidate why there was such a level of resistant response in Lancashire while there was general conformity in Cheshire. Turning to existing studies of Cheshire it was then suggested that the two major works on religion in sixteenth-century Cheshire, Wark's book on Elizabethan recusancy and Richardson's study of Puritanism from 1579 to 1642 throughout the diocese of Chester had considered radical religious responses in the county and in the process may have given the county a reputation for religious extremism.³ This reputation has been fostered

¹ G. R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 132.

² Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975).

³ R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972); K. R. Wark, *Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire* (Chetham Society, 3rd Series, 19, 1971).

by the proliferation and perpetuation of myths surrounding events in Cheshire, and several of these, such as the supposed riot at the time of the suppression of Norton Priory and the 'Blue Posts' incident of Mary's reign have been discussed in this dissertation and dismissed as fabrication. One other issue upon which closer scrutiny reveals the need for re-consideration is the reputation of William Downham. Some of the criticisms of him can be demonstrated to be due to misunderstandings and others can be refuted by evidence which has only recently come to light. This reappraisal of Downham shows that he bears less of the responsibility for perceived failures to enforce the Elizabethan settlement in his diocese than has previously been understood; suggesting that Catholic survival in Lancashire had little to do with the ambivalence of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

The chronological approach adopted in this thesis has meant that key religious events of successive reigns could be considered in the context of their effect upon the life of the county. In turn, this local response helps to illuminate such events in a national context. The dissolution of the monasteries has been demonstrated to have inspired little hostility among the county's inhabitants, most likely because the county was not heavily monasticised and the few monasteries were effectively dominated by the gentry. The monasteries thus inspired little loyalty, emphasising the importance of the dissolution as a trigger for rebellion elsewhere in the country where the monasteries had continued to occupy an important spiritual and practical role prior to their dissolution. The subsequent dissolution of the chantries also had little effect on the structure of the church in Cheshire and did not result in the depletion in numbers of parish clergy which occurred in other areas. While the confiscation of treasured parish

possessions and changes in liturgy were felt as keenly in Cheshire as elsewhere, yet again Cheshire remained quiet while other areas experienced violent disorder. This emphasises the importance of factors other than religious change in some of the areas which did experience such unrest. The restoration of Catholicism under Mary was broadly welcomed in Cheshire, although the speed of restoration of church equipment may have been exaggerated. However, assertions that the cost of the restoration was accepted nationally with little opposition require reconsideration in the light of the evidence from the Chester consistory which reveals growing opposition to the financial implications as the reign progressed.

Underlying the chronological framework, however, are a number of defining and recurring features of life in Cheshire; some remained constant and others evolved during this time. The county's inhabitants were in regular contact with London, and were by no means isolated from news and ideas which were current in the capital which was, after all, accessible within two days. Although Lollard ideas are not known to have been prevalent, the cult of the Holy Name of Jesus, also popular with early evangelicals, was widespread from an early date in the north-east of the county. We have also seen that news of the death of Edward VI reached Chester within a few days. Smith and Webb, in their portrayal of Cheshire, described the loyalty of the inhabitants who never 'stirred one spark of Rebellion.'⁴ A consistent factor throughout this period is that although the inhabitants of the county were expected to join more than one Tudor rebellion, they never did so. One significant new development at this time was the foundation of the diocese of Chester, but the poverty and size of this new diocese led the first bishop to commit his successors to numerous long leases at low rents, as he had appropriated the

⁴ See Epigraph, p. xii.

high entry fees. Although each of the two Marian bishops was in office for such a short time that this was scarcely relevant to them, Bird's actions severely hampered the work of others of his successors and Downham certainly complained that poverty was inhibiting his work. Lower down the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the parochial clergy showed that as a body they were open to change. This is reflected in their evolving attitude to clerical marriage, an important matter of religious principle to early evangelicals. Although the vast majority of the Edwardian parish clergy of Cheshire do not seem to have married when they were permitted to do so, by the time of Downham's death about half of the parish incumbents are known to have been married at some time. Many of their wills also reveal that solifidianism was becoming normalised among them.

Although there is evidence of early evangelism and later Puritanism among small groups in the county at this time, the main impetus for acceptance of the Elizabethan settlement seems to have been political as much as religious. While the gentry of Cheshire had much to gain in terms of patronage by conforming to the Elizabethan settlement, the same factors did not apply in Lancashire where the influence of the third earl of Derby, who probably remained a Catholic, was crucial. The importance of the influence of the leaders of county society was paramount, as contemporaries acknowledged. The gradual appointment of sympathetic parish clergy who were able and willing to preach the new religion, supported by the patronage of amenable gentry, brought about the gradual conversion of the county.

As William Downham seems to have understood, the process of conversion was a gradual one – not to be achieved by coercion, but by persuasion. However, without the

co-operation of leading members of the community in Cheshire, notably the gentry and the clergy, it would have been very much more difficult, as the experience of Lancashire shows.

APPENDIX

The Clergy with Parochial Responsibilities in 1578.

Abbreviations

BOOKS AND WEBSITES

- 1592 visitation W. F. Irvine, 'The Bishop of Chester's Visitation Book, 1592', *Journal of the Architectural, Archaeological and Historic Society for Chester and North Wales*, 5 part 4 (1895).
- Alumni Oxonienses* Joseph Foster (ed.), *Alumni Oxonienses 1500-1714* <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/source.aspx?pubid=1270>> (accessed 3 May 2103).
- Beamont, *Frodsham* William Beamont, *An Account of the Ancient Town of Frodsham in Cheshire* (Warrington: Percival Pearse, 1881).
- Burne, *Chester Cathedral* R. V. H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral from its Founding by Henry VIII to the Accession of Queen Victoria* (London: S.P.C.K., 1958).
- Burne, *Monks* R. V. H. Burne, *The Monks of Chester: the History of St Werburgh's Abbey* (London: S.P.C.K., 1962).
- CPRD Cheshire Parish Registers database <<http://cgi.csc.liv.ac.uk/~cprdb>> (accessed 3 May 2013).
- CS *Cheshire Sheaf*.
- DNB *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004; online edition, May 2009) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>
- Kitching, 'Fire Relief' C. J. Kitching, 'Fire Disasters and Fire Relief in Sixteenth-century England: the Nantwich Fire of 1583', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 54 (130) (1981), p. 181.
- Landor Walter Noble Landor, *Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records (1530-1680)* (William Salt Archaeological Society, Collections for a History of Staffordshire for 1915) (London, 1916).

- Richardson Richardson, R. C., *Puritanism in North-west England: A Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1972).
- Selby Walford D.Selby. (ed.), *Lancashire and Cheshire Records Preserved in the Public Record Office, London* (part II) (The Record Society of Lancashire and Cheshire, 8, 1883).
- Venn online A Cambridge Alumni Database
<<http://venn.lib.cam.ac.uk/Documents/acad/intro.html>> (accessed 3 May 2013).
- Welsh Biography Online < <http://wbo.llgc.org.uk/en/index.html>>

DEANERIES

CS	Chester	MD	Middlewich
FR	Frodsham	NN	Nantwich
MC	Macclesfield	WR	Wirral
ML	Malpas		

OTHER

- b. born (estimated birth dates calculated as nearly as possible from available evidence)
- m. married
- d. died
- ord. date ordained to highest known order
- pa. parish
- PR parish register
- pres. presented (this may not be the appropriate word in all cases, as many curates were never formally presented, for example. It has been used for convenience)

NOTES

These biographical details of the holders of Cheshire parishes in 1578 are based on clergy call lists from the metropolitan visitation of that year (BIY V.1578-9). Two parishes, Lymm and Malpas, were divided rectories and are counted as two parishes for the purposes of this discussion. Four individuals held two Cheshire parishes in plurality, so the details cover 80 individuals in 84 parishes. Where information on life events has been derived from parish registers, the full reference is only given on the first allusion to this source for any individual. Where the individual was a graduate, only the highest known degree is given.

