

## THE CLERGY OF THE CITY OF CHESTER, 1630-1672

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Until the late nineteenth century, Chester contained eight parish churches within its walls. The major city church, St. Oswald's, whose extensive parish included most of north Chester, was the south transept of the Cathedral. William Webb in *The Vale-Royall of England*, 1656, stated that here 'the great assembly both of the mayor, aldermen, sheriffs peers and the whole city [come] to hear the sermons on the Lord's Day . . . being indeed the most spacious and fit place for it'.<sup>1</sup> The patronage of the living belonged to the dean and chapter, who did not exercise this right in the early seventeenth century, but sold the turns of presentation to a succession of interested parties.<sup>2</sup>

At the junction of Watergate Street, Eastgate Street, Northgate Street and Bridge Street, stands St. Peter's Church. In the seventeenth century the church had attached to it three influential lectureships on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. Proof of their popularity is found in the 1631 will of Alderman John Brereton (mayor, 1623-24), in which he bequeathed £5 per annum to maintain the Friday lecture.<sup>3</sup>

The other major parish churches were Holy Trinity, on the north side of Watergate Street, in the patronage of the earls of Derby;<sup>4</sup> and St. Mary's near the castle. Both had large parishes extending beyond the city walls.

In the southern part of the city were four churches with small but populous parishes: St. Michael's, at the junction of Bridge Street and Pepper Street; St. Bridget's, almost opposite; St. Olave's, in Lower Bridge Street; and St. Martin's, in Cuppin Street. The bishop was the patron of St. Bridget's and St. Martin's.<sup>5</sup> Outside the city walls, St. John the Baptist had a large, populous parish extending from the eastern edge of the city walls to Boughton.

In addition to the parish churches, there were two chapels in the environs. St. Giles, Spital Boughton, was a hospital and chapel used by the six men and one woman who were brethren; and by some of the inhabitants.<sup>6</sup> The Chapel of St. John without the Northgate served an almshouse with six men and six women.<sup>7</sup> Both chapels were regularly served by clergy.

1 G. Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, vol.1, 2nd edit. by T. Helsby, 1882, p.194.

2 *ibid.*, p.306.

3 *The Charity Commissioners Report*, 1836, p.306; Cheshire Record Office, will of John Brerewood, 1631, Ref. WS.

4 G. Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, vol. 1, pp.327ff.

5 *ibid.*, pp.332,342.

6 *The Victoria History of Cheshire*, vol.3, 1980, pp.179-80.

7 *ibid.*, pp.180-2.

The value of the Chester livings in the early seventeenth century is uncertain. When the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* was compiled in 1535 only the four most important parishes within the city were named. St. Oswald's was valued at £8. 18s. 4d., Holy Trinity at £8. 15s. 6d., St. Peter's at £6. 13s. 4d. and St. Mary's at £52. 0s. 0d.<sup>8</sup> In the hundred years following this valuation these sums may have doubled or trebled but greater study is required in this field.

The Clerical Subsidy of 1624 and the first assessment of Ship Money in 1635, show that within Chester only the rectors of Holy Trinity and St. Mary's, together with the vicar of St. Oswald's, made contributions. In the second assessment of Ship Money in 1636, these three ministers were again required to contribute, together with the curate of St. Peter's.<sup>9</sup> In the 1630s, the salary of the non preaching minister of St. Michael's was £8 per annum: he was paid by the parishioners.<sup>10</sup> The wealthier St. Peter's parish, from 1627-28 until the Civil War, employed a curate, to whom the parishioners paid twenty nobles per annum for reading the service weekly and £20 per annum for preaching once every Sunday; a total of £26. 13s. 4d. per annum.<sup>11</sup> This shows the relative value placed on a preaching minister and on one who merely read prayers.

The poverty of the smaller parishes, St. Olave's, St. Martin's, St. Michael's and St. Bridget's, between them covering almost half of the city area, meant that they could attract only reading ministers to serve their cures. The statutory number of sermons were either given by peripatetic licensed preachers or, as at St. Michael's during the 1630s, by a licensed curate. These parishes were served mainly by non graduate pluralists. This must have been very unsatisfactory to the inhabitants, who would have been considerably more literate than those of rural parishes, many of which were wealthier and better able to attract a more qualified minister.

The day to day running of these poorer parishes fell mainly upon the petty canons of the Cathedral. This was a body of six, which often consisted of choristers and lay clerks who had advanced from their humble station by taking holy orders. The prime requirement of a petty canon was a good voice, not an agile intellect. This is clearly shown in the indictment against William Clark, petty canon, rector of St. Martin's and St. Bridget's in 1641. Clark was accused of perjury; his accuser stated that Clark, though learned in music, was simple and ignorant.<sup>12</sup> In 1640, three of the minor canons, Henry Biddulph, John Pilkington and Christopher Pye, were former choristers and lay clerks.<sup>13</sup> In 1640, only one of the petty canons was a graduate; and between 1610 and 1644, only three are known to have had degrees.<sup>14</sup>

8 *The Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 5, 1825, pp.207-8. R.S.L.C., vol. 28, 1893, p.216 states that the stipend attached to Holy Trinity prior to 1651 had been £10 per annum and that at St. John's £20.6s.8d.

9 *ibid.*, vol. 12, 1885, pp.56-129.

10 Cheshire R.O., church wardens' accounts, 1558-1678, Ref. P65/8/1.

11 *ibid.*, church wardens' accounts, 1626-87, Ref. P63/7/1.

12 *ibid.*, Quarter Sessions File, 27 June 1641, Ref. QSF 77 f.97.

13 *ibid.*, Cathedral Visitations, Ref. EDV 6/1; the Cathedral treasurer's accounts, 1610-44 were viewed by kind permission of Canon Maltby, the sub dean. See also K. Simpson, *The Early History of the King's School Chester until 1642*, M.Ed. thesis, Manchester, 1979, vol.2, pp.222, 253, 327-8.

14 Devereux Beverley, Charles Jones, Francis Pilkington.

During this period only one of the minor canons, Charles Jones (who had been a chaplain to Bishop Bridgeman), is known to have held a preaching licence.<sup>15</sup> Most, perhaps all, of the others were reading clergymen, so their theological influence on the parishes could not have been great.

The emoluments attached to the post of minor canon were meagre. In 1622-23, their stipend was £13 per annum.<sup>16</sup> This resulted in the petty canons attempting to supplement their stipends with whatever other preferments they could obtain. Thus pluralism among them was a necessity and the result was that neither their parochial work nor their Cathedral duties were performed satisfactorily.

Bishop Bridgeman recognised the problem and in his Cathedral Injunctions of July 1623 attempted to discourage the minor canons from taking further employment because 'the great negligence of the petty Canons or Singing Men hath done much wrong to God's service, and brought the church into contempt and obloquy'. The bishop instituted a system of fines for absence from services which exceeded six weeks. Hopeful of the success of his scheme, he went on to state that 'seeing they are so diligently to attend divine service as they can hardly by any other vocation procure a competency for their substances', he proposed to augment the stipends of the petty canons with pensions from various defunct offices in the Cathedral. This was for the betterment of their wages, which were 'too mean to maintain them, considering their charge of wife and children'.<sup>17</sup> It was not until 1642 that their salaries were actually augmented to £14.<sup>18</sup>

The Bishop's Injunctions were also unsuccessful in regulating the canons' behaviour. The Triennial Visitation of 1631 states that all minor canons were usually absent from the first morning prayer in the choir, as well as from lectures and sermons. In a rival presentment made at the same visitation, the minor canons Beverley and Biddulph, the organist and a conduct, claimed that Mr. Pilkington, the precentor and Mr. Burches, one of the minor canons, made notes of the absences of others from services, although they were 'perchance more negligent than others, and for Mr. Pilkington hee hath his fortnight every q[uarte]r in sondayes almost, beside holy dayes'.<sup>19</sup>

One of the vices most despised by contemporary Puritans, drunkenness, was not unknown among the minor canons.<sup>20</sup> In May 1631, Henry Biddulph was presented for being an 'immoderate drinker'. In 1637, the bishop suspended Biddulph; in his petition for reinstatement he acknowledged that he had 'dishonoured my good god, and by mine evil example have done much hurt to the church'. Biddulph's crime is not known, but it was serious enough for the usually lenient Bridgeman to remove him from the rectory of St. Martin's. When Biddulph was restored to his minor canonry, he was warned of 'irrevocable deprivation' for a like offence. Nor was

15 Payments made to Jones for preaching in 1636-38 are noted in Cheshire R.O., Ref. P63/7/1 and P65/8/1.

16 Cathedral treasurer's account book, 1610-44; the Venerable R.V.H. Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, 1958, p.100.

17 The Honorable and Reverend G.T.O. Bridgeman, *The History of the Church & Manor of Wigan. pt.2.*, Chetham Society, new series, vol. 16, 1889, pp.277-8.

18 Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.100.

19 Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 6/1.

20 R.C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North West England*, 1972, pp.52-3.

Biddulph the only one disciplined. In 1634, Pilkington and Burches were suspended for not executing their offices; it was noted also that their colleague, Devereux Beverley, was non resident.<sup>21</sup> John Pilkington, who succeeded his father in 1637, was involved in an unsavoury court case heard before the Consistory court in 1639: it related to the supposed adultery of one Ann Potter, which was reputed to have taken place in Pilkington's own house in Abbey Court.<sup>22</sup>

Such cases as these can hardly have inspired many of the citizens of Chester. When Richard Hulme, curate of Betley, Staffordshire, preached at Harthill near Chester in 1631 and lamented 'that soe much [money] is bestowed upon idle persons to singe morninge and eveninge prayer in Cathedrall Churches', when there were so few preachers in cities, he must have echoed the sentiments of many of the citizens of Chester.<sup>23</sup>

To this sadly divided and ill assorted group of minor canons the day to day running of the smaller city churches fell. Francis Pilkington combined his precentorship and minor canonry with the living of St. Bridget's, which he held from 1616 until his death in 1638; and for some years also the living of St. Martin's. Henry Biddulph was rector of St. Martin's, 1629-37; John Pilkington (the son of Francis) was curate of St. John without the Northgate, 1639-43; William Clark, the Cathedral sacristan, held the living of St. Martin's, 1637-41 and St. Bridget's, 1638-46, (besides practising medicine); John Packe a minor canon, acted as a witness against William Clark, together with Henry Biddulph and John Pilkington, in Clark's trial for perjury and four months later succeeded him at St. Martin's, which he held until 1646; and Charles Jones, who had succeeded Francis Pilkington as precentor, served as curate of St. Oswald's, 1637-46.<sup>24</sup>

To this list may be added Roger Gorst, who though not a minor canon, was both non graduate and pluralist. At some time before 1616, he became curate of St. Giles, Spital Boughton and from 1617, held this together with the parishes of St. Olave's and St. Michael's until 1646.<sup>25</sup>

The fragments of ecclesiastical records surviving from the 1620s and 1630s show that the minor canons beneficed in the city were lax in their duties. The Correction books for 1634 state that Francis Pilkington, rector of St. Bridget's 'doth not constantly read [prayers] on Wed. & Fridaies & some holie daies' and Henry Biddulph neglected to keep holy days at St. Martin's.<sup>26</sup> The Metropolitan Visitation of Archbishop Neile in 1633 reveals a similar neglect. Pilkington omitted to catechise the youth of St. Bridget's on four separate occasions, which he claimed was owing to the length of the preceding sermons; Biddulph omitted to read prayers on Sunday evenings as well as on Holy Days, Wednesdays and Fridays at St. Martin's; while

21 Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 6/1.

