

Social History, Local History, and Historiography

Social History, Local History,
and Historiography:
Collected Essays

By

R.C. Richardson

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P U B L I S H I N G

Social History, Local History, and Historiography: Collected Essays,
by R.C. Richardson

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PREFACE

This volume collects together some of my principal essay-length publications – twelve in all – written over the course of a long career in higher education. The majority of them were first published in the last decade, three date from the 1980s and 1990s, and one first appeared in 1973. Five originally came out in academic journals in the UK and USA, two of them (chapters 9 and 11) first saw the light of day as chapters in *festschriften*. Five of the others (chapters 1, 3, 7, 8, and 10) originally formed part of volumes I edited or to which I contributed.

The book's title reflects my long-standing interest in three principal fields of history and the inseparable connections between them, going back to my undergraduate days at the University of Leicester in the early 1960s studying under Joan Thirsk, and later in the same decade to my PhD at Manchester on Puritanism in the pre-Civil War diocese of Chester. Most of the essays gathered here are based in the early modern period, my chief period specialism, and deploy a wide range of source materials. Two others (11 and 12) reach out into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, though their subject matter contains some echoes of my preoccupations in the early modern period. Some focus on a particular individual – not all of them well-known – to open up a subject (2, 3, 6, 9, and 12). Three of them deal with aspects of the history and historiography of the English Revolution. The local histories addressed here specifically relate to Lancashire and Cheshire, the Home Counties, and Hampshire, all of them areas in which I have lived and worked for extended periods. By contrast, chapter 10 is a wide-ranging comparative study, the only one of its kind in print, of the evolution of local history as a subject in England and America. This, like chapter 9, reflects my frequent visits to the USA and my growing interest in different aspects of the development of Anglo-American relations. Some of the chapters have a pronounced interdisciplinary flavour (4, 5, 6, 8, 9, and 11) – again a long-standing feature of my approach to history dating back to my first academic appointment in the 1960s in a pioneering, subject-linking, Humanities Department in what is now the University of Greenwich, and to my long-running co-editorship of the journal *Literature & History* (from 1975).

Rather than artificially separate these inter-related essays into three distinct sub-groups addressing the three fields of social history, local history,

and historiography, a general chronological arrangement by subject seems more appropriate. The essays complement my many book-length publications since the 1970s, starting with *Puritanism in North West England* (1972), and later including *The Debate on the English Revolution* (1977, 3rd ed., 1998), *The Changing Face of English Local History* (2000), and most recently *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (2010). Unlike a single book, however, these essays – taken together – cover much broader territory and provide a varied gallery of studies of particular topics (predominantly of the micro variety). They also, necessarily, document some of the features of the development of my own outlook on history as a subject since the 1960s and the conceptual apparatus and methodologies I have variously employed. Though written on a considerable range of topics at different times and for different purposes, when assembled together the essays in this collection have a mutually reinforcing unity and illustrate both the initial inter-relationships between society and locality and later historians' changing perceptions of them.

In bringing together essays first published in different places care has been taken to impose a standardised house-style. Occasional cuts and amplifications have been made where these seemed necessary and to remove redundant repetition. In a number of places reference has been made to later books and articles to strengthen the original foundations of the work reproduced here. But the essays remain largely as they were first written and published. As with all volumes of an author's collected essays, substantial re-writing has not been part of this project. A companion volume – *Receptions and Revisiting* – containing a number of my shorter writings (mainly review articles) is being brought out by the same publisher. Spelling in quotations from early modern sources has been modernised in the interests of clarity. Dates are given with the calendar year beginning on 1 January. Pre-metric prices – pounds, shillings and pence – and weights – hundredweights, quarters, pounds – are used, where these occurred in the original documents.

Permissions to reproduce the essays collected here are given in the acknowledgements. Joan Thirsk, as always, expressed a continuing interest in this project as it developed. My heartfelt thanks go to my good friend Dongyoung Kim of University College London for his expert help with all computer-related questions and for reformatting these chapters, and to Amanda Millar at Cambridge Scholars Publishing for conscientious final editing.

August 2011

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CHAPTER ONE

PURITANISM AND THE ECCLESIASTICAL AUTHORITIES IN THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR*

In stark contrast to the situation in the south of England, the existence of Puritanism in the diocese of Chester, in Elizabeth's reign at least, was in no sense regarded by the authorities as a threat to the well-being of the church. On the contrary, the prevailing attitude was that Puritanism was far too useful and necessary to be persecuted. This region, after all, was one of the 'dark corners of the land' faced with the constant and alarming threat of Catholicism on the one hand and irreligion on the other; church and civil government needed to enlist the able and energetic support of puritan preachers. The ministers' patrons, therefore, could always offer in their defence the effective argument that without them the reformed religion in the diocese stood virtually unprotected against the old faith and its adherents.

This was a view that was generally shared by the ecclesiastical authorities. Bishop John Aylmer of London, for example, in 1577 saw the attractive possibility of ridding London of its numerous puritan firebrands by using – and exhausting – them in active service elsewhere. 'They might be profitably employed in Lancashire, Staffordshire, Shropshire, and other such like barbarous counties, to draw the people from Papism and gross ignorance'.¹ Similarly, in 1582, the Earl of Huntingdon, Lord President of the Council of the North, declared to the Bishop of Chester that 'the want of diligent and faithful preaching doth wonderfully hinder the building of our church, and in these north parts it is most apparent'.² In the following year, a similar reminder was given to the same Bishop – William Chaderton – by the Privy Council about the pressing need for more preachers.³ Secretary Walsingham said as much to the Earl of Derby in 1583.⁴ Thus, while in the south at this time puritan divines were being harried to conform, in the diocese of Chester – as in that of York⁵ – a working cooperation evolved between the authorities and the puritan

clergy. The puritan onslaught on Catholicism in the diocese of Chester was viewed as an integral part of the wider, official campaign to extirpate the old religion.