ANALYSIS

Ian Green has suggested that in the early Stuart church many ordinands served the church in their home county, or an adjacent county.¹ It has been possible to establish the place of origin of more than a quarter of the incumbents of 1578. Of these 19 were local men and a further 6 came from neighbouring counties. Only 5 are known to have originated from further away; of these men, 2 were presented for non-residence in 1578 and 2 others held at least one other parish outside the county so may not have been resident. This suggests that the majority of incumbents were local, but that those who were not may not have felt a great deal of loyalty to their Cheshire parish. Of the 80 individual clergy, there is evidence that 22 were graduates and 23 were not graduates. However, of the balance of 35 men whose educational details are not known, it is likely that the majority were not graduates in the absence of any reference to their holding a degree. It must be noted, however, that a third of Downham's appointments are known to have been graduates (see Table 7), suggesting that the appointment of graduate incumbents was becoming more common as time went on. Reports dating from 1592 survive for 32 of these 80 clergy of 1578 detailing their qualifications; of these 20 are recorded as preachers. It therefore seems that by the time of Downham's death ability to preach may have been a factor influencing parish appointments.

By 1578 almost half of the county's incumbents can be shown to have been married at some time; although the evidence of when they married unfortunately does not survive in most cases. Some of the tropes of clergy families were becoming evident

¹ Ian Green, 'Career Prospects and Clerical Conformity in the Early Stuart Church', *Past and Present*, 90, 1981, pp. 89-92. It must be noted that Green's valuable analysis of the clergy across England has only included 68 Cheshire parishes (p. 97) because he drew his information from Ormerod, who does not give details of clergy from all the parishes of the county.

in the clergy of 1578. There are examples of clergy marrying clerical widows and of widows of Cheshire clergy marrying other clergy (for example Thomas Warburton and Thomas Betson). Many clergy, such as Matthew Wood and Robert Rogers, had large families and several were succeeded by sons or sons-in-law, for example Evan Rycroft and Thomas Collier. Some, such as John Barlow, fathered eminent clerics. Conversely, the lingering disinclination to marriage on the part of a few meant that Humphrey Berron was succeeded by his illegitimate son and John Smallwood left an illegitimate daughter.

There is insufficient data to calculate the ages of the majority of the 1578

Table 9 – Ages of 1578 incumbents.

20 to 29	30 to 39	40 to 49	50 to 59	60 and over	no data
3	8	7	3	9	50

incumbents, but Table 9 above indicates that almost a third of those whose ages are known were over 60, while half were aged between 30 and 50. It may also be suggested tentatively, in the absence of so much data, that it was more likely to be the younger men who were married. Of the men known to be aged below 60, the marital status of 17 is known and of these, all but 2 were married at some time. One of those who did not marry was William Dorington, whose over-reaction to a reference to his unmarried state has been noted. Of those aged 60 and over, 4 were unmarried, 2 were married (of which one was the Cambridge academic, Thomas Barnard) and for the remaining 3 there is no evidence.

These brief biographies of the Cheshire incumbents at the time of Downham's death indicate that many elements which characterised the Stuart clergy were already evident in the clergy of 1578.

BIOGRAPHIES

ADAMSON, William Stoke **WR** **curate** CCEd none
 At the 1578 metropolitan visitation it was claimed that the vicar was not resident (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 16). Adamson is listed as the only cleric serving the parish in the 1578 call list, but it has not been possible to discover anything about him, or whether there was also a vicar in the parish. It seems unlikely that, as a curate, Adamson did not reside in the parish as there were no complaints of neglect in 1578. In 1588 the rectory was sold by one layman to another and it had previously been wholly impropriated to the college of St John's in Chester (CS, 3rd Series, xvii, p. 106). Admitted between 1563 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 31) and 1578.

ALLEN, William **Wistaston** **NN** **rector** CCEd 22753

m. by 1580 Katherine baptism daughter Sarah 15/4/1580 mentions wife 'Catheren'; PR (CALS P 74/1/1)
 d. 1606 buried 3/1/1606; PR
 career possibly curate Gisburn 1564-1572 (CCEd 134840)
 pres. 1572 10 February 1572 by Thomas Persall of Horsley, Staffordshire and John Alexander of Wistaston (CCEd)
 1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1606 William Allen
 funeral sermon 'one godly preacher ... iijjs iiijd'
 charitable bequests ten poor men and women of his parish a groat each
 children 1 son, 1 daughter
 brother-in-law George Tattenhall of Ightfield, Coventry & Lichfield diocese (CCEd 29785); probably previously vicar of Bunbury (CCEd 127367)

BAGSHAW, Edward **Tarvin** **CS** **vicar** CCEd 23568

b. 1535 age 16 in 1551; from Staffordshire (CCEd quoting Venn)
 m. 1) Anne; buried 23/9/1616; PR (CALS P 9/1/1)
 2) Anne Johnson, widow; PR
 d. 1622 buried 12/9/1622; PR
 career BA King's Cambridge 1555/6 (CCEd); rural dean of Wirral from 1585 (CCEd)
 pres. 1558 5/3/1558 by James Huntbache (CCEd)
 1592 report 'public preacher in their cure' (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1622 Edward Bagshaw
 children none

BARLOW, John	Warmingham	MD	rector	CCEd 35561
	Malpas	ML	rector	and 115210

m. by 1571 Margaret Silcock; PR (CALS P 21/3607/1/1 *sub* Randle Barlow 31/1/1572)
d. 1595 buried 28/4/1595; PR
pres. 1536 Warmingham 26/8/1536 by John Minshull (Ormerod, iii, p. 234)
pres. 1562 Malpas – higher moiety 30/1/1562 by James Pavor (Ormerod, ii, p. 608)
1578 visitation Warmingham – not resident; seldom visits; few sermons (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 32v)
WILL CALS WS 1595 John Barlow; Piccope, (Third Portion), pp. 87-9
charitable bequests 20s to the poor
children 4 sons; 2 daughters
son Randle – archbishop of Tuam, Ireland (Venn online)
widow remarried Mr Thomas Williamson 26/5/1596, PR

BARNARD, Thomas	Frodsham	FR	vicar	CCEd 113725
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b. 1506 age 18 in 1524; from Worcestershire (CCEd)
m. c. 1547 Edith Henry Summerson, 'Bernard, John (d. 1554)' (DNB)
d. 1582 30 November 1582 (DNB)
career M.A. King's Cambridge 1533; BTh Oxford 1567 (DNB)
ord. 1546 priest 1/5/1546 by John Hodgkin, Bedford (CCEd 9063)
pres. 1548 Pyrton, Cambridgeshire 1548 to 1554 (deprived) (CCEd 9063)
1559 to death
(Beamont, *Frodsham*, pp. 228-9)
pres. 1567 Frodsham by Dean & Chapter Christ Church, Oxford (Beamont, *Frodsham*, p. 228)
children Daniel – succeeded to Frodsham (Beamont, *Frodsham*, p. 229);
Margaret Lucille Kekewich, 'Bernard, Daniel (d. 1588)' (DNB)
John – succeeded to Pyrton (DNB *sub* John Bernard)
3 other sons

BARRETT, John	Northenden	MC	rector	CCEd 35571
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b. 1543 probably son of James Barrett of Etchells, pa. Northenden
(Earwaker, i, p. 291)
m. 1581 Sybil Prestnow at Cheadle, she died 9/1615 (*ibid.*)
d. 1627 17/6/1627, age 84 (*ibid.*)
pres. 1578 9/7/1578 by Robert Tatton of Wythensahwe (CCEd) (curate at
1578 visitation)
career curate Northenden by 1575 (witness will Geoffrey Ryle CALS
WS 1575)
1592 report 'no graduates nor preachers but catechizers' (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1627 John Barrett
children 4 daughters

BERRON, Humphrey Cheadle **MC** **rector** CCEd 35644

m. assumed not – only son illegitimate (will)
 d. 1606 buried 22/6/1606 (Earwaker, i, p. 220)
 ord.1546 priest 18/9/1546 by John Bird (CCEd)
 career curate at Bowdon in 1548 (CALS EDV 2/3, f. 8)
 pres.1563 25/4/1563 by Sir Richard Bulkeley (Ormerod, iii, p. 630)
 1592 report 'no graduates nor preachers but catechizers' (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1606 Humphrey Berron
 children base son, Edward Berron, who succeeded him at Cheadle