22 *ibid.*, Ref. EDC 5/105 (1639).

23 *ibid.*, Ref. EDC 5/29 (1631).

24 Evidence for this comes from the bishop's transcripts of the parish registers in the Cheshire R.O. See also will of John Conney, clerk, 1642, Cheshire R.O., Ref. WS and R.S.L.C. vols. 56, 1980, 57, 1909 and 61, 1911.

25 A brief biography occurs in the index of the Reverend L.M. Farrall, *The Parish Register of the Holy & Undivided Trinity in the City of Chester 1532-1837*, 1914.

26 Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/32 f.31.

Roger Gorst had failed to read the litany on Wednesdays and Fridays at St. Olave's and to catechise since Lent at St. Michael's.<sup>27</sup>

There is evidence that two of the younger additions to the petty canons, Charles Jones and William Clark, were more committed to the service of the church than were their predecessors. It is noteworthy that neither had come up from the ranks of choristers or lay clerks to become minor canons.

The state of affairs to be found in the 1630s at the Cathedral and St. Oswald's was scarcely more encouraging than in the smaller parishes. The relationship between the mayor and corporation and the dean and chapter, had undergone a number of upsets in the first part of the seventeenth century, all concerning the temporal powers claimed by the mayor and corporation but disputed by the dean and chapter. At a civic ceremony in the Cathedral in 1607, Peter Sharpe, the sub dean, enraged at what he regarded as an infringement of the jurisdiction of the chapter, thrust down the point of the civic sword carried before the mayor and regarded as a sign of the corporation's claims to temporal supremacy within the Cathedral. Shortly afterwards at the funeral of a civic dignitary inside St. Oswald's, where the sword of maintenance was carried in a similar manner, Prebendary Ravenscroft shut the Cathedral doors in the face of the funeral procession.<sup>28</sup>

In 1624, before leaving Chester for Wigan, Bishop Bridgeman ordered St. Oswald's to be reseated and asked the mayor to supervise the work. On his return to Chester two years later, he found that the work had been done to the great detriment of the dignity of the Cathedral clergy, placing many of them in the seats reserved for women. The pulpit had also been moved to a position which obscured the bishop's view. When the bishop remonstrated, Nicholas Ince, the mayor, claimed sovereign authority within the church and disputed the right of the bishop to interfere.<sup>29</sup>

From time immemorial the prebendaries and Cathedral lecturers had preached their sermons in St. Oswald's. It was the custom for the citizens after hearing matins in their own churches, to attend St. Oswald's in the afternoon to hear the sermon. Thereafter they would return home to attend evensong in their parish churches.

In retaliation for the mayor's action, the bishop changed this custom. From 14 January 1626/27, the sermons were to be preached in the Cathedral quire, not St. Oswald's, after evensong. Bridgeman especially erected a pulpit and pews in the quire for that purpose and required services in other churches to finish before that in the cathedral began. The mayor took the opinion of counsel: thereafter neither he nor his successors attended the cathedral services.

Dean Mallory took a conciliatory line. At a meeting of the parishioners of St. Oswald's on 15 January 1628/29, he stated that he had attempted to persuade the bishop to return to the practice of lectures by the dean and prebendaries in St. Oswald's. He hoped this would be done, if the parishioners would affirm that St. Oswald's was under the jurisdiction of the dean and chapter.<sup>30</sup> Nothing came of Mallory's efforts.

<sup>27</sup> Borthwick Institute, Ref. EDVI R 23 ff.434v., 437v.-438, 441 and 436.

<sup>28</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.2, 1898, p.313; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, 1958, p.83.

<sup>29</sup> Chetham Society, new series, vol. 16, 1889, pp.295-9; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.104.

<sup>30</sup> Chetham Society, new series, vol.16, 1889, pp.199-300 and 303-4.

Some years later Bridgeman wrote to Archbishop Laud that 'the mayor of Chester and his brethren have discontinued from our Cathedral service about twelve years together 'till this last year when an ingenious merchant, who had sometime been a chorister and a scholar of our church, broke that schism and came diligently to our quire at the beginning of service, every Sunday and there continued reverently 'till service and sermon were fully ended'. When in the Cathedral, the mayor sat in the chair allotted to his predecessors in the quire. 'But on a sudden our Dean . . . commanded the sub-sextons to keep the mayor out of that seat', with the result that the mayor 'and his successor have since abandoned our quire service and sermons so we have scarce five lay persons present besides the consistory and my family whereas formerly the whole city came to it'. The situation so alarmed Laud, that although he had no authority in the Northern Province, he overruled the dean.<sup>31</sup>

Following the death of Rowland Thickness in 1626, one of the chapter was appointed vicar of St. Oswald's. William Case was a native of Chester; his father an attorney of the Exchequer court of the Palatinate and his wife the daughter of a draper in the city. Owing to the respect in which the corporation held his father, Case had been elected a freeman of Chester.<sup>32</sup> He became a prebendary of the Cathedral in 1613 and between 1624 and 1627, was rector of St. Peter's, where his brief tenure and departure involved litigation.<sup>33</sup> Case became sub dean of the Cathedral in 1624. In 1621, he had been found guilty by the Portmote court of libelling a workman whom he had accused of theft and was required to pay damages.<sup>34</sup> The choice of such a fractious vicar at a difficult time in the history of St. Oswald's did nothing to ease the dispute. In 1630, having requested and been denied, the key to the meeting house of the Company of Painters, Glaziers, Embroiderers and Stationers on the city walls, he attempted to have revenge by infringing the rights of the company. He requested the bishop to allow a stranger, who had not been admitted to the company, to keep a stationer's shop in Abbey Court.<sup>35</sup> Case shamefully neglected his cure. In Neile's Visitation, William Case and his curate (who was also his son in law), Henry Trafford, were presented for not reading prayers on holy days, Sunday evenings, Wednesdays and Fridays at Bruera, a dependent chapelry of St. Oswald's. At St. Oswald's it was stated that many parishioners either attended other churches, or received communion sitting. Here, Case not only did not read service on the required days, but also rarely preached and failed either to catechise or go on perambulations.<sup>36</sup> The Correction books of the bishop of Chester for the following year show no reformation in the behaviour of Case. His previous negligence was recited and it was further stated that he had failed to preach at St. Oswald's for twelve months.<sup>37</sup> On the death of Case in 1634, his brother in law, the newly appointed divinity lecturer in the Cathedral, John Conney, succeeded to the vicarage.

31 *ibid.*, p.404; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.1, 1878-79, no. 28; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.115.

32 R.S.L.C., vol.6, 1882, pp.60-1; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.77.

33 Cheshire R.O., Ref. P63/7/1.

34 *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 6., 1906, no. 932.

35 Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, p.112.

36 Borthwick Institute, Ref.RVI A23, f.440.

37 Cheshire R.O. Ref. EDV 1/32.

He was apparently of Puritan leanings and may well have run the church with more gravity.

The attitude and behaviour of the prebendaries mirrors the picture found in other city churches. In his Injunctions of 1623, Bridgeman stated that the absence of the dean and chapter from the Cathedral caused 'much disorder and negligence in other members'. He drew up a rota requiring two of the six prebendaries to reside in the city for a third of a year each. All prebendaries and the dean were to attend services in hood and surplice; failure in this or in any other part of the Injunctions would result in a fine. Bridgeman complained that the dean and chapter never, or seldom, preached, 'leaving their courses either unprovided altogether or supplied by mean and insufficient men'.<sup>38</sup> In an attempt to enforce regularity in preaching, the bishop drew up a table of preachers starting with the dean, the two archdeacons, six prebendaries and ending with the divinity lecturer.<sup>39</sup> From the beginning, his Injunctions met with as little success in the regulating of the prebendaries as they had with the minor canons. In the official presentment to the Triennial Visitation of 1631 by Dr. Snell and Prebendary Ravenscroft, it was stated that the stipend of the prebendaries was so small that residence was a burden rather than a benefit.<sup>40</sup> The unofficial presentment made by two minor canons, the organist and a conduct states that with the exception of the dean, the chapter had not kept residence for three years and although the prebendaries attended services they seldom wore their habits. Dr. King, the theology lecturer, gave only one of the two sermons required each week.

In June 1640, the bishop was forced to issue new Injunctions to rectify:

the great negligences and diverse faylinge of the severall said members of the Cathedral Church . . . The Lord B[isho]pp hath many times been enforced to preach upon little or no preparation, and now latelie upon the Sundaie before East[e]r last there had been no sermon, had not the said Ld B[isho]pp suddenlie upon halfe an houers notice of the neglect, made provision of a supplie.

Bridgeman was also concerned that:

divers of those whose course is to preach in the sayd Cathedrall shift of there preaching to other p[er]sons without licence obteyned from the B[isho]pp whereby sometimes meane men of little learninge and lesse discretion are put up and that upon most solemne dayes and times to the great wrong of gods service & that place.

He demanded conformity 'upon paine & penaltie of other censures to bee inflicted in strict manner upon everie such p[er]son as shall pr[e]sume to offend or transgress in the pr[e]mises or any part thereof'.<sup>42</sup>

The bishop's problems with the dean and chapter included their management of their property. In 1623, he required that property leased by them in Abbey Square

38 Chetham Society, new series, vol.16, 1889, p.277.

39 Cheshire R.O. Ref. EDA 3/1 f.48v. (c.1632-34).

40 In 1622-23, the deanery was worth £100 per annum, the theology lectureship £40 per annum and a prebend £20 per annum.

41 Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 6/1.