Around 1584, James Gosnell, lecturer at Bolton in Lancashire, wrote to the Leicestershire divine Anthony Gilby about the contrast between official ecclesiastical policy in the north and that in the province of Canterbury. Gosnell was from Leicestershire himself and he had good news to tell his brother in the ministry. ‘The Bishop of Canterbury [John Whitgift] has not yet, God be thanked stung us with his articles⁶, which in the south parts have quenched the Lord’s lights nearly to the number of two hundred’.⁷ But ecclesiastical policy towards puritans in the north, it should be stressed again, was not one of unwilling or passive toleration. For example, in the same year a system of preaching Exercises – regular monthly meetings at fourteen centres – was set up to cover the whole diocese of Chester.⁸ Its purpose was to win over the people from popery and at the same time improve the educational standards of the lower clergy. The scheme took effect with full official approval and direction.

The Exercises of 1584 arose out of an arrangement made in 1582 which provided for thrice-yearly synods which the Lancashire clergy were to attend. The Privy Council wrote to Bishop William Chaderton in April 1584 praising the original scheme and recommending its extension.⁹ Moreover their Lordships appended a list of clergy in the diocese with whom they wished the Bishop to confer. These were not, as might be imagined, those renowned for their orthodoxy, but some of the most prominent nonconformists. Listed here, for example, were Christopher Goodman of Chester, John Caldwell of Winwick, Richard Midgley of Rochdale, William Langley of Prestwich and Edward Fleetwood of Wigan. Arrangements for the enlarged version of the preaching Exercises were accordingly made. Significantly the document setting out the details was signed not only by the Bishop but also by the puritans Edward Fleetwood, Leonard Shaw of Bury, William Langley and Richard Midgley. The Bishop now wrote to the various deans of his diocese informing them of the Privy Council’s instructions concerning the enlargement of the scheme of preaching Exercises and of his own discussions with the leading preachers in his charge and to enlist their support in securing attendance.¹⁰

This was no means the only decisive intervention from above in favour of the puritan divines of the diocese. In 1599 the four Queen’s Preachers for Lancashire – each appointment worth £50 a year – were established as part of the official effort to win over the county to the reformed religion.¹¹ ‘I have seated the Queen’s Preachers in Lancashire’, wrote Chaderton’s

successor, Bishop Richard Vaughan, to Cecil in 1600, after the first appointments had been made, 'with as much care as I could, and following the records of presentments made to me and the Judges of Assize of late years, I have put one in every part of the county where there are most recusants...' ¹² Although it was with Cecil that the scheme originated, the Bishop of Chester had an important share in making the first appointments and thereafter was left in complete control of the nominations. Bishop Vaughan particularly wanted Richard Midgley, formerly vicar of Rochdale, to take up one of the preachings in view of 'his well deserving of the churches in these parts'. ¹³ Midgley was a strict nonconformist, and the Bishop's choice of him may possibly have caused some official concern in the southern province. But Bishop Vaughan stood firm. 'As to Mr Midgley', he declared in the following year, 'whatever exception may be taken to him, considering the good he has done in the last forty years and the respect in which he is held, I am resolved for his continuance unless by superior authority I am pressed to the contrary'. ¹⁴

Bishop Vaughan's choice of Richard Midgley provides a further indication of the peculiarities of the situation in the diocese of Chester. The endowment of the four Queen's Preachers was a royal attempt to further orthodoxy in Lancashire, but of the four first appointed, three – Midgley, William Harrison and William Forster – were inclined to Puritanism. ¹⁵

In view of their usefulness to church and government, the Elizabethan puritan divines of the diocese of Chester were very rarely troubled for their nonconformity by the ecclesiastical authorities. In contrast, Giles Wigginton, incumbent at Sedbergh in the archdeaconry of Richmond – a Yorkshireman by birth and a graduate and later Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge – aroused the personal animosity of none other than Archbishop Whitgift. Such at least is the impression gained from Wigginton's own full, although very biased, account of the Archbishop's dealings with him, which he gave to Sir Walter Mildmay, his patron. ¹⁶

According to Wigginton the vendetta was of long standing and had begun in his student days at Cambridge. Whitgift became Master of Trinity in 1567 when Wigginton was still an undergraduate. Thereafter, Wigginton told Mildmay, Whitgift did all in his power to hinder his advancement. He tried first of all to block his election to a fellowship. Then in 1571 when Wigginton received his MA, the Vice Chancellor – at the instigation of Whitgift, the preacher felt sure – gave 'a general admonition and reproof to certain over busy fellows', and especially mentioned one, 'whom he termed Whittington, for God would not suffer him to utter the word plainly'. But this was not all. 'At sundry times and in sundry sorts I

suffered like injuries at his hands', Wigginton went on, 'and at the hands of his chief adherents, scholars and friends, procured and encouraged by him to molest and trouble me, mainly for wearing my hat instead of a square cap and for not wearing a surplice when I went to the chapel, for speaking against non-residents, stage plays and popery or prelacy, and such like matters'.¹⁷

Wigginton claimed that the Archbishop's calculated opposition towards him continued unabated after he had left Cambridge. Even after he had settled at Sedbergh, Wigginton was convinced that Whitgift was trying to stir up Archbishop Edwin Sandys of York and Bishop Chaderton of Chester to take action against him. Certainly Sandys was aware of what a radical he had in his midst. As early as 1582, he had written to the Bishop of Chester that 'your Lordship shall do well to better Mr Wigginton, a young man very far out of frame, who in my opinion will not accept of you as of his ordinary, a bishop. Neither would I accept of him being in your place as a preacher in my diocese. *He laboureth not to build but to pull down and by what means he can to overthrow the state ecclesiastical*'.¹⁸ The opportunity for which, in Wigginton's opinion, Whitgift had long been waiting came two or three years later when complaints were lodged against him by members of his congregation. Whitgift, Wigginton told Mildmay, enthusiastically acted upon this information and urged the Archbishop of York and the Bishop of Chester to eject him.