BETSON, Thomas **Neston** **WR** **vicar** CCEd 35668
 (CCEd conflates 2 men with same name)

b. 1535 age 34 in 1569; local (CS, 3rd Series, I, p. 47)
 m. by 1598 married twice – 1) first wife, no details (*ibid.*)
 2) Margery, she possibly later married subsequent incumbent
 Francis Greene at Heswall 21/2/1603 (CPRD)
 d. 1599 buried 23/11/1599 PR (CALS P 149)
 ord.1557 priest 18/9/1557 by Cuthbert Scott (CCEd)
 pres.1563 4/1/1563 by Richard Hough of Leighton (CS)
 career matriculated pensioner at Trinity Cambridge, 1557 (Venn
 online) but does not seem to have graduated
 1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
 children 2 daughters by second wife

BLAKEN, John **Chester, Holy Trinity** **CS** **rector** CCEd 23680,
 35680

b. 1520 age 32 in 1552 (CALS EDC 2/5, f. 49v)
 d. 1580 by 10/9/1580 (CCEd 23680)
 ord.1545 priest 30/5/1545 by John Bird (CCEd 35680)
 career curate Eccleston by 1548 (CALS EDA 2/4, f. 24v)
 pres.1572 10/9/1572 by John Griffith, yeoman, of Overton Maddock,
 Flintshire (CALS EDP 70/1/1)
 1578 visitation accused of using practices 'after the popishe maner' (BIY V
 1578/9 CB3, f. 19v)

BIRCH, Richard **Church Lawton** **MD** **rector** CCEd 35649

b. 1518 age threescore in 1578 (CALS WS 1577 Matthew Moore)
 d. 1585 buried 7/8/1585 PR (CALS P109/1/1, f. 35)
 pres.1555 22/6/1555 by John Lawton of Church Lawton (CCEd)

CALDWELL, John	Mobberley	MC	rector	CCEd 35648
b. 1544	aged 51 at death in 1595 (Ormerod, i, p. 412); son of John Richard Caldwell M.D. of Burton on Trent (<i>The Rectors of Winwick</i> , < http://newton-le-willows.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=579&Itemid=63 > (accessed 21 February 2013))			
m.	Margaret (named in will)			
d. 1595	30/6/1595 (Ormerod, i, p. 412)			
pres.1573	27/4/1572 by Richard Caldwell (his father) (CCEd)			
career	M.A. (CCEd); fellow King's, Cambridge, fellow 1565-9 (Venn online); also rector of Winwick from 1575; chaplain to the earl of Derby and his favourite preacher; one sermon printed in 1577 on the text 'while we have time let us do good' Galatians, 6 v.10 (<i>The Rectors of Winwick</i>); 1584 moderator of the Macclesfield and Northwich exercises (Richardson, p. 66); appointed to relief committee following the Nantwich fire of 1583 (Kitching, 'Fire Relief'); presented 1595 for not always wearing the surplice (CS, 3 rd series, xlv, p. 31)			
1592 report	'preachers' (CCEd)			
children	one daughter			
WILL	CALS WS 1595 John Caldwell (nuncupative)			
	library valued at £40			
	charitable bequests left to the discretion of his executors			
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CARTER, John	Shotwick	WR	curate	CCEd 35850
m.	Jane (named in will)			
d. 1587	will proved 7/9/1587			
ord.c. 1562	by William Downham (CCEd person ID 35849)			
pres.by 1563	CALS EDV 1/3, f. 31			
WILL	CALS WS 1587 John Carter			
children	2 sons			
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CHALLONER, William Baddiley		NN	curate	CCEd 115471
ord. 1577	deacon 12/4/1577 by William Downham (Chalner) (CCEd 108629)			
pres.by 1578	between 1563 (CALS EDV 1/3, f 25v) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			

COLLIER, Thomas	Swettenham Malpas	MD ML	rector rector	CCEd 35918
m.	Anne, buried 12/6/1615 (wife of Mr Thos Collier Parson of Malepas) (John T. James & Janet M. James (eds), 'A Copy of the Registers of the Marriages, Christenings & Burials at St Oswald's hurch, Malpas, in the County of Cheshire, from 1561 to 1812', i, p. 136)			
d. 1623	buried 26/9/1623 at Malpas (James, 'Registers', i, p. 167)			
pres. by 1578 Swettenham	between 1563 (CALS EDV 1/3, f 24v) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
pres. 1578	Malpas – lower moiety 25/1/1578 by William Brereton of Brereton (CCEd)			
career	M.A.(CCEd); 1584 moderator of the Nantwich exercises (Richardson, p. 66)			
1578 visitation	Malpas – not as yet resident; keeps no hospitality (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 8v)			
1592 visitation	Malpas – has 2 benefices; enjoined to live conformable to the injunctions in that respect (1592 visitation, p. 415)			
1592 report children	'preacher' (CCEd) daughter, Thomasine, m. Thomas Dodd who succeeded him at Malpas (Ormerod, ii, pp. 612-3) (CCEd 24030)			
WILL	CALS WS 1623 Thomas Collier of Malpas charitable bequest – poor householders of Malpas £10 library valued at £40			

COMMANDER, Robert	Tarporley	CS	rector	CCEd 31031
b. 1532	in London; Venn online gives date of admission to King's, Cambridge 1548 age 16			
m.	yes, wife's name not known (see under 1578 visitation)			
d. 1613	died by 1/9/1613 (CCEd)			
pres. by 1578	between 1570 (deprivation of previous incumbent EDC 5 1571.12 Tarporley) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
career	B.A. (CCEd); chaplain to Sir Henry Sidney (BIY V 1578/9 call list); rector and prebendary of Kilmactalway, County Dublin and Vicar of Bodinstown, County Kildare (C. Litton Falkiner, <i>Essays relating to Ireland, Biographical, Historical and Topographical</i> (London, 1909), pp. 208-9) commonplace book BL Egerton MS 2642			
1578 visitation	not resident; does not distribute one fortieth part of his benefice; wife and children are resident in the parish (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 21v)			
1592 report children	'public preacher in their cure' (CCEd) number and sex not known			

COOKE, Thomas	Bromborough	WR	curate	CCEd 35985
b. 1549	age 29 in 1578 (deposition in 1578 CALS WC 1575 Gilbert Norris)			
pres. by 1578	between 1567 (CALS EDC 2/8, f. 81) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
career	teacher at Bromborough (CALS WC 1575 Gilbert Norris)			
1592 report	‘no graduates nor preachers but catechizers’ (CCEd)			
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COWLEY, William (Colley)	Dodleston	CS	rector	CCEd 32080, 36041
b. 1514	age 61 in July 1575 (CS, 3rd Series, xxi, p.29)			
m.	yes, wife’s name not known (Anthony Grosvenor of Dodelston in 1575 left 10s to ‘the parson’s wife’; CS, 1st Series, i, p. 295)			
d. 1596	died by 24/11/1596 (Ormerod, ii, p. 850)			
pres.1560	1/10/1560 by Richard Hough and Thomas Grosvenor (CCEd)			
career	curate Dodleston by 1554 (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 17v)			
1592 report	‘no graduates nor preachers but catechizers’ (CCEd)			
children	2 daughters; one of them, Julian, married Peter Sharpe who succeeded him at Dodleston (CS, 3rd Series, xxvii, p.82)			
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COWPER, William	Chester, St Oswald	CS	vicar	CCEd 36064
b. 1525	age 51 in 1576 (CALS WC 1576 Thomas Johnson)			
d. 1580	died by 13/12/1580 (CCEd)			
ord.	priest 6/6/1558 by Cuthbert Scott (CCEd 32087)			
pres.1574	27/3/1574 by the Dean and chapter of Chester Cathedral			
1578 visitation	presented for refusing to visit a sick woman who died ‘furthwyth’; not instructing parishioners to send their children to learn the catechism (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 18v)			
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DANALD, Robert	Handley	ML	rector	CCEd 35930
b.	probably local; bequests to cousins in Chester (CALS WS 1578 Robert Dannelde)			
m.	probably not – no bequests to wife or children			
d. 1578	died by 20/10/1578 (CCEd)			
pres. 1530	9/10/1530 by St Werburgh’s monastery (Ormerod, ii, p. 725)			