42 *ibid.*

should revert to them on the expiry of their leases and become houses for the use of the prebendaries. Part of the square was rented as a brewery by John Ratcliffe, a Puritan alderman and influential parishioner of St. Oswald's.<sup>43</sup> In 1633, Ratcliffe died and contrary to the Bishop's Injunctions, the dean and chapter (perhaps swayed by Prebendary Ley, a close friend of the family) granted Ratcliffe's widow a renewal of the lease for three lives, receiving for it a mere £30.<sup>44</sup> Shortly afterwards the widow died and fearing that the dean and chapter might extend the lease, the bishop appealed for Laud's assistance.<sup>45</sup> After consulting Charles I, Laud wrote to the dean forbidding him to extend the lease; Mallory 'promised all obedience'.

There are other indications that the bishop and Dean Mallory were not on good terms. Mallory had been dean for almost twenty years when Bridgeman became bishop. He had married the daughter of Richard Vaughan, bishop of Chester, but his chance of promotion disappeared with the premature death of his father in law shortly after the latter's translation to London in 1604.

The bishop failed to receive the full support of the dean, in ensuring the duties of the Cathedral clergy, over St. Oswald's, or on the leasing of deanery property. When the relationship between the bishop and John Ley, the leading Puritan clergyman in Chester, was strained, Dr. Mallory was one of the four clergymen who received the dedication of Ley's book, *Defensive Doubts, Hopes and Reasons for refusal of the Oath imposed by the 6th Canon of the late Synod*, in which he showed sympathy for change within the Established Church.

Laud suspected the dean's intention in excluding the mayor from his rightful seat in the Cathedral in 1637. To Bridgeman he wrote that he hoped that 'the Deane takes noe inward pett at this, nor labors to distemper the Government there, or cast a bone between ye church and ye citty therby to discontent you. For if I should finde this he should heare of me in another way. Yet I must confess I am afraid there is something that makes the man forward'.<sup>45</sup> By the time Mallory died, the Civil War was well advanced and Bridgeman had no opportunity to repair the rift between himself and the chapter.

St. Mary's was the wealthiest city parish. Between 1623 and 1642, the rector was Francis Edwards, whose relationship with his parish was far from cordial. In the years 1629-31, there were three unpleasant struggles between the parson and the parish. In the first, Edwards claimed the right to appoint one of the church wardens, contrary to ancient custom. Following the victory of the parish, Edwards and his curate increased their charges for burials, weddings and churchings. After the funeral of Lady Oldfield, he claimed the pulpit cloth and the escutcheon as his perquisites. The parishioners disliked this innovation and desired 'to knowe and understand from Mr. Parson by what right or title he doth claime the said pulpitt cloath & scutchion . . . and thereuppon the p[ar]ish will further consider thereof'. This was followed by Edwards enclosing the parish pews when formerly they had been open and free.

43 Chetham Society, new series, vol. 16, pp.279-80.

44 John Ley, *A pattern of pietie, or the religious life and death of that grave and gracious matron, Mrs. Jane Ratcliff, widow and citizen of Chester*, 1640; will of John Ratcliffe, 1633, Cheshire R.O., Ref. WS.

45 Chetham Society, new series, vol. 16, 1889, p.407.



Opposition to these measures was led by Randle Holme (a member of a Chester family of antiquaries and herald painters) and in all cases the parishioners successfully fought the encroachments of the rector.<sup>46</sup>

About this time Edwards became non resident and went to reside at his rectory at Heswall, which he had held in plurality since 1624.<sup>47</sup> Thereafter the bulk of the work in St. Mary's fell upon a succession of curates. Francis Edwards appears to have been so unpopular in Chester that between 1634 and 1638, he petitioned Charles I for representation to the living of St. Mary's because he had been 'threatened by some malignant persons to be ousted of his living upon a pretended simony committed by his predecessor or some other lapse . . . Many other ministers are troubled in all sorts of courts upon like pretences to their utter undoing'.<sup>48</sup>

The Reverend Richard Wilson, a chaplain to Lord Derby, was rector of Holy Trinity from 1630 until 1646. Like Francis Edwards, he was accused of obtaining the living by simony. Refuting these false accusations resulted in his involvement in protracted litigation in the Consistory court in 1639-40.<sup>49</sup> The surviving evidence does not indicate that he was hard working or conscientious. In Neile's Visitation in 1633, he was indicted for not reading prayers on Sunday evenings or on holy days, or the litany on Wednesdays and Fridays and neglecting to wear a hood.

The vicar of St. John the Baptist's was for most of the 1630s, the pluralist John Conney, who employed a number of stipendiary curates to serve the cure. Little is known about either its clergy or government, although in 1633, the curate was stated to have failed to catechise the youth of the parish.<sup>50</sup>

In the 1630s, the parish churches and Cathedral were generally not governed to the satisfaction of the ecclesiastical authorities or the citizens at large. St. Peter's Church presents a stark contrast. Although it had a small parish, its central position, three weekly lectures and committed ministers, set it apart from its fellows. In the early years of the century, the church secured the highly influential and controversial services of Nicholas Byfield (1579-1622) as a preacher. A strict Calvinist and sabbatarian, Byfield profoundly affected a generation through his sermons and books.<sup>51</sup>

Byfield arrived in Chester about 1605 and soon collected a devoted auditory including Alderman Brereton and his wife; Thomas Benson the brewer; and Alderman Ratcliffe<sup>52</sup>. Under Byfield's guidance, Ratcliffe became a committed sabbatarian and during his first mayoralty (1611-12) he forsook his parish church, St. Oswald's and erected a pew in St. Peter's with the church wardens' consent. He issued a stern declaration to be read by the city ministers, enforcing church attendance and shop and tavern closure on the sabbath. Failure to comply was to result in fines to be collected by the church wardens. Bishop Lloyd, though noted for his leniency with

<sup>46</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. P20/13/1.

<sup>47</sup> J.P. Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary on the Hill Chester*, 1898, p.84; Canon T.H. May, *The Parish Registers of Heswall*, 1921.

<sup>48</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 17, 1920, nos. 4001 and 4007; *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1660-61: 115 is wrongly dated.

<sup>49</sup> Cheshire R.O., Consistory court papers, Ref. EDC 5/15 (1639), EDC 5/62 (1640).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, Ref. EDV 1/32 ff.29v.-30.

<sup>51</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>52</sup> For Benson and the Ratcliffes see Richardson, 1972, pp.82-3, 90, 103-5, 112, 133-5 and 141.

Puritanism, was so incensed by the mayor's actions that he ordered the pew to be pulled down and forbade the clergy of the city to read the declaration.<sup>53</sup> The divisive nature of Byfield's ministry is shown by five cases brought before the City Quarter Sessions between 1610 and 1612. The daughter of a city hosier was accused of being a Puritan by John Evans, one of the minor canons, who further stated that Byfield was 'a whooreson [and] runagate'. Less than four weeks later, John Halliwell, a tailor, on hearing Byfield termed a prophet, stated that Byfield 'was as like a rogue as a prophet', and when pressed refused to retract the statement. In June 1611, Davis, a scrivener, declared that Byfield, besides having 'a skurvie utterance', 'hath sowne more sedition within this city than would be rooted out whiles this city stood'. In November 1611, one John Bradshaw was imprisoned after having stated that Byfield was a traitor to whom he would like to be hangman. Hostility to Byfield was often coupled with contempt. John Weedup asked Richard Birchley, a prominent mercer and parishioner of St. Peter's, whether Byfield, 'were as yet cured of the pox'.<sup>54</sup>

Signs of the acrimony between Byfield and the more orthodox divines may be seen in the will of Hugh Burches, who held the influential post of divinity lecturer at the Cathedral until his death in 1615. After declaring that he was an 'unfayned P[ro]testant', with what must be a reference to Byfield and his supporters, he goes on to state that 'my wants were many in the discharge of my dutie and especially that I did not with more zeale beate downe the subtile p[ro]ceedings of the novelists, seekinge or privily labouring an overthrow of this rev[e]rend church & although some pr[e]tend an upright intent and cariage I protest that by my continuall molestacon, they are better knowne to mee for hearty presumptious & spitefull of schismatikes' in 'theire raw & unconcoted exercises'.<sup>55</sup>

Hugh Burches was the head of a small family of clergy who were active within the city before the Civil War. His three sons were David (died 1640), a minor canon of the Cathedral; George, sequestered from St. John the Baptist's in 1646 and Peter, ordained a deacon in 1629 and perhaps driven from Chester when it fell to Parliament in 1646. His daughter was the second wife of Case, the sub dean. It is likely that the experiences of their father influenced the family against Puritanism.

After Byfield's departure from Chester in 1615, St. Peter's was served by a number of less controversial figures until in the mid 1620s, John Ley, the Puritan rector of Great Budworth was appointed to the influential Friday lectureship. He was well respected and liked by the bishop and many of the merchants and tradesmen. By 1627, Ley was a prebendary of the Cathedral and in 1630, stood as a godfather to one of the bishop's sons.<sup>56</sup>

53 Chester City R.O., Assembly minutes, 15 Nov. 1611, Ref. AB/2; Margaret J. Groombridge, *Calendar of the Council Minutes of the City of Chester 1603-1642*, R.S.L.C., vol. 106, 195, pp.36-37 and 79-80.

54 Chester City R.O., Quarter Sessions examinations, Ref. QSE 9/55 (5 June 1611); QSE 9/59 (8 June 1610); QSE 9/70 (1 July 1610); QSE 11/16 (1 Nov. 1611) QSE 11/62 (13 July 1612).

55 Cheshire R.O., will of Hugh Burches, 1615, Ref. WS; *Wirral Notes and Queries*, Nov. 1893; F.C. Beasley, *Thurstaston*, 1924, pp.127-9.

56 *D.N.B.*; Chester City R.O., Earwaker MSS., Ref. CR 63/1/227; G.T.O. Bridgeman, *Memoir of Dr. John Bridgeman*, 1883, p.26.