Wigginton was indeed deprived of his living and a successor introduced. But his patron, Mildmay, intervened on his behalf and he was restored. He had, in any case, ignored his deprivation and continued to preach. Later, however, in 1586, Wigginton was imprisoned in London at Whitgift's instigation and was subsequently deprived and degraded. The immediate cause of this action, as Wigginton himself admitted, was for

praying and preaching in every one of my sermons commonly against anti-christ and against all popish prelates and usurpers such as had no warrant from God's [word] to deal in his church, and yet did tyrannise and overrule the same. And sometimes praying in my sermons that God would confound the councils of Achitophel and that God would send and establish true pastors, teachers, elders and deacons, with the whole right government of Christ in every several congregation of his church. And I used to pray... that God would bless all her Majesty's faithful councillors and namely my Lord the Earl of Leicester [Whitgift's great adversary] in his expedition and warfare for the church and for the gospel'.¹⁹

Having preached such inflammatory matter, it is hardly surprising that attempts – according to Wigginton, by the Earls of Warwick and

Huntingdon among others – to secure his release were unsuccessful. Wigginton remained in prison.

But even such detention could provide an ardent Presbyterian like Wigginton with ample scope for his talents. In prison he came into contact with the religious fanatics William Hacket and Edmund Copinger,²⁰ and Whitgift – perhaps not unjustly – came also to suspect Wigginton of being in some way involved in the Marprelate tracts. Although he vigorously denied the accusation, Wigginton refused to answer questions on oath, and he was not restored to Sedbergh until 1592.

Wigginton's experience has been described at some length since it provides one of the very few instances of Elizabethan attacks on the nonconformist clergy of the diocese of Chester. But although Wigginton himself and the case against him were quite untypical, this was not the only occasion in Elizabeth's reign on which an attempt was made to reverse the normal policy of toleration in the diocese and to impose a tighter control over the puritan clergy in this region, particularly those of Lancashire.

A more general, but at the same time isolated and apparently short-lived, effort to bring the puritan divines of Lancashire to conformity was made in 1590. On this occasion, as in Wigginton's case, the initiative behind the action came from outside the diocese. Archbishop John Piers of York used his metropolitan visitation of that year as a weapon against the puritans, though in this he may only have been acting on advice from Whitgift.²¹ It was not with the Bishop of Chester that the 1590 drive against Puritanism originated.

The most puritan region of the whole diocese was the deanery of Manchester, and it was with the clergy of this area that Piers was most concerned.²² His metropolitan visitation had revealed that the use of the surplice was almost entirely neglected in most parishes. The clergy of the Collegiate Church in Manchester were perhaps the most obstinate offenders in this respect, and they were singled out for separate comment.²³ They were enjoined to provide themselves with surplices, wear them regularly at all services, or else be summoned to appear before the Archbishop at York.

The preachers themselves, however, were quite capable of defending themselves. A letter was drawn up and delivered to the Archbishop – a letter which contained an admission of their nonconformity but which also proclaimed their fundamental loyalty to the church. They emphasised that the peculiarities of the religious state of Lancashire were such that special treatment was necessary. Ceremonies, they wrote

however otherwise they may be thought lawful and tolerable elsewhere, yet assuredly in these parts of our country they may seem less expedient than in any other part of the realm ... These considerations ... being well known and duly weighed of our own Bishop have hitherto caused him to deal favourably with us in these matters, in which favourable course we doubt not but of himself he purposeth to continue, as finding it most expedient for our state, which considerations also no doubt have drawn heretofore the like grace towards us from your Lordship's most worthy predecessor'.²⁴

They did not forget, of course, to remind the Archbishop of their usefulness as preachers and as front-line adversaries of the papists. By their ceaseless activity on behalf of the reformed religion the puritan preachers had made many enemies among the Catholic population who were only waiting for an opportunity for revenge. Having thus forcefully insisted on their loyalty and diligence and stated their case, the preachers' request was that

your good Lordship upon this full intelligence of our state will not vary from the former favourable proceedings which hitherto have been taken with us, wherein we doubt not but your Lordship shall find a far greater blessing to the good reformation of our country from the gross idolatry and heathenish profanations which yet continue with many among us than if a more strict course were taken in these smaller matters of nonconformity in the preachers'.²⁵

Archbishop Piers, probably under instructions from Whitgift, stood firm. He wrote to Edmund Hopwood of Hopwood, a JP and a puritan sympathiser

whereas they allege that they speak not against the communion book their actions and examples are witnesses to the contrary... In their other allegations I see no sufficient reason to warrant the breaking of the order of the church established by authority and not being contrary to God His word. Therefore I do require that according to the order of the communion book they have divine service celebrated in their churches and their sacraments administered in a surplice'.²⁶

There could be no question of continuing to treat Lancashire as a special case. Laws were laws, and there could be no exemptions.²⁷ But the issuing and implementation of orders in sixteenth-century England were two entirely different things. Despite the Archbishop's determination, there is no evidence that conformity was actually enforced in the diocese of

Chester; the use of the surplice, and other ceremonies, continued to be neglected by puritan divines ministering there.