DORINGTON, William Chester, St Peter **CS** **rector** CCEd 33202

b. 1546 age 18 on admission to Caius, Cambridge 13/5/1564 (Venn online); son of Robert Dorington of Stafford
 m. no (CALS EDC 5 1576.4 Chester; 1576.14 Chester)
 d. 1587 by 18/12/1587 (CCEd)
 ord.1574 priest 7/3/1574 by William Downham (CCEd)
 pres.1574 24/3/1574 by Dean and Chapter (CCEd)
 career M.A. St Catharine's, Cambridge 1573 (Venn online); from 1578 held Handley in Malpas deanery in plurality (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1587 William Dorington
 extensive library; best Bible given to mayor and citizens of Chester to be kept in the Pentice

DOUGLAS, John **Chester, St John** **CS** **vicar** CCEd 116605

pres. by 1578 between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 48) and 1578 (1578 visitation)
 1578 visitation presented for marrying strangers without banns; no sermons 'but by the vicar'; 'the forfeiture is not levyed' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 20)

DOWNES, Robert **Shocklach** **ML** **curate** CCEd 33359

b.1547 age 86 in 1633 (CS, 3rd Series, lxv, p.29); probably local
 m. 1) Anne Greene (9/11/1574) (d. 8/9/1581) (CS, 3rd Series, xxvii, p. 86)
 2) Alice Eddoe, widow da. John Yeardley of Calcott, gent (m. 7/7/1600) PR (CALS P 308/4772/1)
 d. 1633 buried 12/10/1633; PR
 ord.1568 priest 3/10/1568 by William Downham (CCEd)
 pres. by 1576 son Richard baptised at Shocklach that year
 career curate of Tilston in 1574 (CS, 3rd Series, xxvii, p. 86)
 1592 report 'no graduates nor preachers but catechisers' (CCEd)
 children 1 son, 1 daughter; PR
WILL CALS WS 1633 Robert Downes
 books filled 'Three Biggest Chestes'; valued at £13 13s 4d

DUCK, William	Thornton	CS	rector	CCEd 12255
b. 1517	in Devon; age 30 in 1547 (C. W. Boase, <i>Register of the Rectors, Fellows, and other Members of the Foundation of Exeter College, Oxford</i> (Oxford, 1894), p. 63)			
m.	probably not; no bequests to wife or children			
d. 1581	buried 7/4/1581; PR (CALS P 163/1/1)			
ord.1544	priest 23/3/1554 at Oxford (CCEd)			
pres.1553	November 1553 by Queen Mary (one of only 2 such presentations in the county)			
career	M.A. Christ Church, Oxford 1544 (<i>Alumni Oxonienses</i>); fellow Exeter College, 1541 (Boase, <i>op. cit.</i>)			
WILL	CALS WS 1581 William Duke			
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DUCKWORTH, Charles	Chester, St Mary	CS	rector	CCEd 33205
d. 1595	died by 4/6/1595 (CCEd)			
pres. 1554	25/9/1554 by John Brereton of Eccleston (J. P. Earwaker, <i>The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary-on-the-Hill Chester</i> (London, 1898), pp. 81-2)			
career	curate Aldford from at least 1539 (TNA: PRO PROB 11/27/542 Robert Lanton)			
1578 visitation	'hath two benefices he is not Resydent' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 20).The second benefice may have been in the diocese of St Asaph where he seems to have had interests (TNA: PRO STAC 3/2/79)			
1592 visitation	not resident, no sermons by his procurement, 2 benefices, does not lease the living to his curate or keep a preacher (1592 visitation, p. 408)			
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EATON, Richard	Great Budworth	FR	vicar	CCEd 33273
m.	yes, wife's name not known; 12 children baptised in the parish PR (CALS P 41/1/1 1563 to 1594)			
d. 1600	buried 7/1/1600; PR (CALS P 41/1/1, f. 135v)			
ord.1558	priest 24/9/1558 by Cuthbert Scott (CCEd ID 33300)			
pres. 1560	19/5/1560 by Dean & Chapter Christ Church, Oxford (CALS EDP 131/1/1)			
career	accused of simony by a parishioner (TNA: PRO CHES 15/2); rural dean of Frodsham by 1599 (BIY CP.G.3103)			
1592 report	'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)			
children	5 daughters; 7 sons; PR son Richard (b. 1563) probably man of that name who graduated from Lincoln College, Oxford as BD 1599; succeeded as vicar of Great Budworth in 1604 (CCEd 25915)			

ELCOCK, Thomas	Barthomley	NN	rector	CCEd 33325
b. m. d. 1617 pres. 1577 career 1592 report children WILL	probably from Stockport (bequest to the poor of Stockport) Margaret, buried ‘ <i>cum filio</i> ’ 16/2/1599; PR (CALS P 284/5063/1) buried 7/7/1617; PR 24/3/1577 by Robert Fouleshurst of Crewe (Ormerod, ii, p. 304) M.A. Christ Church, Oxford 1566 (<i>Alumni Oxonienses</i>); rector Bladon, Oxfordshire 1570 to 1577 (resigned); ordered to pay £20 to a Cheshire woman with whom he had committed fornication in the late 1570s (CALS EDC 1/26, f. 25v); appointed to relief committee following the Nantwich fire of 1583 (Kitching, ‘Fire Relief’); presented in 1611 for baptising a child in a pewter basin (Richardson, p. 28); frequent tithe litigant 'preachers' (CCEd) surviving 3 sons, 3 daughters PR CALS WS 1617 Thomas Elcock funeral sermon – unnamed preacher to receive 10s charitable bequests poor of Stockport 40s books and clothes valued at £10			
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FIDDLER, Nicholas	Taxal	MC	rector	CCEd 36102
b. d. by 1589 pres. 1532	probably local successor presented 11/2/1589 due to his death (Earwaker, ii, p. 545) 31/5/1532 by John Downes (<i>ibid.</i>)			
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FOSTER, Robert	Over	MD	vicar	CCEd 36152
d. by 1591 ord.1558 pres. 1572 career	successor presented by 4/2/1591 (CCEd) priest 6/6/1558 by Cuthbert Scott (CCEd 36147) collated 3/5/1573 by William Downham (CCEd) 1563 clergy list at Middlewich chaplain to Thomas Venables (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 24)			

FRODSHAM, John	Ince	CS	curate	CCEd 36170
b. 1550	age 31 in 1581; deponent in will case of William Duck, rector of Thornton (CALS WS 1581 William Duke); probably local			
m.	Margaret (named in will)			
d. 1606	buried May 1606			
pres. by 1578	between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 59) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
career	previously curate at Thornton (deposition in CALS WS 1581 Wiliam Duke); defamation case accused of sexual misconduct (CALS EDC 5 1576.23 Thornton); subsequently curate of Handley by 1592 (CCEd) and Eccleston by 1606 (will)			
1592 report	‘no graduates, but preachers, honest men’ (CCEd)			
children	2 daughters named in will			
WILL	CALS WS 1606 John Frodsham			
	books valued at £9			
GERRARD, Richard	Stockport	MC	rector	CCEd 28156
b. 1553	age 15 in 1567; son of William Gerrard, recorder of Chester; nephew of Gilbert Gerrard attorney general (Venn online)			
m. 1585	Ursula Arderne at Stockport on 19/1/1585; she was buried 3/4/1624 (Earwaker, i, pp. 367-8; 383)			
d. 1614	died 10/5/1614 (<i>ibid.</i>)			
pres. 1577	by Gilbert Gerrard and William Gerrard (<i>ibid.</i>)			
career	M.A. Caius, Cambridge 1575; fellow of Caius 1578-82 (Venn online); prebendary Norwell Overhall, Southwell 1580 to 1614; chaplain to Queen Elizabeth (Earwaker, i, p. 383); moderator of Macclesfield deanery exercises 1584 (Richardson, p. 66)			
1578 visitation	‘student in Cambridge, doth not distribute the xl th parte of his Lyvinge’ (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 5)			
children	6 sons, 4 daughters (Earwaker, i, p. 368)			
WILL	CALS WS 1614 Richard Gerrard			