With the active assistance of Ley, the parishioners of St. Peter's appointed John Glendole, his curate at Great Budworth, their stipendiary minister. Glendole and Ley worked closely together in Chester during the following decade and a half.<sup>57</sup>

The third of the Puritan triumvirate in Chester in the 1630s was Nathaniel Lancaster, a contemporary of Glendole's at Oxford and a nephew of Byfield's most influential auditor at St. Peter's, John Bruen of Bruen Stapleford, the model Puritan layman in the eyes of many. Lancaster, newly ordained and recently appointed lecturer at St. Peter's, attended Bruen on his death bed in 1625, together with William Hinde, the preacher at Bunbury.<sup>58</sup> In 1627, Lancaster became preacher at St. Michael's and St. Olave's, holding these posts together with his St. Peter's lectureship, until resigning the former in 1639.

The sabbatarian controversy was resurrected between 1630 and 1632 with the publication in 1630 of *A learned Treatise on the Sabbath*, which consisted of acrimonious letters between Byfield and Edward Brerewood, a native of Chester and Professor of Astronomy at Gresham College, on the nature of the sabbath. The work was so popular that a second edition was printed in 1631 and was followed by further extracts from their correspondence. The confusion this caused among the clergy of the county was such that fourteen of them petitioned John Ley to make a prescriptive comment on sabbatarianism. Three of them, Richard Wilson, John Conney and Nathaniel Lancaster ministered within Chester.<sup>60</sup>

In response, Ley preached a series of sermons at St. Peter's in defence of Byfield's position. About the same time *The Book of Sports* was re-issued by Laud and the ill will between the two factions became such that Charles I wrote to Bridgeman ordering him to command Ley not to 'unsettle the accepted doctrine of the Church of England or engender strife amongst the clergy'.<sup>61</sup> Neile's visitors suspended Ley from his lectureship at St. Peter's, ostensibly on the grounds of his holding it in plurality with a vicarage and prebendal stall. The mayor, aldermen and sheriffs lost no time in petitioning Neile to reconsider this decision. After claiming that Ley's cure was neither neglected nor hindered by his lectureship, they stated that:

his learning is both here & in other places well known & for his judm[en]t & opinion concerning the rites & ceremonies of the church & for his practise there in for the future, we hope yor honours visitors have received good satisfacon. We have fond his ministrie soe succesfull that we may truly informe your honr yt hath wrought much reformacon amongst us, & his life & conv[er]sacion sutable & agreeing with his doctrine soe inclinable in his disposicon & desires of peace & unity that he is likewise alway ready to doe all good offices that way and

<sup>57</sup> For Glendole see index to Farrall, *The Parish Register of the Holy and Undivided Trinity*, 1914 and Simpson, *A History of the Church of St. Peter's, Chester*, pp.73ff.

<sup>58</sup> William Hinde, *A faithful Remonstrance of the Holy Life & Happy Death of John Bruen*, 1641. Chapter 68 refers to him as 'M.Lan'. The 1799 edition, p.108, wrongly calls him Langley.

<sup>59</sup> Chester City R.O., Earwaker MSS., Ref. CR 63/2/132 consists of a volume of sermons preached at St. Peter's and St., Michael's. For Lancaster see *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 38, 1943, nos. 8215, 8219, 8222, 8225 and 8238.

<sup>60</sup> This was published as *Sunday a Sabbath or a prescriptive discourse for discussion of Sabbathary doubts*, 1641 and is prefixed with their petition.

<sup>61</sup> Chetham Society, new series, vol. 16, 1889, p.338.

we beseich your Lo[rds]hippe beassured that we write not as a divided body frome the rest, but that herein is involved and represented to yor honours favorable considerracon the humble desire and request of the whole citty & inhabitants in his behalf, wherein we hope of yor honours allowance & approbacon.<sup>62</sup>

In the face of such determined support, Ley returned to his lectureship.

Generally St. Peter's escaped punitive action from the ecclesiastical authorities for nonconformity, partly because the church wardens did not co-operate in filling in the required presentments of visitations. In 1628, though they presented John Glendole for not wearing a hood, they did not name those who failed to bow their heads at the name of Jesus.<sup>63</sup> St. Peter's failed to make a full presentment at the Metropolitan Visitation in 1633. In Bridgeman's Visitation next year, the church wardens omitted to name parishioners who refused to make the required reverent gestures.<sup>64</sup> No further action appears to have been taken against St. Peter's.

Laud's Injunctions requiring the erection of altar rails appear to have been universally complied with by the churches within the city walls. The church wardens' accounts for Holy Trinity, St. Peter's, St. Michael's and St. Mary's all record payments to joiners for undertaking the turning of pillars and erecting the balustrades before the communion table.<sup>65</sup> Outside the city walls at St. John's, altar rails appear not to have been erected until 1637-38.<sup>66</sup>

The divisions were highlighted in 1637. William Prynne had been sentenced by the court of Star Chamber to a term of imprisonment in Caernarvon Castle and his journey took him near Chester. On the outskirts of the city, he was met by Calvin Bruen, former sheriff and cousin of Nathaniel Lancaster; Peter Ince, stationer; Peter Leigh, grocer and others, who conducted him to the city, where he was well entertained. Laud heard of this reception. His reaction was such that Bridgeman was forced to act swiftly. He ordered all the churches in Chester to have sermons preached against Prynne. Peter Ince's house was searched unsuccessfully for compromising letters or seditious books. Ince was the only 'stationer in the city, yet no Puritanical books appear, but our citizens get them as soon as any which I suppose come by his means'. The offenders were fined huge sums and forced to make a public confession before the mayor, citizens, clergy and Dr. Snell, archdeacon of Chester.<sup>67</sup>

The bishop visited St. John the Baptist's soon after Prynne's visit to the church. The church wardens showed their opposition to the bishop by 'not ringing when the Bushopp came to vew the church'. Following his visit, they provided altar rails, wainscotting, a pulpit with embroidered hangings and a new surplice.<sup>68</sup>

62 Chester City R.O., Mayors' letters, 31 Aug. 1633, Ref. ML/2/273.

63 Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/29 f.2.

64 *ibid.*, Ref. EDV 1/32 f. 28v; Borthwick Institute, Ref. RBI R 23 f. 438v.

65 Cheshire R.O., Ref. P1/11/1, P63/7/1, P65/9/1 and P20/13/1.

66 *ibid.*, Ref. P51/12/1.

67 Richardson, *Puritanism in North West England*, pp.182-3; Burne, *Chester Cathedral*, pp.114-5; J.S. Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, 1974, pp.18-19; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol.1, 1878-79, no. 28; vol.3, 1883-85, nos. 1934, 1943, 1983; 3rd series, vol. 56, 1961, nos. 10764 and 10773; Canon Blomfield, 'Puritanism in Chester in 1637', *J.C.A.S.*, old series, vol. 3, 1885, pp.271ff.

68 Cheshire R.O., Ref. P51/12/1. The Reverend S. Cooper Scott, *Lectures on the History of St. John the Baptist's Church and Parish*, 1892, pp.66ff.

Writers on early seventeenth century Chester disagree on the strength of Puritanism there. Both Dr. R.C. Richardson and Dr. A.M. Johnson see Puritans as being a small minority; Archdeacon Blomfield took the opposite view and Miss M.J. Groombridge was undecided.<sup>69</sup> However, there was a committed nucleus of Puritans who had close family, business and social ties. The Brerewoods and Ratcliffes were related, as were the Breretons and the Harpers; of the eight men who were most intimately concerned with Prynne's reception, four, Leigh, Aldersey, Trafford and Bruen were members of the wealthiest of the city companies, the Mercers', Ironmongers', Grocers' and Apothecaries' Company.<sup>70</sup> Three of the eight were aldermen and had served as sheriffs; Thomas Aldersey (1627-28), Robert Ince (1629-30) and Calvin Bruen (1635-36). At least two of the eight, Aldersey and Ince, had served as church wardens of St. Oswald's and the latter was responsible for the reseating of 1628-29 which caused the rift with Bridgeman.<sup>71</sup> In his will, William Trafford left small bequests to four of the remaining seven, Hunt, Bruen, Leigh and Goldbourne.<sup>72</sup>

Prynne's entertainment could not have occurred at a worse time for the Anglican Church in Chester. It coincided with Biddulph's dismissal from the rectory of St. Martin's, the threats by some of his parishioners to oust Edwards from the living of St. Mary's on the grounds of simony and the exclusion of the mayor from his seat in the Cathedral. The temper of the city can be judged from a letter written by Bridgeman to Laud on 1 December 1638, in which he asked for help in settling the seating controversy in favour of the mayor:

It is an unseasonable quarrel for these times (and as I hear is taken notice of in Scotland) . . . My aim is only to cast water on that fire which is already kindled, or leastwise that none may get a stick from this place to increase the flame, our citizens being already too sensible of that punishment which they just and lately received for Prynne's entertainment.<sup>73</sup>

The division within the clergy is clearly shown when, either by design or accident, John Ley was unable to take the Friday lecture at St. Peter's on 12 January 1637/38<sup>74</sup> and his place was filled by Thomas Holford, rector of Plemstall, one of the most vituperative of Puritan preachers. In his sermon Holford stated that:

full and ample conformity now adayes would not serve the turne, but yf a man be more zealous or more religious than other men then he is branded with the name of heretices, schismaticke or puritan.

As a result Holford found himself before the Consistory court, indicted for preaching a sermon full of 'factious & seditious doctrine' for having thereby

<sup>69</sup> A.M. Johnson, 'Politics in Chester during the Civil War and Interregnum 1640-1662' in P. Clark and P. Slack, eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700*, 1972, p.204; R.C. Richardson, 'Puritanism in North West England', Ph.D. thesis, Manchester University, 1969, pp.20 and 291; Margaret J. Groombridge, *Calendar of the Council Minutes of the City of Chester 1603-1642*, M.A. thesis, Manchester University, 1951, p.37; and Blomfield, 'Puritanism in Chester', *J.C.A.S.*, old series, vol.3, 1885, p.271.

<sup>70</sup> See *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.8, 1910, nos. 1608, 1613 and 1663.

<sup>71</sup> *Cheshire R.O.*, Ref. EDC 5/1 (1630).

<sup>72</sup> *ibid.*, will of William Trafford, 1640, Ref. WS.

<sup>73</sup> *Chetham Society*, old series, vol. 16, 1889, pp.405ff.

<sup>74</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 6, 1961, no. 10764. Ley was claimed to be sympathetic to Bruen and the others.

endeavoured 'to confute a good and wholesome doctrine delivered by Mr. Coney a learned & lycensed precher . . . touching conformity'. He was further accused of having been 'a favorer of factious & schismaticall p[er]sons & puritans who refuse to conforme themselves to the lawfel ordinances and rytes ecclicall'; of publicly stating that the rites and ceremonies of the church were superstitious and that 'men zealously & godly affected may not with any good conscience applie them, use them or as occasion requirith subscribe unto them'; of discarding the surplice, administering the sacraments to people sitting, omitting the sign of the cross at baptism and refusing to stand at the creed or gospel, or bow at the name of Jesus. Further, Holford had encouraged others to follow his example.