At the Hampton Court Conference in 1604 a plea for a continuation of the traditional policy of studied lenience towards the puritan clergy of his native county was made by Laurence Chaderton, brother of the Bishop and Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. William Barlow reported that Chaderton had begged James I that ‘the wearing of the surplice might not be urged upon some honest, godly and painful ministers in some parts of Lancashire, who feared that if they should be forced to them, many whom they had won to the Gospel would slide back and revolt unto popery again...’ His request met initially with a not unfavourable response. The King promised that moderation would be shown to those preachers who ‘by their pains and preaching had converted many from popery and were withall men of quiet disposition, honest of life and diligent in their calling...’ To those, on the other hand, who were ‘of a turbulent and opposite spirit, both they and others of that unquiet humour, should presently be enforced to a conformity...’²⁸ In the end some sort of compromise was agreed upon and it was hoped that that the nonconformist divines of Lancashire would see the error of their ways.

Although proceedings were taken against individual ministers, the puritan clergy of the diocese were still obstinately persisting in their ‘errors’ in 1616 when Thomas Morton succeeded George Lloyd as Bishop of Chester.²⁹ Faced with this situation, one of Morton’s earliest actions was to cite the main puritan clergy of the diocese to appear before him and demand from them a reasoned explanation of their continuing opposition to the ceremonies. Bishop Morton, wrote John Barwick,

was content himself to endeavour their satisfaction in a public and solemn conference with them upon ... these ...points. But their perverseness frustrating his expectation and desires in relation to their own good his next care was to make his endeavours more public for the common good of the rest of their party. And therefore he printed a relation of that conference’.³⁰

This work was his *Defence of the Innocencie of the Three Ceremonies of the Church of England*.³¹ It was prefaced by an ‘Epistle to Nonconformists’ in which the Bishop told the puritan divines of

the extreme injury you do unto the Church. But you pretend peace because, forsooth, you preach not against conformity – as though there were not a preaching as well in the ear as on the house top, or not as well an exemplary as there is an oratory seducement... And that which herein doth double your offence is that your opposition is grounded upon a sinister conceit that our church observeth these ceremonies in an opinion of

holiness and necessity which is altogether contrary to her own express protestation...

The Bishop scornfully rejected the general contention of William Hinde, preacher at Bunbury,³² that the imposition of the ceremonies was unlawful since it deprived men of their christian liberty.³³ To support his case he provided ample quotations from scripture, the Church Fathers, and leading Protestant theologians. Challenging the arguments put forward by the puritan divines, the Bishop insisted that the wearing of special dress by clergymen was no different in principle from the use of robes by lawyers and magistrates to denote their office.³⁴ The clergymen's opposition, he was convinced, produced schism and scandal.³⁵

On the question of other ceremonies the Bishop asserted that the nonconformists were misrepresenting the official position. Using the sign of the cross in church services was not a popish practice.³⁶ Nor was kneeling at communion in any way idolatrous. The Eucharist was no ordinary domestic banquet where casual sitting was in order.³⁷ It was absolutely right, in his view, to insist that 'internal reverence [be made] visible by bodily gesture...'³⁸

Morton's defence of conformity was published in 1618. In 1617 James I had issued the famous *Declaration of Sports*, a document which attacked the puritan position, but from a different angle. Morton was its author. The declaration was framed with Lancashire in mind and was only made generally applicable the following year.³⁹ Its avowed purpose was to make certain that lawful recreations were not curtailed. Only bull and bear baitings, bowling and the performance of plays on Sundays were expressly prohibited.⁴⁰ Appearances notwithstanding, the *Declaration* was intended to continue to contribute to the solution of Lancashire's Catholic problem. Over-strict regulation of the sabbath, it was argued, could only persuade Roman Catholics that the reformed religion was dull and joyless. The document, of course, was not an edict of toleration for the Catholic population. Recusants, in fact, were denied all these Sunday pastimes since they were 'unworthy of any lawful recreation after the [said] service that will not first come to the church and serve God'. There is no doubt, however, that the *Declaration of Sports* was designed to weaken the puritan position and to undermine the authority of the preachers, who by now were beginning to be considered almost a greater nuisance than the Catholics they opposed. It was a direct attack on the puritan insistence on the godly discipline.⁴¹ Moreover, the Bishop of Chester was authorised to take 'straight order with all the puritans and precisians within [his diocese] either constraining them to conform [them]selves or to leave the country according to the law of our kingdom and canons of our church, and so to

strike equally on both hands against the contemners of our authority and adversaries of our church’.

How effective the Declaration was in achieving its objects and how much difference it made to the local situation, is difficult to determine. But since it had to be re-issued in 1633, it can hardly have succeeded as well as originally intended. The 1633 re-issue was deemed necessary because ‘of late in some counties of our kingdom we find that under pretence of taking away abuses, there hath been a general forbidding, not only of ordinary meetings, but of the feasts of the dedication of the churches, commonly called wakes’.⁴² So that none should be ignorant of the *Declaration* it was required to be read in all parish churches.⁴³ But it is certain that the main effect of the *Declarations* was not to weaken the hold of Puritanism but to identify it even more closely with sabbatarianism in such a way that the two tended to be linked almost inseparably with each other.⁴⁴ By the Civil War, ‘puritan’ and ‘sabbatarian’ were virtually synonyms.