GILPIN, Luke **Bebington** **WR** **rector** CCEd 26328

b. probably nephew of Bernard Gilpin from Westmorland (Venn online)
 m. Anne (named in will)
 d. by 1587 will proved 27/10/1587
 ord.1569 priest 3/4/1569 in London (CCEd)
 pres. 1573 collated by archbishop of York due to disputed presentation (John Strype, *The History of the Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, Edmund Grindal in two books* (Oxford,1821), ii, pp. 265-7
 career M.A. Trinity, Cambridge 1565; B.D. 1576; fellow 1562 (Venn online); perpetual vicar, Chesterton, Cambs, 1571 to 1574; archdeacon of Derby, 1577 to 1587; rector Barton in Fabis, Notts, 1577 to 1587; prebendary Norwell Tertia, Southwell 1581 to 1587 (CCEd); commissary to archbishop of York 1578 (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 12v)
 1578 visitation not resident (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 15v)
 children 4 sons, 4 daughters (named in will)
WILL TNA: PRO PROB 11/71/188 Luke Gilpin

GORSTILOW, John **Wallasey** **WR** **rector** CCEd 36305

b. probably local
 d. 1580 buried 8/1/1580 (Wirral Notes & Queries,ii, p. 59)
 pres. 1549 9/11/1549 by Philip Gorstilow, yeoman (CCEd)
 career previously monk at St Werburgh's, Chester (Burne, *Monks*, p. 183)

HAYDOCK, Richard **Woodchurch** **WR** **vicar** CCEd 118096

d. 1588 buried 3/6/1588; PR (CPRD)
 pres. 1571 7/8/1571 by Sir William Sneyd (CCEd)
WILL inventory only, goods worth 45s 8d (CALS WS 1590 Richard Hadock)

HEVELT, Thomas Davenham MD rector CCEd 118162

b. 1538 age 28 in 1566 (CALS EDC 2/8, f. 34)
 m. 1) Mathilda Wharton 9/9/1576 (bur. 15/12/1582) PR (CALS P 6/1/1)
 2) Elizabeth Holford 17/4/1583; PR; (her pedigree Ormerod, iii, p. 239)
 d. 1600 buried 7/6/1600; PR
 pres. by 1578 between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 61v) and 1578 (1578 visitation)
 career 1563 curate at Davenham '*extra*' (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 24v)
 1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
 children at least 5 children all of whom seem to have died in infancy; PR

HEYWARD, William Whitegate MD vicar CCEd 37065

b. 1536 age 74 in 1610 (BIY CP.H.612)
 m. probably; son, Richard buried 12/9/1599; PR (CALS P 52/1/1)
 d. 1613 buried April 1613 at Little Budworth; PR
 pres. 1576 7/3/1576 by Dame Juliana Holcroft (Ormerod,ii, p. 146)
 career curate before presentation to the living; resigned by 21/9/1597, moved to be curate of Little Budworth chapel (BIY CP.H.612)
 1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)

HYDE, John Mottram MC vicar CCEd 33320

b. son of Nicholas Hyde, previous incumbent (Earwaker, ii, pp. 127-8)
 m. 1) Alice Reddich on 26/2/1576 (d. 21/3/1594) (*ibid.*)
 2) Anne Hyde on 22/5/1597 (*ibid.*)
 d. 1637 buried 17/3/1637 (*ibid.*)
 ord.1572 priest 23/3/1572 by William Downham (CCEd)
 pres. 1575 4/6/1575 by William Downham (CCEd)
 career rural dean of Macclesfield by 1580 (CCEd)
 1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
 children 4 sons, 1 daughter; son, Hamnett, acted as his curate until he died in 1618 (Earwaker, *op. cit*)
WILL CALS WS 1637 John Hyde

IRELAND, Robert	Christleton	CS	rector	CCEd 23018
m.	yes, wife's name not known; 2 children named in probate proceedings (CALS WC 1606 Robert Ireland)			
d. 1599	died by 25/1/1599 (CCEd)			
ord.1545	deacon 21/3/1545 by John Bird (CCEd)			
pres. by 1565	by July 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 49v)			
career	B.C.L. according to CALS EDC 5 1570.30 Christleton and 1592 clergy list (CCEd); rector Llangar, Merioneth resigned 1554 (CCEd 65711); curate Stoke in Wirral deanery 1554 (Wirral Notes & Queries,ii, p. 65)			
1578 visitation children	also vicar of Denbigh (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 22v) daughter Margery, Ralph 'one of the sons' named in probate proceedings. Ralph may be CCEd 31088 ordained deacon at Chester 24/8/1599			
WILL	Probate proceedings (CALS WC 1606 Robert Ireland)			
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JANION, John	Guilden Sutton	CS	curate	CCEd 119016
b. 1546	age 29 in 1575 (CALS EDC 5 1575.22 Guilden Sutton)			
ord.1573	John Janeon ordained priest 16/3/1573 by William Downham (CCEd 36722). This man subsequently curate at Ashton in Makerfield Chapel, parish of Winwick, Lancashire in 1609 <i>per</i> CCEd.			
pres. by 1575	between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 49) and 1575 (CALS EDC 5 1575.22 Guilden Sutton)			
1578 visitation	no sermons for 3 years; Janion had churched 2 women accused of fornication (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 19)			
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KEYE, Robert	Upton	WR	curate	CCEd 119139
	(also known as Overchurch)			
pres. by 1578	between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 53) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
1578 visitation	'no quarter sermons in whose default they do not know'(BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 15v)			

LANE, John d. by 1580 pres. 1573 career	Aldford	ML	rector	CCEd 31115
1578 visitation	by 18/9/1580 (CCEd) 16/3/1573 by Edward Fitton (CALS EDP 3/1/1) also prebendary of Chester from 1570 (CCEd) 'for the most part resident'; received £20 <i>per annum</i> for the divinity lecture there (Burne, <i>Chester Cathedral</i> , pp. 56, 58); assisted Goodman in 'conference' with recusants (BIY V 1578-9 CB/2, ff. 10-10v, 16v, 36) 'not Resydent neyther is the fortyth part of the benefyce distrybuted to the poor ... ther curate doth not say servyce at convenyent houres' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 8v)			
LOWE, John m. d. by 1601 pres. 1559 career 1592 report WILL	Acton	NN	vicar	CCEd 36508
	probably not – no bequests to wife or children by 30/9/1601 (Ormerod, iii, p. 347) 8/1/1560 by Sir Hugh Cholmondeley (CCEd) possibly ordained priest 18/9/1546 by John Bird (CCEd 31427); curate at Acton in 1554 (CALS EDV 1/1, f. 23) 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCEd) CALS WS 1602 John Lowe			
LOWE, John d. by 1589 pres. 1559	Pulford	CS	rector	CCEd 36509
	by 9/1/1589 (EDP 229/1/1) 10/1/1559 by John Warburton (Ormerod, ii, p. 860)			
LOWTHER, Richard b. 1512 d. 1588 pres. by 1541	Chester, St Bridget	CS	curate	CCEd 31437
	age 36 in 1548 (TNA: PRO E 301/8/1) buried 13/9/1588 (' <i>vir bonus</i> '; CS, 3rd Series, xv, p. 37) W. F. Irvine, (ed.), 'List of the Clergy in Eleven Deaneries of the Diocese of Chester', p. 2			
MARTIN, Fulk m. d. by 1610 pres. 1571 career 1592 report	Eastham	WR	vicar	CCEd 32114
	yes, wife's name not known; son, Peter, baptised 12/11/1598; PR (CALS P 195/1/1) buried 9/1/1610; PR 14/6/1571 by Oliver Smith and William Brown (CCEd) B.A. (CCEd) 'public preachers in their cure' (CCEd)			