All five witnesses examined in the case were clergy; there are clear divisions in their testimony. Three witnesses (William Clark, a minor canon, William Seddon, curate of St. Mary's and John Conney, divinity lecturer at the Cathedral) all affirmed that Holford was unconformable to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England, but they differed in their perceptions of the sermon. Clark saw it as an attack on the hierarchy of the church; Conney, as a contradiction of a sermon in which he had urged conformity and then zeal towards God; Seddon as no criticism of the church rulers. Lancaster and Glendole denied that the sermon had attacked the Church of England and Glendole further stated that he knew Holford as 'a man conformable to the discipline of the Church now established'.<sup>75</sup>

Although found guilty, Holford appears to have escaped with a warning. Thus in 1639, he was able to preach unhindered at St. Michael's and in 1640 at Barrow, where he delivered a savage attack on the government and rites of the Anglican Church.<sup>76</sup>

The divisions between the clergy widened after war with Scotland broke out. The Cathedral treasurer's accounts from 1638 onwards, note constant payments for the equipage and upkeep of the horse and man that the dean and chapter agreed to keep in the field for the service of the king.<sup>77</sup> Most of the organisation was undertaken by William Bispham, the sub dean, with some help from Prebendary Duckworth.

To help finance the war with the Scots, a clerical contribution was organised throughout the diocese. The dean and chapter gave £20, but the sole contributor among the city clergy was Francis Edwards, rector of St. Mary's. Glendole and Conney, who had paid their Ship Money assessments in 1635 and 1636, avoided payment to the Scots war on the grounds of the smallness of their cures.<sup>78</sup> This is remarkable in the case of Conney, who was a man of some wealth. Richard Wilson, rector of Holy Trinity, was one of the only two clergymen in the county to refuse any payment. The division among the Puritan clergy on the subject of the Scots war is shown in that while Wilson and Samuel Torshell, the Puritan vicar of Bunbury refused payment, Ley and Lancaster paid the assessments.

<sup>75</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDC/5/32 (1637).

<sup>76</sup> *ibid.*, Ref. P65/8/1; Public Record Office, Ref. S.P. 16, vol. 483 f.20; J.S. Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.35.

<sup>77</sup> Cathedral treasurer's accounts, 1610-44.

<sup>78</sup> R.S.L.C., vol.12, 1885, p.119.

The controversy over the Scots war was increased by the trial of Thomas Case, a Manchester preacher, before the Chester Consistory court. Case had preached a sermon in which he referred to persecutions of the Scots for religious reasons and accused his auditors of 'not being soe zealous and forward against the ceremonies of the Church'<sup>79</sup> since the war. The unsettled state of the times was such that men like Holford and Case remained at large to propagate their hatred of the liturgy and hierarchy. The result was a growing radical, anti episcopal movement within the city.

The relaxing of printing regulations led to the publishing and distribution of books and pamphlets which encouraged the popular agitation of 1640-41.<sup>80</sup> Preachers were encouraging their followers 'to comit divers outrages even in the City of Chester by pullinge down the rayles in one of the most publicke churches of the said citie at noone daie w[hi]ch might have caused much effusion of blood'.<sup>81</sup> Such preachers emboldened the factious and turbulent to express their malice. The church wardens' accounts show that the altar rails of St. Peter's, St. Michael's, St. Mary's and St. John's were swept away, probably sometime in May/June 1641. At St. Michael's the screen, pulpit and all the expensive work which had stood, (against the wish of many parishioners) for less than a year, was removed.<sup>82</sup> The more Puritan elements indulged in an orgy of destruction. At the Cathedral the church walls were whitened and an image at the east end of the quire was defaced and plastered over on the order of the sub dean acting on instructions from the mayor.<sup>83</sup> The church wardens' payments for lime and glazing indicate that stained glass and painted walls were obliterated. In the wake of this unrest, followed the 'innovators' who neglected to read divine service on Sundays, but 'entetayned the people with novell exhortacons & inventions of their owne to the great grieffe & discouragment of his ma[jes]t[y]'s moderate & well affected people'.<sup>84</sup>

Among these 'innovators' was Samuel Eaton, a Cheshire clergyman, who returned from New England in 1640. On 3 January 1640/41, Eaton preached a powerful and bitter sermon at St. John's laying down the tenets of Congregationalism, extolling the autonomy of individual congregations and their right to appoint their ministers and attacking bishops, Consistory courts and the Book of Common Prayer. Eaton claimed that all who failed to assist in this work were cursed.<sup>85</sup>

With the removal of the bishops' control of the press, Ley launched into print. Following his encomium upon the life of Jane Ratcliffe, widow of Byfield's patron, he printed what were probably the core of his sermons on the sabbath in 1633, in *Sunday a Sabbath, a Prescriptive Discourse for discussion of Sabbatary Doubts*, 1641. So popular was this work that it went into a second edition within the year.

About the same time Prynne published *A New Discovery to the Prelate's Tyranny*, in which he accused Bridgeman of erecting popish altars in Chester Cathedral. Shocked by the injustice, violence and abuse of Prynne's attack, it was Ley who rushed to

<sup>79</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDC 5/112 (1638); Richardson, *Puritanism in North West England*, pp.54-5.

<sup>80</sup> See Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.20.

<sup>81</sup> British Library, Additional MS. 36914 ff.224-5.

<sup>83</sup> Cathedral treasurer's accounts, 1610-44 for 1641-42; Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.36.

<sup>84</sup> British Library, Additional MS. 36914 ff.224-5.

<sup>85</sup> Bodleian Library, Tanner MS. 65 f.214.

Bridgeman's defence in his *Letter against the erection of an altar, written 29 June 1635 to John Bishop of Chester*. Ley establishes his Puritan credentials to the Puritan reader with his statement that 'I never yet bowed head or knee either to or towards an altar or holy table'. He defended his claim that Bridgeman only meant to use the table as a repository and stated that 'for the most part of mine intercourse with him I have had more experience of favourable than unfavourable dealings with him'.<sup>86</sup> The attacks upon the bishops may have swayed Ley in their favour, but he had travelled too far along a path from which he was unable to extricate himself.

With the chaos and confusion caused by the destruction of church furnishings, the breakdown of the Consistory court and the radical pamphlets and petitions that flooded the city and county, many friends of the Puritan movement felt their enthusiasm for change replaced by desires to staunch or reverse the trends.

Lords Kilmorey and Cholmondeley drew up a petition asking for firm and 'speedie direcon' against 'innovators and distubers'. Among the signatories were Bispham, the sub dean, Conney and Richard Wilson, rector of Holy Trinity.

This petition was followed by one moderately Puritan in tone regretting the king's estrangement from Parliament and his intended journey to Ireland. The clergy with Chester connections who signed the petition were Ley, Lancaster, Conney, Holford, Glendole and Richard Hunt, who succeeded Francis Edwards as rector of St. Mary's in 1642.<sup>88</sup>

Sir Thomas Aston made great efforts to bring the more moderate Puritans into the episcopal camp. His agent in this was John Werden, who wrote to Sir Thomas that he had been asked by Lord Cholmondeley to show one of Aston's letters to 'my Lord of Derby, to D[o]c[t]or du Mosyn and Mr. Conney. But none of them saw it, but I returned it to his Lo[rdshi]p w[i]th my oppinion that it was only fit for the view of a bosome frend'.<sup>89</sup> Werden sounded out the people mentioned in the letter and could report to Aston that 'I have imparted yr noble respects to or very comendable divines D[o]c[t]or du Mostyn, Mr. Coney & Mr. Bispham who desire me to represent . . . their humble acceptancies & service'.<sup>90</sup>

Mostyn and Conney were valuable additions to the episcopal cause. Mostyn was a regular preacher in the city, a friend of Ley and allied through his wife to the powerful city family of Aldersey;<sup>91</sup> Conney was Saturday lecturer at St. Peter's as well as vicar of St. Oswald's and St. John's. The clergy of Chester were now in two irrevocably divided camps, but national events soon overtook local considerations.

Ley and Lancaster had probably ceased to preach in the city by early 1642. Thereafter, Sir Thomas Aston and the other commissioners of array took stern measures against any minister who refused to publish Royalist declarations in their churches. 'Indeed it is most apparent they intend so much to enawe the country as

86 John Ley, *Letter against the erection of an altar, written 29 June 1635 to John Lord Bishop of Chester*, 1641, pp.2-8.

87 British Library, Additional MS. 26914 f.224v.

88 *ibid.*, 36913 f.60; Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.54.

89 British Library, Additional MS. 36914 f.107.

90 *ibid.*, 36914 f.206.

91 For the Aldersey family see *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 13, 1916, no. 3217; *Harleian Society*, vol. 59, 1909, pp.5-9.



that none should dare discover or speak against their courses'. Sir William Brereton, in a letter dated 30 July 1642, mentions that four or five ministers were already 'convented and give security to appear at the Assizes'. Among them were Ley, Lancaster and Holford.<sup>92</sup>

The general retreat of the Puritans in Chester at this time was lessened only by the institution of Ley's protégé, Glendole, as vicar of St. Oswald's on 14 November 1642 on the death of Conney. The presentation was made by Evan Edwards, a baron of the Exchequer and Henry Harper, an attorney of the Exchequer, on an existing grant from the dean and chapter.<sup>93</sup> Probably Glendole never took up the appointment.

With the fortification of Chester for the king, the city became a haven for clergy dispossessed by the victorious Parliamentary armies. The city also contained Irish clergy who had fled from the rebellion there, including the Cheshire born George Cottingham, whom the rebels had imprisoned in Monaghan<sup>94</sup> and an un-named Irish bishop who preached monthly and administered the sacrament at St. Michael's in 1643-44. William Ainsworth, Ley's former curate at Great Budworth, defected to the Royalists and later in 1641 was the bishop's curate at Wigan.<sup>95</sup> On the outbreak of hostilities, Ainsworth fled to Chester, where he was appointed divinity lecturer at the Cathedral in succession to Conney and in April 1644, Sunday lecturer at St. Peter's. Supporting the influx of clergy was not easy during the war. In July 1644, Ainsworth was forced to petition the mayor for remuneration for eight months service and the leavelookers were ordered to collect benevolences for his support among the citizens.<sup>96</sup>

In an effort to help finance the dispossessed clergy, Lord Byron, Royalist governor of Chester, sequestered Ley's prebend on 25 November 1644. The £40 owing to Ley was divided between Dean Nicholls, Ainsworth and five prebendaries.<sup>97</sup> The Friday lectureship held by Ley was given by the mayor and aldermen to William Seddon, former curate of St. Mary's, who had withdrawn from his vicarage at Eastham and been given several rooms in the palace by the bishop.