The official attitude to Puritanism and Catholicism in the diocese of Chester was beginning to change in the early seventeenth century. But Puritanism still continued to develop, and a general conformity was not enforced. It was not until the Archbishop of York’s metropolitan visitation in 1633 that a determined, wholesale and systematic attempt was made to curb the puritans of this region. Richard Neile (1562-1640), who became Archbishop of York in 1631, soon proved himself ‘the great adversary of the puritan faction’ in the north.⁴⁵

Neile’s visitation articles for 1633 – with which all parishes were required to equip themselves – show the extent of his preparations against the puritans. In them he demanded that churchwardens should tell him whether their parish clergy observed all the orders, rites and ceremonies prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer and whether set forms were being abbreviated or dispensed with to allocate more service time to preaching.⁴⁶ The Archbishop also wanted detailed information about failures to kneel at the communion service and about any public railing against the Prayer Book, the Thirty nine Articles, and the authority of bishops.⁴⁷ The holding of fasts and weekday lectures was also investigated.⁴⁸

As far as the laity were concerned Neile required churchwardens to inform him whether any in their congregations had deviated from standing or kneeling as prescribed in the church services or irreverently failed to remove their hats in service time.⁴⁹ He also wanted to know whether any had spoken disrespectfully of bishops and the Anglican church and separated themselves from their congregations. Irregularities at baptism

services were also looked into.⁵⁰ The visitation articles thus show both the Archbishop's full awareness of the forms in which Puritanism was expressed by clergymen and laity and his firm determination to eradicate them.

The visitation took place in the autumn of 1633 and was conducted not by Neile himself but by his three equally anti-puritan commissioners, John Cosin, William Easdale and Henry Wickham.⁵¹ It marked the turning point in official policy towards the puritans of the diocese of Chester. The change, as has been shown, had been coming for some time but both the scope and effects of earlier dealings with the puritans (such as Morton's) had been limited – a fact clearly shown by Neile's visitation report.

The commissioners found the Prayer Book 'neglected and abused in most places by chopping, changing, altering, omitting and adding ... so unregarded [in fact] that many knew not how to read the service according to the Book'. 'Many were found', the Archbishop continued in the account he gave to Charles I, 'that thought themselves well deserving and conformable men, though they observed not the Book and orders prescribed so long as they did not oppose them...'⁵² But the dividing line between conformity and nonconformity had been left deliberately vague for so long in the diocese of Chester that Neile ought not to have been surprised to find that 'the country is full ... of puritans ... though they will not endure to be thought any such'.⁵³

On no occasion before 1633 had Puritanism in the diocese of Chester been subjected to such a penetrating investigation. But what was the subsequent experience of those who were presented in this year? In a great many cases, unfortunately, the visitation records give no indication – a fact which may itself imply that in the event formal proceedings were not taken against them. Further details are available, however, of some of those puritan clergymen and laymen whose nonconformity was uncovered in 1633. For example, George Willis, curate at Broughton Chapel in Amounderness, was charged in the visitation for not wearing the surplice and for not reading prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and for these acts of nonconformity he was inhibited.⁵⁴ Robert Shaw, vicar of Cockerham, presented on similar charges, was sternly warned 'hereafter to observe the orders and ceremonies of the Book of Common Prayer'.⁵⁵ William Gregg of Bolton, having been presented as a nonconformist, was then enjoined 'to catechise diligently... and that he do not administer the communion to any but those that kneel...'⁵⁶ Thomas Bewersall, the puritan curate at Blackley Chapel near Manchester, was presented on a variety of charges and required in future to follow the prescribed rubric of the church's ceremonies and to wear a surplice when officiating.⁵⁷ Hugh Burrows,

vicar of Runcorn, Cheshire, received a similar judgement.⁵⁸ At Witton the curate was presented for failure to wear the surplice and to read the canons, but was later dismissed with a warning.⁵⁹

The nonconformist clergy of Bunbury in Cheshire posed a special problem. The patron of this church living was the puritan-inclined London Haberdashers Company which asserted Bunbury's immunity from episcopal and archiepiscopal jurisdiction.⁶⁰ Neile's commissioners, however, would have none of this and took a firm line with the two clergymen there – Samuel Torshell and John Swan – and suspended them. Finding themselves in this position, the two puritans expediently submitted.⁶¹

At Richmond in Yorkshire the nonconformity of the incumbent, Thomas Rokeby, was fully noted in the visitation but as the commissioners declared, 'we have so dealt with him that he will not dare the like again in any kind'.⁶² Stern treatment was also extended to another clergyman from the archdeaconry of Richmond, the parson of Aldingham, who was suspended.⁶³ A curate at Wigan, deprived for non-wearing of the surplice, was re-instated after he conformed.⁶⁴

The commissioners' dealings with Richard Mather of Toxteth near Liverpool are known in more detail since they figure in his biography. Mather himself describes the interview he had prior to his suspension.⁶⁵ Unsuccessful attempts were made by some of his lay supporters to secure his release. But the situation was hardly eased by Mather's frank admission that he had never worn the surplice in all his time there. "What!", said the visitor, swearing as he spake it, 'preach fifteen years and never wear a surplice? It had been better for him that he had gotten seven bastards!' This, declared Mather's biographer, 'was a visitor's judgement!'⁶⁶