METCALFE, Mark	Barrow	CS	rector	CCEd 36333
b. 1539	at Bedale, Yorkshire; age at death 54 (Rev. J. L. Saywell, <i>The History and Annals of Northallerton, Yorkshire</i> (Northallerton, 1885), p. 54)			
m.	Elizabeth			
d. 1593	buried 24/5/1593 (<i>ibid.</i>)			
pres. 1569	5/2/1569, appointed Edmund Savage to take possession of Barrow as proctor with others (Ormerod, ii, p. 342)			
career	B.A. 1568; rector of Northallerton from 1562 to 1593 (<i>Alumni Oxonienses</i>) and hospital of St Mary Magdalen at Ripon (CCEd 119819)			
1592 visitation	not ministered the sacraments nor said divine service; not resident, has devised the living to his patron. Excommunicated but reinstated (1592 visitation, p. 406)			
1592 report	'no graduates nor preachers but grammarian scholars and catechisers' (CCEd)			
children	2 daughters			
MERE, John	Runcorn	FR	vicar	CCEd 36330
b. 1508	clerk in Chester (CS, 3rd Series, xxi, p. 18).			
pres. by 1554	CALs EDV 1/1, f. 27			
career	minor canon or Gospeller of Chester Cathedral; previously monk at St Werburgh's, Chester (Burne, <i>Monks</i> , pp. 4-5)			
1578 visitation	'John Mayre the vycar is not Resydent' 'he is vycar of the cathedral church of chester' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 28)			
MILNER, James	Chester, St Olave	CS	curate	CCEd 31456
pres. by 1578	between 1565 (CALs EDV 1/3, f. 49) and 1578 (1578 visitation)			
career	curate of St Mary's, Chester by 1570 (Earwaker, <i>St. Mary-on-the-Hill</i> , p. 82); minor canon of Chester Cathedral; rural dean of Chester from 7 September 1598 (CCEd)			
1578 visitation	'They haue no Sermons in ther church' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 20v			
1592 visitation	'serves 2 cures; very small so tolerated' (1592 visitation, p. 410)			
MORREY, Hugh	Backford	WR	vicar	CCEd 120394 and 35205
pres.by 1563	CALs EDV 1/3, f. 31			
resigned 1583	by 19/5/1583 (CCEd)			

MOSSOCK, Gowther Alderley	MC	rector	CCEd 32833
b.	probably from Lancashire (Earwaker, ii, p. 632)		
m.	probably not; no references to wife or children in PRs (<i>ibid.</i>)		
d. 1580	buried 12/4/1580 (<i>ibid.</i>)		
pres. 1542	21/6/1542 by Sir Edward Fitton (CCEd)		
charity	left £46 8s 6d to the poor of Alderley (Earwaker <i>op. cit.</i>)		

NEWSOME, Edmund	Prestbury	MC	vicar	CCEd 31489
b. 1498	probably chantry priest at Over Peover (Rostherne parish); age 50 in 1548 (TNA: PRO E 301/8/22)			
m.	probably not; no references to wife or children in PRs (Earwaker, ii, p. 207)			
d. 1584	buried 20/1/1584 (<i>ibid.</i>)			
pres. 1559	6/5/1559 by Richard and John Grosvenor (CCEd)			

PRESTLAND, Peter	Middlewich	MD	vicar	CCEd 121518
pres. 1568	paid First Fruits 14/2/1568 (Selby, p. 398)			

PULESTON, Richard	Astbury	MD	rector	CCEd 14733
b. 1548	D. A. Orr, 'Puleston, John (1583?–1659)', <i>DNB</i> (online edition accessed 9 February 2013); Richard Puleston, son of Roger of Emral, Flintshire. Mother was Ann Grosvenor; Sir Samuel Rush Meyrick (ed.), <i>Heraldic Visitations of Wales</i> (Llandovery, 1846), pp. 309-10			
m.	Alice Lewis (Orr, 'Puleston, John')			
pres. 1576	17/8/1576 by Ralph Egerton (Ormerod, ii, p. 27)			
career	M.A. 1577, Oxford (<i>Alumni Oxonienses</i>); resigned Astbury by 21/11/1587 (CALS EDP 15/1/1); subsequently rector of Kingsworthy, Hants and the sinecure rectories of Llaneugrad, Anglesey and Hope, Flints (Arthur Herbert Dodd, Puleston, John (c.1583 -1659) Welsh Biography Online accessed 9 February 2013)			
1578 visitation	'student in Oxforde, not resydent and distributeth not the x1 th parte of his Benefyce to the poore' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 32)			
children	John – lawyer and judge; Puritan (see DNB entries) Richard - noted cleric; succeeded to living at Kingsworthy (CCEd has conflated father and son)			

RILEY, Charles **Church Minshull** **NN** **perpetual curate** CCEd 34907

b. 1534 age 49 in 1582/3 (CS, 3rd Series, xvii, p. 72)
d. 1601 buried 16/9/1601 (G. B. Sandford, 'An account of the parish of
Church Minshull, in Cheshire', *THSLC*, 2, (1850 for 1849-50),
p. 106)
pres. 1573 (*ibid.*)
career curate of Baddiley 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 58v)
1592 report 'no graduates nor preachers but catechisers' (CCEd)

ROBINSON, John **Ashton-on-Mersey** **FR** **rector** CCEd 34974

m. probably not – no bequests to wife or children
d. 1583 by November 1583 (date will proved)
pres. 1550 paid First Fruits 3/8/1550 (J. P. Earwaker, (ed.), *Lancashire and
Cheshire Wills and Inventories*, Chetham Society, new series, 3,
1884, p. 92)
career curate of Cheadle 1548 (CALS EDV 2/3, f. 10v)
WILL Earwaker, *op. cit.*, pp. 92-6
charitable bequests his 'bee howses' to the use of the church; oats and barley for the
poor of the parish

ROGERS, Robert **Gawsworth** **MC** **rector** CCEd 31543

b. probably local; attended school in Chester 1544 to 1549 (CS, 3rd
series, xxix, p. 10)
m. Elizabeth Dean of Wallingford, Berks (CS, 1st Series, ii, p. 381)
d. 1595 by 1/12/1595 (CALS EDA 1/4, f. 24)
pres. 1565 by Sir Edward Fitton following deprivation of previous
incumbent (TNA: PRO SP 15/12, f. 240); paid First Fruits
19/4/1565 (Selby, p. 398)
career M.A. 1551; B.D. c. 1564, Oxford (*Alumni Oxonienses*);
prebendary of Chester and archdeacon of Chester from 1580
(Earwaker, ii, p. 588); moderator Macclesfield exercises
(Richardson, p. 66)
WILL CALS WS 1595 Robert Rogers
funeral sermon to be 'made by some godly wise learned man ... he to haue for
his paynes xs'
children 5 daughters, 10 sons; including antiquarian David who wrote up
his father's notes

ROWSON, Reginald **Lymm – Leigh moiety** **FR** **rector** CCEd 32365

m. Joan (named in will)
d. 1611 buried 29/5/1611; PR (CALS P 119/2924/1/1)
ord. 1568 priest 3/10/1568 by William Downham (CCEd)
pres. 1569 25/8/1569 by Richard Leigh of High Leigh (Ormerod, i, p. 594)
career 1589 office case, promoted by patron of living; accused of adultery and neglect of his office (CALS EDC 5 1589.7 Lymm; articles of inquiry include charges of sexual misconduct with four women; usury; swearing while playing cards and dice; bear-baiting on Sundays and holidays)
1592 report 'no graduates but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
WILL CALS WS 1611 Rginald Rowson
children 1 son, 4 daughters (named in will)