Glendole's preferments were also given to clerical refugees. Thomas Bridge, rector of Malpas, was given the vicarage of St. Oswald's<sup>98</sup> and William Smyth, curate of Malpas and Worthenbury in Flintshire, received the stipendiary curacy of St. Peter's.<sup>100</sup>

Other clergy who withdrew to the city for safety included the dean, Dr. Mallory; Francis Edwards, rector of Heswall; Charles Duckworth, rector of Dodleston; Philip Holland, curate of Macclesfield; Thomas Wright, rector of Wilmslow; William

<sup>92</sup> The MSS. of His Grace the Duke of Portland, *13th Report of the Historical MSS. Commission*, part 1, 1891, pp.44-7.

<sup>93</sup> Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, vol. 1, p.306.

<sup>94</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 15, 1918, no. 3502, 3511, 3520, 3529, 3536 and 3537.

<sup>95</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDC/5/29 (1641). Ainsworth is incorrectly called rector of Great Budworth in Chetham Society, old series, vol. 18, 1890, p.724.

<sup>96</sup> Chester City R.O., Ref. AB/2 ff. 60, 66 and 67v.

<sup>97</sup> Cathedral treasurer's accounts, 1610-44.

<sup>98</sup> Chester City R.O., Ref. AB/2 f.66; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 44, 1949, no. 9172.

<sup>99</sup> A.G. Matthews, *Walker Revised*, 1948, p.88; R.S.L.C., vol. 1, 1878, p.248.

<sup>100</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. P63/7/1; R.S.L.C., vol. 61, 1911, pp.36 and 125.

Nicholls, rector of Cheadle; Dr. Paisley, rector of Hawarden;<sup>101</sup> Edward Wyrley, subsequently rector of Mobberley; and Robert Freckleton, curate of Bishpam, Lancashire.<sup>102</sup>

Although the Consistory court ceased to function after 1641, some of the ecclesiastical machinery continued to function: wills were proved and marriage licences granted (the last in October 1644), although in greatly reduced numbers. The most marked sign of the continuation of ecclesiastical government was the Ruridecanal Visitation of the two deaneries still under Royalist control, Chester and Wirral, which was held in the Cathedral on 9 May 1643.<sup>103</sup>

Throughout the war, the affairs of the Cathedral were run by the sub dean. The upkeep of horse and man remained a drain on the depleted revenue of the Cathedral. The last section of the Cathedral treasurer's accounts for 1645 itemises debts owing to the dean and chapter, drawn up by Bispham and Prebendary Moreton. Probably the list of debtors was drawn up for the purpose of coercion by the garrison, because payments by tenants in March 1645 include one by George Ball, a captain in the Parliamentary army, who was on the Wirral committee for sequestrations.

The morale of the clergy in Chester must have been lowered when the 'aged Bishop dreading the hardships of a siege voided the place'<sup>104</sup> and joined Archbishop Williams in Conway. A small number of clergy followed him, including Francis Edwards and Dean Nicholls.<sup>105</sup> They were followed by a flood after the fall of the city in February 1646.

The terms of surrender were drawn up by twelve Royalist commissioners (including Dr. Moreton and Thomas Bridge) and twelve Parliamentary commissioners: 'Every Captain of Foot, Esquire, graduate, preaching minister, gentlemen of quality' was allowed to leave Chester, 'every one of them with his own horse and swords. The ministers without swords, none of them carrying with them above five shillings and the ministers to have all their own notes and evidences'.<sup>106</sup>

Among the ministers who left the city were William Smythe, curate of St. Peter's, who was paid £5 for his last quarter's service on 21 January 1645/46, ten days before the fall of the city; and George Burches, vicar of St. John's. He was reduced to poverty owing to the sequestration of his rectory at Woodchurch and the St. John's church wardens' accounts record a payment 'unto Mr. George Burges minister before his quarterage came to be collected in regard of his necessity the 15th of August 1645'. Burches and his family fled to Bebington.<sup>107</sup> Some ministers remained in Chester after its surrender, including William Seddon. His son recounted that:

<sup>101</sup> *J.C.A.S.*, new series, vol. 2, 1892, p.30.

<sup>102</sup> D. Lambert, 'The Lower Clergy of Lancashire', M.A. thesis, Liverpool University, 1964, unpaginated lists of curates.

<sup>103</sup> Cheshire R.O., bishop's transcripts of Bebington Parish register, 1642-43. The writer is grateful to Miss Helen Lowry for her translation of the Latin.

<sup>104</sup> Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary on the Hill, Chester*, p.85; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.44, 1949, no. 9172; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. 2, 1881, nos. 1450 and 1459; *Local Gleanings Relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, vol. 2, 1877, no. 517.

<sup>105</sup> Matthews, *Walker Revised*, 1948, p.90; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol.10, 1913, no. 2410.

<sup>106</sup> Chetham Society, new series, vol. 65, 1909, p.130.

<sup>107</sup> The Reverend F. Sanders, *The Parish Registers of Bebington, Co. Chester 1558-1701*, 1897, p.76; Cheshire R.O., Ref.P61/1/1.

the city being surrendered upon Articles, my father was shortly apprehended and made prisoner, and after some short durance was demanded by ye prevailing powere why he had not . . . marched off with ye Garrison to ye kings quarters to which he replied yt he thought his cassock had unconcern'd him in those Articles, being a minister in ye city, but above all he had a wife and many small children there which if he could see tolerably dispos'd of he would not unwillingly accept the articles.

Soon after his release:

many complaints being made against him yt he had in his preaching reflected upon the proceedings of the prevailing party, and had animated ye garrison to resist even unto blood & etc., he was remanded to prison again, and his house permitted to be plunder'd by ye soldiers, who despoil'd him not of his goods only, but of his books and papers which they exposed to sale at a very low rate; and so by private directions to some of his friends, he repurchas'd some of the most necessary for his own use.

Seddon and his family were expelled from Chester;<sup>108</sup> he may be referred to in St. John's Parish accounts for 1646-47, recording two shillings paid 'unto a banished minister . . . that came forth of prison'.

The experiences of Seddon were not unique. A marginal note in the registers of Holy Trinity states that 'Now all parsons were driven out of Chester and new lights came in'.<sup>109</sup> None of the clergy who remained in Chester during the siege and held a lectureship or a living there retained it under the new government. Pilkington, Ainsworth, Johnson, Jones, Biddulph, Bridge, Burches, Clark, Gorst, Hunt and Wilson were all sequestered and removed from office. The smaller and poorer parishes of St. Bridget, St. Martin and St. Olave, remained without ministers throughout the Commonwealth. William Cook was the first minister of St. Michael's appointed after the siege, in 1650. The parishioners of the first three churches and St. Michael's until 1650, attended Holy Trinity and possibly St. Peter's. The parish register of St. Bridget records that 'the register is defective till the year 1653 . . . there being neither priest nor clarke the tymes were such'.<sup>110</sup>

With the city in the hands of Parliament, a new wave of destruction descended on the remaining stained glass and the stone cross in St. Mary's churchyard was cut down.<sup>111</sup> Some churches, including St. Bridget's and St. Oswald's, hid their church plate. All the traditions observed without interruption from the Middle Ages were abolished. In the 1630s, even strongly Puritan churches like St. Michael's and St. Peter's were decorated with holly and ivy at Christmas. During the siege, the parishioners of St. John's beat the bounds at Rogationtide in spite of the fact that much of the boundary of the parish was dangerously near the enemy. Monthly communion was held until September 1645, after which it was abandoned owing to the

<sup>108</sup> Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary on the Hill, Chester*, pp.85-6.

<sup>109</sup> *J.C.A.S.*, vol. 21, 1915, p.161; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 53, 1958, no. 10396.

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*, vol. 15, 1918, no. 3484.

<sup>111</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. P20/13/1.

exposed position of the church. At St. Mary's, communion in the 1630s was held eleven times a year; at St. Michael's, apparently once every two months and at St. Peter's, monthly.

With Chester in the hands of Parliament, the picture changed radically. A Consistory court case in 1666 revealed that there had been no communion at St. Olave's for twenty years.<sup>112</sup> In 1650, at St. Peter's, the sacrament was celebrated four times a year. No accurate figure can be derived for Holy Trinity, St. Mary's and St. Michael's, but the indication is that communion was infrequent.

Dr. J.S. Morrill's vision of a post episcopalian church where the ceremonies of the Church of England survived among the Directory and other Presbyterian additions, because of the attachment of many people to the old services, is partly borne out by the surviving church wardens' accounts for Chester.<sup>113</sup> In 1656-57, the parishioners of St. John's observed Rogationtide during the absence of their minister in Ireland. It was the first time for twelve years that the parish had performed the ceremony and it was celebrated by a cold collation for the parishioners on their return. In May 1657, the parishioners of Holy Trinity also walked the bounds of the parish in Rogationtide.<sup>114</sup>

St. Peter's removed their font between 1646 and 1648, St. John's in 1656-57 and St. Mary's as late as 1657-58, when they replaced it by 'a faire bason'.

The siege of Chester caused great damage to the churches and chapels outside the walls. The Hospital and Chapel of St. Giles, Spital Boughton, were demolished by the Royalist garrison on 20 July 1643 and never rebuilt.<sup>115</sup> A similar fate befell the Chapel of St. John the Baptist outside the Northgate in February 1643/44.<sup>116</sup> The parish churches of St. John and St. Mary also received extensive damage.

With the capture of the city by Parliament, Ley, Glendole and Lancaster returned to St. Peter's. Shortly after, Benjamin Ball was appointed at St. John's, Thomas Upton at Holy Trinity and Henry Masy at St. Oswald's; only Masy had served in Chester before the war, as curate of St. Mary's, but he withdrew from the city sometime in 1642.<sup>117</sup> St. Mary's was vacant until 4 February 1647/48, when William Peartree became rector.<sup>118</sup> He had played a valuable part in helping to finance Parliament's armies. Together with Nathaniel Lancaster he had been one of the receivers of the propositions for the use of Parliament within the hundred of Nantwich.<sup>119</sup> He had been indicted for high treason and outlawed for resisting the Royalist attack on Nantwich.<sup>120</sup> All these clergy subscribed to the Cheshire attesta-

<sup>112</sup> *ibid.*, Ref. EDC 5/8 (1966); *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 6, 1906, no. 942.