When the commissioners came to the Collegiate Church in Manchester, they found – not altogether to their surprise – that 'all things and all men were out of order'. To resist the intended reforms of the visitation, some of the Collegiate clergymen even pleaded 'exemptions from the canons and had common lawyers' opinions for them'.⁶⁷ The commissioners, however, overrode this resistance. 'We behaved ourselves so among them', they wrote, 'that we got them all to put on their quire habit – all but Mr Bourne – and some of the fellows to execute at service, which no man there alive ever saw so fully performed before'. William Bourne, Fellow of the College, as the commissioners emphasised, presented the greatest problem. After much cajoling, he was eventually persuaded to read service from the Prayer Book – for the first time in his thirty years at the College. But he could not be prevailed upon to wear the surplice, being 'ashamed to

put on that which he hath not worn heretofore...’ Bourne was therefore suspended.⁶⁸

Never before had so many puritan laymen been presented at Manchester in the course of a visitation. Twenty-seven were charged on this occasion with failing to kneel at the communion. Sixteen of the congregation were presented for keeping on their hats in church, and fifty-three for not kneeling at the reading of prayers. In addition, Thomas Worsley, gentleman, his wife and daughter were ‘credibly reported to be Brownists’.⁶⁹

In view of the incompleteness of the evidence, no meaningful statistics can be given concerning the treatment of lay puritans presented in the visitation of 1633; as in the case of the clergy, illustrations must again suffice. Edmund Fazakerley of Hale, for example, who was presented for his nonconformity, was merely ordered ‘to forbear the putting on of his hat and to stand up’ (at the saying of the creed).⁷⁰ Many of those non-kneelers at Bolton, however, were excommunicated.⁷¹ At Burton in Kendal Edward Preston, an unlicensed schoolmaster, though charged with organising conventicles and with making extempore prayers, was nonetheless dismissed with a warning. Charged along with him were three other lay puritans – separatists, in fact – and they were enjoined to attend their parish church diligently and to certify the fact.⁷²

In 1633, as in 1590, the initiative behind the drive against Puritanism came from outside rather than from within the diocese of Chester. It was Archbishop Neile of York, rather than John Bridgeman, Bishop of Chester, who was responsible for the change of policy. All the available evidence suggests that Bridgeman, who had been Bishop since 1619, was moderate in his own dealings with the puritans.⁷³ He was content to follow the traditional policy of his predecessors – as long, that is, as he was permitted to do so. ‘I must ingeniously confess I can neither justify nor excuse them’, wrote Neile of the Bishops of Chester and Carlisle in his visitation report, ‘yet this I know they will say, that finding their dioceses so distracted with papists and puritans, they thought by a mild way to recover the puritan part, lest that by carrying a severer hand upon the puritans than they had power to carry upon the papists, the popish party might take heart and opinion of favour...’⁷⁴ Bridgeman’s basically moderate approach to Puritanism, although the same policy which had been followed by most of his predecessors, was now quite unacceptable at York, Lambeth and Whitehall in the changing climate of the Laudian years. ‘The neglect of punishing puritans’, commented Charles I on Neile’s visitation report, ‘breeds papists’ – a new doctrine indeed so far as the diocese of Chester was concerned.

Only because of pressure from his superiors did Bridgeman's attitude to the puritans of his diocese begin to harden, and though personally well-disposed towards them he was bullied into taking at least some corrective action.⁷⁵ What must have helped to make Bridgeman more amenable to pressures from York and Canterbury in 1633 was the fact that he had himself very recently been the subject of a case heard before the High Commission. The investigation into the Bishop's alleged malpractices had been conducted only a matter of months before Neile's metropolitan visitation took place.⁷⁶ In the end Bridgeman's accusers and their claims that the Bishop had misappropriated funds and conspired with the puritans of his diocese were all discredited, and the Bishop exonerated.⁷⁷ But even so, when Neile's visitation of the diocese of Chester took place in the autumn of 1633, Bridgeman can hardly have been in a confident mood.

After the visitation puritans in the diocese of Chester never again enjoyed that almost complete immunity from official interference which they had known before. Neile tried to keep a watchful eye on the diocese through an extended use of the northern High Commission, and was always ready when necessary to prod Bridgeman into taking action against the nonconformists in his charge.⁷⁸ 'I might not run the race of one year at Ringley Chapel', wrote John Angier, one of the victims of the changed situation,

whither I was first called, and in that year was twice inhibited... In nine or ten years at Denton Chapel', he continued, 'I preached not above two separated years, to my best remembrance, without interruption and in that time was twice excommunicated... Sabbath assemblies were sundry times distractedly and sorrowfully broken up and my departure from habitation and people often forced [and] no means left in sight of return.'⁷⁹

A very rough indication of the increased effort against the puritans in the 1630s is provided by the Consistory Court papers.⁸⁰ Although the series is by no means complete, the fact that no sixteenth-century records of proceedings against puritans in the Consistory have survived would seem to be a genuine reflection of moderate episcopal policy during that period. Between 1601 and 1610, two cases – both involving laymen – were heard by the Consistory Court while in the following decade, four cases – two concerning laymen – were dealt with. The decennial total rose slightly in the years 1621-30 to six, of which one involved a layman. But in the decade 1631-40, the much higher total of fourteen cases was heard by the Consistory – four of them concerning laity. And, significantly, all but one of these proceedings were opened after 1633.