RYCROFT, Evan **Coddington** **ML** **rector** CCEd 35052

m. Joan (named in will)
d. 1612 by 18/10/1612 (Ormerod, ii, p. 736)
pres. by 1577 witness will written 25/5/1577 (CALS WS 1577 Thomas Pulford)
1592 report 'no graduates but preachers, honest men' (CCEd)
1592 visitation 'rood lofte standeth undefaced and full of idolatrie pictures' (1592 visitation, p. 414)
1595 visitation 'sometymes hunteth for whiche the churchwardens presente him, it semeth they hold it offensive' (CS, 3rd Series, xliv, p. 27)
WILL CALS WS 1612 Evan Rycroft
books valued at 15s
children 5 sons, 2 daughters (named in will)
succeeded by his son, Thomas (Ormerod, ii, p. 736)

SALE, William **Burton** **WR** **rector** CCEd 128624 and 19345

m. probably not – no bequests to wife or children
d. 1588 by 27/7/1588 (date will proved)
pres. by 1578 between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 52) and 1578 ('Mr Ws Sail rector' at 1578 visitation)
career M.A. 1556; rector Quatt 1547 to 1573; rector Stoke upon Tern 1563 to 1584; rector Aston on Trent 1569; rector Stoke upon Trent 1579; prebendary Weeford from 1565; canon residentiary Lichfield 1582 to 1588 (all Coventry and Lichfield diocese)
WILL TNA: PRO PROB 11/72/658 William Sale

SANDFORD, Randle Audlem NN vicar CCed 31557

d. 1582 buried 22/4/1582; PR (CALS P 113/1/1)
 pres. 1557 26/2/1557 by Brian Socolar (CCed)

SHALLCROSS, Edward Weaverham FR vicar CCed 24098

b. probably local; scholar in Manchester (CS, 3rd Series, xviii, p. 38)
 m. Ellen; defamation cause (CALS EDC 5 1596.41 Weaverham)
 d. 1613 buried 8/6/1613 (CPRD)
 pres. 1575 7/12/1575 by Queen Elizabeth (CCed)
 1592 report 'no graduates but of mean learning & suspected conversation' (CCed)
 1590 visitation 'not painfulll in studie ... dothe not seruice accordinge to the order set downe ... a common drunkarde ... an extorcioner ... he also takes brybes ... for certefyinge false penancies ... vehementelie suspected for comittinge adulterie ... also an instructor of yoonge folkes how to commit the syn of fornication ... and not to beget ... children' (BIY V.1590-1 CB2, ff. 78v-79)
 1592 visitation vicar 'negligent in his service ... useth not the surples nor crosse. Noe sermons these iiii years but one... he readeth no homilies ... Hee resorteth much to Alehouses' (1592 visitation, p. 416)
 children 2 sons, 1 daughter (CPRD)

**SHARPE, Thomas Thurstaston WR rector CCed ID 32397
 (John in call list) also 129214 (John)**

b. 1513 on Wirral age 56 in 1569 (F. C. Beazley, 'The Parish of Thurstaston', *THSLC*, 75, (1923), p. 125-6)
 m. probably not – no bequests to wife or children
 d. 1605 *THSLC*, 75, p. 126
 pres. 1542 23/6/1542 by Thomas Pole (CCed)
 career resigned in 1601 and lived with his cousin at Neston (will)
 1578 visitation presented 'for want of sermons' (BIY V 1578/9 CB2, f. 15v)
WILL CALS WS 1605 Thomas Sharp

SHAW, John	Sandbach	MD	vicar	CCEd 24083
b. 1543 m.	age about 32 in 1575 (CALS WC 1575 Reginald Cahowe) Elizabeth (J. P. Earwaker, <i>The History of the Ancient Parish of Sandbach</i> (published privately, 1890), p. 47)			
d. 1616 pres. 1576 career 1592 report children	buried 16/1/1616 (<i>ibid.</i>) 23/5/1576 by Thomas Wilbraham curate at Sandbach in 1565 (CCEd) 'no graduates but preachers, honest men' (CCEd) numerous, including John who acted as his father's curate (Earwaker, <i>op. cit.</i>)			
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SMALLWOOD, John	Coppenhall	NN	rector	CCEd 32473
b. 1525 m.	age 50 in 1575 (CS, 3rd Series, xxi, p. 21) probably not – no bequests to wife; base daughter Catherine			
d. by 1584 ord.	will proved 30/6/1584 priest 18/9/1546 by John Bird (CCEd)			
pres. 1554 career	6/6/1554 by Richard Wilbraham (CCEd) assistant at Acton in 1548 (CALS EDV 2/4, f. 13); rural dean of Middlewich by 1571 (CCALS EDC 5 1571.10 Davenham)			
WILL	Piccope (Second Portion, pp. 59-61)			
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SMITH, Randle	Chester, St Martin Chester, St Michael	CS CS	curate curate	CCEd 32478
ord. 1567 pres. by 1578 St Martin	priest 1567 by William Downham between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 49) and 1578 (curate at 1578 visitation)			
pres. by 1578 St Michael	between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 48v) and 1578 (curate at 1578 visitation)			
career 1578 visitation	curate of two of the poorest parishes in Chester absolved for performing clandestine marriages without banns (BIY V 1578/9 CB2, f. 16)			
<hr/>				
STREET, Thomas	Heswall	WR	rector	CCEd 34017
d. 1582 pres. 1570 1578 visitation	buried 21/8/1582, PR (CALS P 129/9/1/1) 31/8/1570 by Thomas Browne and John Annion (CCEd) 'no sermons but by ther parson ... a preacher not lycenced' (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 15v)			

TATTENHALL, George Bunbury **NN** **vicar** CEd 127367

b. 1538 age 40 in 1578, local - raised by previous vicar ('Stray Notes',
THSLC, 71, (1919), pp. 92-3)
 m. 1582 Mary (CRPD)
 career probably rector of Ightfield, Shropshire from 1590 (CCed
 29785)
 pres. by 1578 between 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 57v) and 1578 (curate at 1578
 visitation)
 brother-in-law William Allen of Wistaston (CCed 22753)

TAYLOR, Thomas Grappenhall **FR** **vicar** CCEd 37301

d. 1582 died by 31/7/1582 (CCEd)
 pres. 1574 24/9/1574 by William Downham due to lapse (CCEd)
 career M.A. (CCEd); chaplain to Gilbert Gerrard, attorney general
 (BIY V 1578/9 CB2, f. 22)
 1578 visitation presented for non-residence and for want of sermons (BIY V
 1578/9 CB3, f. 22)

THORLEY, John **Brereton** **MD** **rector** CCEd 27310

b. probably from Biddulph, Staffordshire
 d. 1597 by 29/9/1597 (CCEd)
 ord. 1567 priest 31/8/1567 by William Downham
 pres. 1576 11/9/1576 by Sir Ralph Bagnall of Dieulacres, Staffordshire
 (Ormerod, iii, p. 94)
 career parochial curate, Horton, Staffordshire by 19/6/1573; vicar
 Biddulph from 13/8/1577 to death '*scholaris ruralis et utcunque
 litteratus*' (country-educated, nevertheless literate) (Landor, p.
 27)
 1595 visitation 'vycar of Biddulph ... where he is resydent ... not known to be
 dispensed withal to hold twoo benefyces' (CS, 3rd Series, xliv,
 p. 26)

TRAFFORD, Henry **Wilmslow** **MC** **rector** CCEd 34635

b. son of local gentry family (Earwaker, i, pp. 89-90)
 m. probably not – no bequests to wife or children
 d. 1591 3/9/1591 (Earwaker, *op. cit.*)
 ord. 1544 priest 29/3/1544 by John Bird (CCEd)
 pres. 1542 21/5/1542 by his brother, Edmund Trafford of Trafford
 (Earwaker, *op. cit.*)

WILL Piccope (Second Portion), pp. 18-20
 funeral sermon by 'Mr Caldewall ... of Mobberley ... he to haue
 ... vjs viijd'
 books valued at 10s to remain at the church