<sup>113</sup> J.S. Morrill, 'The Church in England 1642-49', in J.S. Morrill, ed., *Reaction to the Civil War 1642-49*, 1982, pp.89-115.

<sup>114</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. P1/11/1 and P51/12/1.

<sup>115</sup> British Library, Harleian MS. 2125 f. 135; *Victoria History of Cheshire*, vol. 3, p.179; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 58, 1963, no. 11051.

<sup>116</sup> British Library, Harleian MS.2125 f.148; *Victoria History of Cheshire*, vol. 3, 1980, p.182.

<sup>117</sup> R.S.L.C., vol. 61, 1911, pp.93-108, June-Nov. 1641.

<sup>118</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. P20/13/1.

<sup>119</sup> Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.102, footnote 3.

<sup>120</sup> Chetham Society, new series, vol. 65, 1909, pp.151ff; Earwaker, *The History of the Church and Parish of St. Mary on the Hill Chester*, p.88; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 51, 1956, nos. 10 and 123.

tion on 6 June 1648,<sup>121</sup> showing their devotion to the Solemn League and Covenant and Presbyterianism. When William Cook became minister of St. Michael's in 1650, he too joined the Presbyterian oligarchy. Lancaster was confirmed in his post as one of the lecturers of St. Peter's by the mayor and aldermen in 1648<sup>122</sup> and was a dominant influence in the city churches throughout the late 1640s and 1650s.

Though the clergy at St. Peter's were Presbyterian, the preachers named in the church wardens' accounts between 1652 and 1660 belong to a wide spectrum of non-conformity. They include the nationally known London preachers, Simeon Ashe and Edmund Calamy: John Angier, curate of Denton; and Samuel Eaton, congregational minister of Dukinfield.

St. John's is the only other church where the names of the preachers in this period are known. Many lack the impeccable nonconformist background of those at St. Peter's, including a number of sequestered clergy, Richard Hunt from St. Mary's, Thomas Bridge from St. Oswald's, George Byrom from Thornton-le-Moors and two, Robert Freckleton and George Cottingham, who resided in Chester during the siege, but later conformed to the new order and signed the attestation in 1648. With St. John's observing Rogationtide in 1656-57, when the minister was in Ireland and Hunt, Bridge and Cottingham preaching during Pemberton's absence either in Ireland or London, the indications are that the parish contained some active Anglicans.

After 1646, there was a serious attempt to improve the income of the new clergy. The revenues of the dean and chapter were sequestered. The records of the mayor and aldermen note that the minister of St. Oswald's was to receive £120 per annum, of St. Peter's £150 and of Holy Trinity and St. John's £100 each. Voting for the payment of these sums from the revenue of the dean and chapter was one thing, payment was another. It was not until three years later, in July 1649, that the lands were surveyed and sold.<sup>124</sup> The church wardens' accounts for St. John's show that even then their minister was not paid regularly. In 1649-50, the church wardens went to the mayor to seek £50 for their minister. By 1654, John Pemberton at St. John's was owed £350 for three and a half years' salary and John Glendole was in arrears of £346. 17s. 9d.<sup>125</sup>

On the death of Peartree in 1655, Richard Hunt, the sequestered rector of St. Mary's, was re-appointed to the living; he was one of a number of Royalist clergymen who lived in Chester in the 1650s. Peter Stringer, ordained in 1639 and employed by Bishop Bridgeman before the war, becoming a minor canon c.1645, was by 1656, parish clerk of St. Oswald's.<sup>126</sup> Another minor canon, John Pack, continued to live in Chester between 1646 and the early 1650s.

During Sir George Booth's rebellion in 1659, William Cook, the minister of St. Michael's, declared for the king and persuaded the citizens to deliver the city to Booth. By 7 August, at least one other minister had prayed for the king, 'to the no little

<sup>121</sup> Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.553.

<sup>122</sup> Chester City R.O., Ref. AB/1 f.84v.

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*, Ref. AB/2 ff.77-78v.

<sup>124</sup> R.S.L.C., vol. 1, 1878, pp.223ff.

<sup>125</sup> *ibid.*, vol.34, 1896, pp.47 and 51; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, vol. 2, 1880-82, no. 1187.

<sup>126</sup> J.C.A.S., new series, vol. 21, 1915, p.164; vol. 19, 1913, p.81.

joy of the people w[hi]ch drawe tears fro the eyes of many'.<sup>127</sup> The rebellion fizzled out and the ringleaders and supporters were rounded up. Cook was condemned for high treason and suffered four months' imprisonment.<sup>128</sup>

The years spanning the Restoration and the passing of the first Conventicle Act in July 1664 saw a radical change in the clerical manpower within Chester owing to death, resignation and ejection. At the same time there was a resurrection of the old diocesan machinery, a gradual resumption of the Book of Common Prayer and a return to the ornaments prescribed by the Canons of 1603.

The dean and chapter were restored and with them the surviving prebendaries and minor canons. The dean, one of the prebendaries and two minor canons died during the Commonwealth. Dr. Bispham took charge of the Cathedral until the arrival in Chester of the new dean, Henry Bridgeman, son of the late bishop.

Four minor canons lived to see the Restoration. Henry Biddulph was in prison, where he remained until his death c.1662<sup>129</sup> for debts contracted during his sequestration. Clark and Pilkington were both fairly elderly; the former resumed the cures of St. Martin's and St. Bridget's, which had remained vacant since his sequestration. Clark died c.1663,<sup>130</sup> Pilkington in August 1666 and Stringer, the youngest, in 1673. The minor canons at this time did not resume their former number, but alternated between three and four,<sup>131</sup> with the result that the Cathedral duties fell more heavily on them, leaving them little time for parochial work. Thus in the reign of Charles II, St. Olave's, St. Martin's and St. Michael's were often without ministers.<sup>132</sup> When the dean and chapter presented Thomas Clarke, a minor canon to St. Martin's in 1670 he was the fifth non graduate to serve the church in ten years.<sup>133</sup> Between 1663 and 1685, St. Bridget's was served by Thomas Swann, a non graduate.

The only beneficed clergyman in Chester to be displaced in 1660 was Thomas Upton at Holy Trinity; he was replaced by the sequestered rector, Richard Wilson, who returned from exile in Chirk between September and October.

The church wardens' accounts indicate that Prayer Book services were resumed at both Holy Trinity and St. Mary's before they were required to be in August 1662. The other churches remained in the hands of their Presbyterian pastors until St. Bartholomew's Day, 1662. Here there is no evidence of the use or purchase of the Book of Common Prayer before April 1662. St. Michael's obtained theirs between April and May 1662, St. John's between April and September and St. Peter's two days before the deadline.

Possession of the book did not signal a sudden return to the ornaments prescribed in the Canons. At St. Mary's the Puritan pewter basin was in use for baptism until 1662-63. The old font of St. John's was recovered from a garden and Holy Trinity's

<sup>127</sup> Morrill, *Cheshire 1630-1660*, p.321.

<sup>128</sup> Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.132.

<sup>129</sup> Farrall, *The Parish Register of the Holy & Undivided Trinity in the City of Chester 1532-1837*, biographical index.

<sup>130</sup> R.S.L.C., vol. 65, 1912, pp.2-316. Thirty six marriage licences were addressed to him between June 1661 and August 1662.

<sup>131</sup> The Cathedral treasurer's accounts, vol. 2, 1664-94, were viewed by kind permission of Canon Maltby.

<sup>132</sup> Cheshire R.O., bishop's transcripts for these parishes in 1675-76 all record that there was no minister.

<sup>133</sup> Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, vol. 1, pp.332-3.

from St. Peter's. At St. Peter's the font was not erected until after January 1662/63. Neither St. John's nor St. Peter's possessed a parish surplice until after St. Bartholomew's Day, 1662; the surplice for St. Peter's was made in April 1663. At Archbishop Frewen's Visitation in 1663, both Holy Trinity and St. Martin's were without a surplice and St. Olave's, St. John's and St. Bridget's were without communion plate. By 1665, St. Olave's was still without a font and St. Martin's without surplice or plate.<sup>134</sup>

Some of the incoming clergy did nothing to win the affections of the people back to the old services and old rites: they brought with them the old abuses. Simon Land, who succeeded the conscientious Dr. Harrison at St. Oswald's in 1662, started off badly by neither catechising nor reading afternoon prayer. He was admonished to mend his ways at the Metropolitan Visitation of 1663, but it was stated in 1665, that not only was he still failing to catechise the youth of the parish, but had administered the sacrament only once in a year and a half.<sup>135</sup> Alexander Fetherstone, who succeeded Peter Leigh at St. John's, was a pluralist, indicted by the church wardens of his other parish, as 'a p'son of scandelous life & conversacon' and William Thompson the new vicar of St. Peter's was presented by his wardens in 1668 for neither reading prayers on Holy Days nor catechising.

Owing to St. Bartholomew's Day, St. Peter's, St. Oswald's, St. Michael's and St. John's lost their ministers and the headmaster of the Grammar School, William Liptrot and Samuel Fisher, Friday lecturer at St. Peter's resigned their posts rather than submit to the new order.

When Upton left Holy Trinity in 1660, he moved to Little Neston, but Cook, Glendole, Leigh and Harrison all remained in Chester after their ejection and formed a focus for the people within the city who dissented from the new order.<sup>136</sup>

One of the major supporters of Nonconformity in the seventeenth century was the Mercers' Company. Although only one out of twenty four companies, it was large and influential in the city.<sup>137</sup> The prominence of members of the company in the entertainment of Prynne was a symptom of their nonconformist leanings and sixty three per cent of those purged as a result of the Corporation Act, 1662, were members. So important was the company in Chester during the Commonwealth that eight out of the eighteen mayors and twelve out of thirty sheriffs, were in it. The Corporation Act affected eleven of the twenty members of its standing committee.<sup>138</sup>

During the period 1662 to 1672, many prominent nonconformists in Chester belonged to the company. They included Samuel Buck, who smashed the newly erected arms of the king in Holy Trinity; Edward Bradshaw, twice mayor, member of Parliament and father in law of Dr. Harrison, ejected vicar of St. Oswald's; Jonathan Gouldson, a former apprentice of William Trafford and Samuel Buck, who was imprisoned at

<sup>134</sup> Borthwick Institute, Ref. RVI A27 ff. 1v., 4v., 5v.-6 and 7v.; Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/34 (1665).