The Prynne episode of 1637 is of considerable relevance to this discussion of changed official attitudes towards the puritans. Full details of the case are not necessary in this context, and it will suffice to say that William Prynne, newly tried, convicted and mutilated in London and being escorted to Caernarvon where he was to serve his term of imprisonment, was met and hospitably entertained in Chester and his portrait painted by a local artist. Bridgeman played a part in examining the offenders, Calvin Bruen, Peter and Robert Ince and Thomas Aldersey, all prominent citizens,⁸¹ and was thanked for his services by Archbishop Neile in December of that year when the case was over.⁸² But the Bishop of Chester had professed his inability to deal with the matter without outside help. 'I myself', he told Neile in August 1637, 'have no authority in Chester to punish them, but what my Consistory doth afford, not so much as a Justice of the Peace to bind them to the good behaviour'.⁸³ So the Archbishop and the northern High Commission at York took over. A pursuivant was sent to Chester, further examinations arranged and the accused summoned to York. In the course of these examinations, further names were added to the original list of offenders, and they too were dealt with by the High Commission.⁸⁴ It did not take long to deal with the affair, and on 26 November 1637 Neile was able to write to Bridgeman that the guilty parties had all been tried, fined and ordered to make public confession of their crimes.⁸⁵ Calvin Bruen, identified as the leader, was fined £500, Peter Ince and Richard Golborn £300 each, Peter Leigh £200, William Trafford £150, and Thomas Hunt £100. Although Pulford, the painter, was not fined, his portraits of Prynne were publicly burnt.

So far as the authorities were concerned, the Prynne affair had been successfully dealt with. Such firm treatment of puritans, however, as has been shown, was by no means universal. In 1633 Neile had aimed to undermine the hold of Puritanism in the diocese of Chester, and to bring official policy in the region belatedly in line with that in the southern province. But to be successful the Archbishop's efforts presupposed an existing system of effective church discipline at all levels. This, however, was quite clearly lacking, and in consequence the actual achievements of Neile's searching metropolitan visitation were considerably less than his many far-reaching intentions. The fact that he never secured the full and willing cooperation of Bishop Bridgeman must be counted as one reason for this. But equally important, as Neile himself realised, was the opposition he encountered at grassroots level from churchwardens. He had no illusions about the fact that it was 'in a manner impossible for the Bishop to know how the public service is performed in every church and chapel of his diocese. The Bishop can but enquire by the oaths of

churchwardens and sidesmen who make no conscience of dispensing with their oath and can hardly be brought to present anything, be things never so far out of order'.⁸⁶ Neile was convinced that puritans abounded in the diocese of Chester, but his commissioners 'could not get the churchwardens to present any; and till some of these wilful churchwardens be exemplarily punished', they concluded, 'the rest will never take care to discharge their duties, their oaths. We threatened them much but they are moved at nothing'.⁸⁷

It was upon churchwardens that the enforcement of church discipline ultimately depended. As the representatives of the parish, they were responsible for the provision of the surplice and they were required to equip themselves with the bishop's or archbishop's visitation articles. Visitation presentments could, of course, come from other quarters – from private informers and from the bishop's or archbishop's own apparitors – but nonetheless churchwardens were the most usual source of presentment. If churchwardens were sympathetic towards, or actively involved in, Puritanism then it was naturally much more difficult to detect at parochial level.

The puritan sympathies of churchwardens in the diocese of Chester had been observed long before the 1630s. At Rochdale, for example, the churchwardens were asked in 1595 whether their puritan vicar, Richard Midgley, 'signed children in baptism with the sign of the cross or not; the churchwardens and swornmen say they know not'.⁸⁸ Undoubtedly their evasive reply was based on more than mere ignorance.

The churchwardens of Manchester, too, accurately reflected, and reinforced, the town's religious sympathies. In 1622, the three wardens were charged for refusing to present those laymen who failed to kneel at the communion.⁸⁹ Their act of defiance, however, did not go unnoticed, for Archbishop George Abbot complained about these wardens in the same year.

I have received advertisement that in the church of Manchester, which should be a president of virtue and obedience to the whole country, there are many disorders concerning ecclesiastical affairs, and I am led to understand that a great reason whereof is because the churchwardens who do have the care of that place are such as are contented to wink at disorders and do never present them to the Bishop of the diocese. I marvel how these persons can dispense with the oath which they do take whereby it behoveth them to take notice of such nonconformities to the canons and orders of the church and so to seek to redress them. I know his Majesty will be much offended when he shall hear thereof. And it shall be no pleasure for those which transgress this way to be called up hither to be censured by the High Commission for their misdemeanour'.⁹⁰

At Runcorn, the puritan incumbent, Hugh Burrows, and his curate enjoyed the support of their churchwardens in 1633. Churchwardens, however, were elected annually, and in the previous year Burrows and his assistant had been struggling against opposition from the then parish officers. Accordingly, when the time of the metropolitan visitation came round, Burrows desperately tried to prevent the former, anti-puritan, wardens from making a presentment against him. The attempt was unsuccessful. A full charge was made by them against Burrows and his curate, and the vicar was sternly reproved 'for his note of citation he sent up to forbid the old churchwardens to come to the visitation for they knew they would present them'. In addition the two new, pro-puritan, wardens were themselves charged, 'they being addicted to Puritanism. They presented not any sitters at the communion, nor anything worth presenting'.⁹¹

Churchwardens such as these were hardly likely to cooperate with any policy – episcopal or archiepiscopal – which attacked Puritanism. But even if, from a religious point of view, the churchwardens of a parish were reliable, they still often lacked sufficient authority and respect to be effective agents of ecclesiastical government.