URMSTON, Robert **Bidston** **WR** **curate** CCEd 23999

b. 1518 local family (W. F. Irvine (ed.), *The Baptismal, Marriage and Burial Registers of the Parish of Bidston* (Birkenhead, 1893), p.i;
 age upward of 50 in 1568 (CALS EDC 2/8, f. 161)
 m. probably not – no bequests to wife or children
 d. 1604 at Wallasey (Irvine, *op. cit.*)
 pres. by 1563 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 27v)
 career held the living as curate until at least 1588 (Irvine, *op. cit.*)
WILL CALS WS 1604 Robert Urmston

VAUDREY, Robert **Bowdon** **FR** **vicar** CCEd 29083

b. son of Robert Vaudrey of The Riddings (CS, 3rd Series, xxi, p. 37)
 pres. 1561 paid First Fruits 21 October 1561 (Selby, p. 398)
 career also perpetual vicar of Over from about 1565 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 24) to resignation 3 May 1572 (CCEd)

WALKER, James **Plemstall** **CS** **rector** CCEd 34528 and 23997

ord. possibly 24/9/1542 by John Bird
 pres. 1545 11/11/1545 by Richard Walker, dean of St John's, Chester
 (CCEd) CCEd assumes successive rectors with the same name
 career possibly also rector of Drayton Bassett, Staffordshire 1555 to 1559 (Landor, pp. 85-7) and Morley, Derbyshire 1573 to 1597 (CCEd 17859)
 1592 report 'no graduates nor preachers but grammarian scholars and catechisers' (CCEd)
 1592 visitation 'Nott resident, excommunicated' (1592 visitation, p. 411)

WARBURTON, Thomas Lymm – Warburton moiety FR rector CCed 34366
and 34632

m. Anne(named in will); possibly widow of Edward Pendleton,
clerk
d. 1597 inventory taken 18/7/1597 (will)
ord. 1572 priest probably 2/3/1572 by William Downham (CCed)
pres. 1571 14/12/1571 by Sir John Warburton (CCed)
career M.A. (CCed). Held Bowdon in plurality 1588 (CCed);
moderator Northwich exercises (Richardson, p. 66)
1592 report 'preachers' (CCed)
WILL CALS WS 1697 Thomas Warburton
books valued at £4
children 2 sons, 1 daughter, 2 stepchildren (named in will)

WATSON, Robert Tilston ML rector CCed 34347

pres. 1573 5/6/1573 (Ormerod, ii, p. 697)
resigned 9/3/1602 (CCed)
career may have been curate of Walsall, 1559 (Landor, pp. 297-8); was
rector of Preston-upon-the-Weald Moors 1557 to 1576; Eaton on
the Weald Moors 1561 to 1563; also rector of Kynnersley,
Shropshire (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 8) 1566 to 1605 (CCed
29947)
1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCed)
1592 visitation 'Hath ii benefices ... he is nott resident' (1592 visitation, p. 415)

WILLIAMSON, Richard Farndon CS curate CCed 34287

m. Ann named in will
d. 1603 will proved 1603
pres. by 1563 CALS EDV 1/3, f. 22v
1592 report 'no graduates or preachers but catechisers' (CCed)
WILL CALS WS 1603 Richard Williamson
charity 3s 4d to the poor of Farndon
children 1 son (named in will)

WILMSLEY, Edmund Tattenhall ML rector CCed 23969
b. local; son of George Wilmesley, chancellor of diocese of Chester
d. 1582 died by 2/10/1582 (Ormerod, ii, p. 720)
ord. 1572 16/3/1572 by William Downham (CCed)
pres. 1571 7/6/1571 by Ellen Wilmesley (his mother) (Ormerod, ii, p. 720)
career M.A. (CCed)

WILMOTT, William **Rostherne FR** **rector** CCed no entry

It has not been possible to find out anything about this rector, but he came to the parish after 1563 (CALS EDV 1/3, f. 26v)

WINSTANLEY, Richard **West Kirby WR** **rector** CCed 29162

d. 1603 by 15/10/1603 (CCed)
ord. 1558 subdeacon 24/9/1558 by Cuthbert Scott (CCed)
pres. 1568 17/5/1568 paid First Fruits 17 May 1568 (Selby, p. 398)
1578 visitation presented for non-residence (BIY V 1578/9 CB3, f. 16v)
1592 report 'no graduates, but of mean learning & suspected conversation'
(CCed Thomas Winstanley)

WOOD, Matthew **Wybunbury NN** **vicar** CCed 30471

b. nephew of previous incumbent; probably local
m. Alice, buried 10/4/1612; PR (CALS P 37/1/1)
d. 1618 buried 15/4/1612; PR
ord. 1569 priest 6/3/1569 by William Downham '*scholaris*' (CCed)
pres. 1570 22/6/1570 by Edward Holland and Richard Kenyon (CCed)
career moderator of Nantwich exercises (Richardson, p. 66); rural dean
of Wirral from 1585 (CCed)
1592 report 'no graduates, but preachers, honest men' (CCed)
children 7 sons, 6 daughters (PR)

WRIGHT, William **Eccleston CS** **rector** CCed 23961
Waverton CS **rector**

m. several children; wife's name unknown; she may have been a
daughter of William Downham (Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.
58)
pres.by 1573 Eccleston collated by William Downham by March 1573 (BL
Additional MS 2091, f. 268v)
pres.1576 Waverton collated by William Downham (CCed)
career M.A. (CCed); chaplain to William Downham (BL Additional
MS 2091, f. 268v); moderator Chester exercises (Richardson, p.
66)
1578 visitation Eccleston – 'Ther parson hath two benefices and is not
Resydent with them ... The forfeiture is not levyed for the
absente' (BIY 1578/9 CB3 f. 21v)
1592 report 'preacher'(CCed)
children 5 sons; 2 daughters baptised Waverton; PR (CALS P
282/4554/1)

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E 101 King's Remembrancer: Accounts Various

E 117 Church Goods Inventories and Miscellanea

E 134 King's Remembrancer: Depositions taken by Commission

E 135 Miscellaneous Ecclesiastical Documents

E 301/8 Court of Augmentations, certificates of colleges, chantries - County of Cheshire

E 337 Office of First Fruits and Tenths: Plea Rolls

Court of Requests

REQ 2 Pleadings

Palatinate of Chester

CHES 5 Exchequer of Chester: Mainprise Rolls

CHES 15 Chester exchequer pleadings

CHES 24 Records of the County Court and Courts of Great Sessions for Chester and Flint

CHES 29 Chester plea rolls

Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury

PROB 11 Will Registers

Records of various departments formerly entitled Special Collections

SC 6 Special Collections: Ministers' and Receivers' Accounts

State Papers

SP 1 State Papers, Henry VIII: General Series

SP 10 State Papers Domestic, Edward VI

SP 11	State Papers Domestic, Philip and Mary
SP 12	State Papers Domestic, Elizabeth I
SP 15	State Papers Domestic, Edward VI-James 1: Addenda
SP 63	State Papers Ireland, Elizabeth I to George III

Chester Archives and Local Studies, Cheshire Record Office

DCH	Cholmondeley family of Cholmondeley records
DDS	Downes family of Shrigley records
DDX	Meyer Collection
DFI	William Fergusson Irvine antiquarian records
EDA 1	Diocesan administration records
EDA 2	Bishop's registers
EDA 3	Bishop's Miscellaneous Registers and Surveys
EDA 12	Proceedings of the Commissioners in Ecclesiastical Causes
EDC 1	Court books
EDC 2	Consistory Court deposition books
EDC 5	Consistory Court cause papers
EDP	Parish bundles
EDV	Visitation records
P	Parish records
WC	Disputed wills
WS	Wills – supra series
ZAB 1	First Chester City Assembly Book
ZCR 469	Aldersey Family Collection
ZS/B	City of Chester sheriffs' books
ZM/B	City of Chester mayors' books

Denbighshire Archives, Ruthin

DD/PP	Plas Power MSS
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Greater Manchester County Record Office

E7	Papers of the Assheton family of Middleton
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Liverpool University Library Special Collections

MS 23.5	Archdeacon Robert Rogers breviary
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