<sup>135</sup> Borthwick Institute, Ref. RVI A27 f.6v. The church wardens of St. Oswald's refused the oath in 1662-63.

<sup>136</sup> R.S.L.C., vol. 34, 1896, p.226. Peter Leigh was admitted to St. John's with the addition of certificates from Lancaster, Glendole and Upton.

<sup>137</sup> Margaret J. Groombridge, 'The City Guilds of Chester', *J.C.A.S.*, vol. 39, 1952, pp.92ff.

<sup>138</sup> The account book of the Mercers Company, vol. 1, f.374, was viewed by kind permission of the aldermen and stewards; Chester City R.O., Ref. AB/2 ff. 135-6; Ormerod, *History of Cheshire*, vol. 1, p.215.

least twice for attending conventicles; John Witter (died 1678) who left twenty shillings per annum for life to William Cook, the ejected nonconformist minister and whose son was a nonconformist preacher at Aston Chapel in the late 1660s<sup>139</sup> and John Travis, who combined trade in ironmongery with itinerant preaching. Probably there was a concentration of Nonconformity in the Mercers because their business required wide travel in particular to London, where they picked up various prevailing ideas.

The close family and business links between Chester nonconformists are illustrated in a letter from Sir Geoffrey Shackerley, governor of Chester, in July 1665:

The parties are so linked together in the city that it would be difficult to surprise them, unless it be by a special commission for their punishment, directed to those of no affinity with them.<sup>140</sup>

In the months after publication of the Act of Uniformity there were a number of protests in church. In 1663, the funeral of Jonathan Ridge, draper, member of Parliament, alderman and staunch Cromwellian, was held at St. Peter's. Four fellow drapers and an apothecary, who were known to object to the 'new' services, seized the corpse while the new vicar was reading the Confession and buried it in the churchyard without a service.<sup>141</sup>

Generally, lay Nonconformity, like clerical Nonconformity was now outside the Established Church, but there were exceptions. Jonathan Gouldson attended both conventicles and his church from June 1660 onwards. In July 1663, he was accused of irreverence in church, being contemptuous of the Book of Common Prayer, attending conventicles and sitting in Holy Communion. Gouldson ignored three summonses from the Consistory court and was excommunicated.<sup>142</sup> The frequency of conventicles and the leniency with which the offenders were treated caused Bishop Hall to react swiftly. When, on a visit to London he heard that Harrison and Cook preached to packed conventicles, he wrote to the mayor, demanding that the law against both preachers and auditors should be rigorously enforced so 'that such as owne not ye authority of the statute may feele the penalty of it'.<sup>143</sup> Gouldson was one of the men named as having attended a conventicle in Chester, in an unsigned letter to the mayor, dated 5 February 1663/64. Three constables stated that between fifty and sixty people were in the house of William Cook, hearing him preach. Cook was eventually imprisoned; his auditors appear to have escaped punishment.<sup>144</sup>

After the passing of the Conventicle Act in July 1664, Shackerley was disturbed by the movement of itinerant ministers and laity within Chester. During the months of national uncertainty with plague in London, war abroad and fears of revolt at

<sup>139</sup> Cheshire R.O., will of John Witter, 1678, Ref. WS; EDO 5/11 (1669); EDV 2/7 (1674); *J.C.A.S.*, vol. 67, 1984, p.73.

<sup>140</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1664-65, 1863, p.461; The Reverend W. Urwick, *Historical Sketches of Nonconformity in the County Palatine of Chester*, 1864, p.48.

<sup>141</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDC 5/26 (1663).

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*, Ref. EDC 5/73 (1663).

<sup>143</sup> Chester City R.O., Ref. ML/3/390; *8th Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts*, 1881, p.387; *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 57, 1962, no. 10926.

<sup>144</sup> *ibid.*, 3rd series, vol. 6, 1906, pp.936 and 974.



home. he remained vigilant. In July 1665, he stated that, 'great strictness is observed in keeping out strangers suspected to bring in the sickness, but the pest of disobedience and nonconformity continues rife. A conventicle of 100 persons was assembled at the house of Dr. Thomas Harrison'. Though many escaped, thirty or forty were brought before the mayor and it being their first conviction, escaped with a fine. Among them were Harrison's father in law, Edward Bradshaw and Peter Leigh, a former alderman. Shackerley stated that they were 'of the first and worst stamp of sectaries and therefor require the more severity'. Many of those who were captured were yeomen and gentlemen in Wirral; Captain George Ball of Irby had travelled almost fifteen miles to hear Harrison preach.<sup>145</sup> Shortly after this, in the wake of the Danvers Conspiracy Shackerley arrested and imprisoned Harrison, Trevis<sup>146</sup> and others, for safety.

When the Five Mile Act became law in October 1665, Harrison and Cook settled in Wirral and Peter Leigh, former vicar of St. John's, went to Knutsford.

Between 1665 and 1668, there was a lull in the persecution of nonconformists. With the removal from Chester of their old ministers they were more dependent upon itinerants. In January 1667/68, Peter Leigh and William Colly were bound over to keep the peace until the next Quarter Sessions. Colly was suspected of being a layman who had for some three years preached in private houses in and outside Chester, where he had administered the sacrament and baptised children.<sup>147</sup>

Similarly, John Trevis, an ironmonger in Northgate Street, took it upon himself to preach and pray in the absence of more regular nonconformist preachers. In August 1668, a conventicle held in his house was broken up by soldiers. While Trevis eluded arrest, six of his auditors were imprisoned. The following year it was stated that Trevis, who was believed to be 'a gifted man' held conventicles in his house and preached at Tarporley.<sup>148</sup> Equally persistent in preaching was Jonathan Gouldson; in July 1668, a warrant for his arrest and imprisonment was issued by the mayor.<sup>149</sup>

The Visitation Court book of Bishop Wilkins, which spans 1668-70, is silent on nonconformists in Chester other than Quakers. The only lay nonconformists presented were Trevis; a tailor who had shown contempt of divine service; and a woman from Sandbach who had caused a disturbance directed at ritual during a funeral service at St. Michael's.<sup>150</sup>

Between 1662 and 1670, there is almost no evidence of Nonconformity in St. Peter's parish, which for almost a century had been at the heart of Nonconformity. In the Metropolitan Visitation of 1663, the church wardens made no presentment and this was again the case in the 1671 Visitation.<sup>151</sup> In four other years, 1665, 1669 (twice)

<sup>145</sup> *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1664-65, 1863, p.461; Urwick, *Sketches of Historical Nonconformity*, p.47.

<sup>146</sup> *T.H.S.L.C.*, vol. 63, 1912, p.149.

<sup>147</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDC15/12 (1668); Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.129 shows that Colly was ordained in 1661; Chester City R.O., Quarter Sessions File, 1667-72, Ref. QSF 79 f.62.

<sup>148</sup> *ibid.*, f.101; Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/36 (1669).

<sup>149</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 6, 1906, no. 936.

<sup>150</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/35 ff. 21-8.

<sup>151</sup> Borthwick Institute, Ref. RVI A27 f.1; Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/39 ff. 3-6 (1671).

and 1670, the only Nonconformity dealt with by the church wardens was that of the Quakers.<sup>152</sup> The return of conventicles in 1669, gives a meticulous list of attenders at a Quaker conventicle, but makes no mention of Presbyterians or Independents. Coupled to this are a number of presentments against their minister, William Thompson, indicating his inadequacy.

Though Nonconformity in Chester was driven underground, it continued to thrive. The close family and business connections between the nonconformists were proof against this uneven persecution. When Henry Maurice, the Welsh nonconformist minister, visited Chester in July 1672, shortly after the Declaration of Indulgence was issued, he appears to have experienced no difficulty in finding a lodging place and possibly had visited Chester before. One of his hosts was William Bathoe, a tanner apprehended some years before while attending a conventicle held by Trevis.<sup>153</sup>

When the Declaration of Indulgence was issued in 1672, eight of the thirty one licences taken out by Cheshire Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Independents were taken out by Chester preachers. William Cook was licensed as both Presbyterian and Congregational preacher; Thomas Harrison as an Independent; John Wilson, former vicar of Backford, was licensed as a Congregational preacher at the home of Lady Catherine Booth, daughter of Lord Delamere, in Northgate Street and as a Presbyterian. In addition to these pre Restoration preachers, two younger men, William Jones and William Glendole, were licensed as Presbyterians.<sup>154</sup> The strength of Nonconformity within the city and the failure of efforts to contain it, are shown by the number of licences granted to Chester preachers.

This brief pause in persecution did not last and during the severe persecutions after 1682, only one Chester minister, William Cook (died 1684), was able to keep his congregation together.<sup>155</sup> John Glendole died in 1676. Harrison returned to Dublin in the 1670s and died there in 1682. John Wilson's preaching attracted great crowds after the Declaration of Indulgence and according to Calamy had 'a throng'd Congregation that fill'd the Hall and Galleries, and some part of the Court'.<sup>156</sup> There is little doubt that his death and that of Glendole and Harrison's desertion, contributed to the decline of Chester Nonconformity, which had always been dependent on the forceful ministers attracted to its service. None of its major figures was a native of the county. Three of the giants, Byfield, Ley and Glendole, came from Warwickshire, Cook from Staffordshire and Lancaster was a Lancastrian. Clerical Nonconformity was a foreign importation to Chester. The only native of the city to have taken orders at this period and to have been of any importance in the history of Nonconformity was Peter Ince, the son of the Chester stationer who had entertained Prynne; his ministry was centred in Wiltshire.

<sup>152</sup> Cheshire R.O., Ref. EDV 1/34 f.5 (1665); EDV 1/36 (1669); EDV 1/38 (1670-71); Borthwick Institute, Ref. REV A29A f.517 (1669).

<sup>153</sup> The MS. diary of the Reverend Henry Maurice, 1 June-6 October 1672, ff. 13-14. Viewed by kind permission of Dr. A.B. Cottle, Reader in Mediaeval History, University of Bristol.

<sup>154</sup> *The Cheshire Sheaf*, 3rd series, vol. 6, 1906, no. 1106; vol. 7, 1909, no. 1196.

<sup>155</sup> J.H. Hodson, *A History of Cheshire*, 1978, p.31.

<sup>156</sup> Matthews, *Calamy Revised*, p.536.

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