Cases concerning the difficulties experienced by churchwardens in exercising ecclesiastical jurisdiction regularly occur in the church records – so regularly that one suspects that some historians have tended to exaggerate both their prestige and efficiency.⁹² For example, at Mobberley, Cheshire, in the visitation of 1601, one Humphrey Paulden was presented for 'abusing the churchwardens in the church'.⁹³ At Leigh in Lancashire in 1604 George Higson was charged with 'brawling with John Lunt, churchwarden, at the church door', and Robert Haughton was said to have 'used undecent speeches to the churchwarden at service time'.⁹⁴ At Mobberley again in 1605, Richard Leigh was presented for having 'abused the churchwardens in markets and public places'.⁹⁵ In the 1630 visitation a presentment was made from Poulton parish in Lancashire which concerned John Fisher who, having been reproved by the wardens for irreverence in church, 'gave them evil words, using also scornful gestures towards them saying he would talk in despite of them and what had they to do with it'.⁹⁶ Finally, it may be noted that at the Quarter Sessions in 1632 a case was heard which involved a man who had assaulted a churchwarden in the church at Guilden Sutton, Cheshire.⁹⁷

Although in the nature of things, conscientious churchwardens were no doubt always likely to arouse opposition and hostility, it is tempting to speculate whether the disrespect in which wardens seem often to have

been held may have been partly due to the fact they themselves sometimes lacked social standing. Sir Thomas Smith in *The Commonwealth of England*, it is worth noting, says of ‘the fourth sort of men who do not rule’ that ‘they are commonly made churchwardens...’⁹⁸ Smith’s view of the social status of these office-holders is supported by the fact that at Barnard Castle in 1587 one of the wardens was a husbandman who was unable to write.⁹⁹ The churchwarden’s office, as its duties became more onerous, seems to have become correspondingly more unpopular among those eligible to hold it, and it may be that the parish ‘electors’ were obliged to choose wardens who occupied lower ranks in village communities. Refusals to take office when once elected churchwarden are fairly common in the records.

The responsibility for choosing churchwardens usually lay jointly with incumbent and congregation, although this function of the Easter parish meeting at which the election took place had by the seventeenth century occasionally fallen into the hands of a select vestry.¹⁰⁰ Sometimes churchwardens were chosen not as the result of an ‘election’ at all. It was stated in 1611, for example, that at Lawton in Cheshire ‘it hath been a custom ... that two men were yearly chosen churchwardens at Lawton according as their turn did fall out by the house row’.¹⁰¹

The rank or occupational status of churchwardens, unfortunately, are rarely given in the records – but even bearing this in mind, it still seems to have been quite exceptional for a gentleman to undertake this office. At Wigan in 1618 the churchwardens were Robert Markland and John Wakefield, a shoemaker and panner respectively,¹⁰² and in Liverpool in 1642 Edward Ryle, a saddler, is known to have been one of the wardens.¹⁰³

Churchwardens, then, being either ‘addicted to Puritanism’ themselves, or else simply incapable – for whatever reason – of enforcing the orders of the church, severely compromised the effectiveness of ecclesiastical government. The weakness of church discipline in the diocese of Chester, in fact, was everywhere apparent, and was certainly no new phenomenon in 1633.¹⁰⁴ In the 1580s, as noted earlier in this essay, Giles Wigginton of Sedbergh ignored his suspension and continued to preach, either in his home or in the churchyard.¹⁰⁵ Similarly, much later, in 1636 Joseph Smithson, a non-wearer of the surplice in his ministry at Whitegate, Cheshire ‘being cited under the seal of [the Chester diocesan] office to appear before us at a day and place therein assigned did irreverently scorn and scoff at the said process and called it an hue and cry and did laugh at it to the manifest contempt of our authority and jurisdiction’.¹⁰⁶

Nor was it only the puritan clergy who defied the ecclesiastical authorities. Puritan laymen, too, were quite capable of behaving in a similar manner – a fact which can be well illustrated by the case of Thomas Constable. Constable, a wooden heel maker, had been charged at Acton, Cheshire, in the 1625 visitation for determinedly refusing to kneel at the receiving of the communion. '[I will] "never kneel at the communion whilst I live", he ranted, "and if I be torn in pieces with horses". This he spake publicly in court'.¹⁰⁷ He meant what he said. Sixteen years later this resolute nonconformist was still defying the authorities. By this time he had removed to Winwick in Lancashire, and it was witnesses from that parish who testified in 1641 that they had heard him

utter and give out speeches... that he did not value or care for any presentment that could be made against him by any of the churchwardens or sworn men, for that for space of twenty years past he had stood in the chancellor's teeth in defiance of his authority and that for all the bishops they are as they have proved themselves, the very scum of our country.

The other witnesses made known that Constable had also declared that 'the bishops are an accursed hierarchy [and] that he careth not for a binding to good behaviour no more than grass or docks which he pulled from the ground and spurned with his foot...'¹⁰⁸

Some indication has been given in this essay of the contrasts in the regional history of Puritanism in England in the period before the Civil War. These variations and contrasts existed not so much in the field of puritan ideas. The puritan clergy, the main retailers of religious belief and practices, to a considerable extent shared a common educational background at the Universities and there were obvious common denominators in their reading habits.¹⁰⁹ The regional differences in Puritanism, especially between north and south, consisted principally in the chronology of the development of Puritanism, in the impact it made not only within but outside the area in question, and in the attitude of the authorities towards its growth. So far as the chronology is concerned in the diocese of Chester the reformed religion took hold later than in the south, and when the 'real' as opposed to the statutory Reformation came it was principally in the form of Puritanism.¹¹⁰ In the last analysis, the Puritanism of this region was primarily local in character although it was not – and could not have been – entirely self-contained physically and intellectually. For this state of affairs the limited scope and character of patronage within the diocese was chiefly responsible. It was through effective patronage that the puritan divines could achieve national importance. But the puritan patrons in this