

26. Blomefield (1805-10) V, 521, VIII, 446; *Calendar of Curia Regis Rolls 1227-30* (1959), 366.
27. *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, X (1921), 95; NRO MC 22/6-7; E Ekwall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names* (4th edn., 1960), 371.
28. *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem* II (1906), 4; NRO DN/TER/35/1/3.
29. *Pers. comm.* Robert Liddiard.
30. *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem* IV (1913), 259; Blomefield (1805-10) IX, 53. These references to park and chace are post-d'Albini, however.
31. B. Morley and D. Gurney, *Castle Rising Castle, Norfolk* (East Anglian Archaeology, Report No. 81, 1997), 1-3, suggest that the Rising town plan is in fact pre-Conquest, formalised by William d'Albini when he added his grand castle about 1140.
32. Norwich's first surviving charter is of c.1158 (Hudson and Tingey I, 11-12), King's Lynn's of 1204 (D. M. Owen, *The Making of King's Lynn, A Documentary Survey* (British Academy, Records of Social and Economic History, n. s. XI, 1984), 34), Great Yarmouth's of 1208 (H. Swinden, *History and Antiquities of Great Yarmouth* (Norwich 1772), 23-52), and Thetford's 1574, though here earlier charters must be lost (A. Crosby, *A History of Thetford* (Phillimore 1986), 30). Castle Rising claimed a charter of between 1233 and 1242 (Blomefield (1805-10) IX, 51).

COUNTING THE FLOCK: A NOTE ON RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY DIOCESE OF NORWICH

by Clive D. Field

SUMMARY

Before the national religious census of 1851, evidence about the church-going habits of the British people is limited. However, one post-Restoration source available for six English dioceses are clergy returns to questionnaires issued in advance of episcopal visitation which, inter alia, probed absenteeism from public worship. Norwich was one of these dioceses. This article reviews the findings of the visitation returns of 1777 and 1801 to form a broad picture of the extent and characteristics of non-church-going in Norfolk and Suffolk during the late 18th century.

Although acts of uniformity obliging the entire population to attend some form of public worship on Sundays were almost continuously on the statute book between 1552 and 1846, relatively little is still known of the extent to which that obligation was fulfilled. Not until the 1830s did local enumerations of church attendance begin to occur, and only in 1851 was there a truly national census of church-going in connection with the civil census of that year.¹ In the absence of objective statistical evidence, increasing interest is being shown in the potential of clergy visitation returns in the Church of England as sources for religious practice. The process of episcopal visitation of parishes developed in the Middle Ages, and was codified through the Canons of 1604, but it was not until 1706 that the circulation of a questionnaire for completion by the clergy in advance of visitation emerged, and not until the 1760s that it became the norm.² The completed clergy visitation returns were not necessarily retained by the bishop and his diocesan staff, and there are several dioceses where they were either destroyed or lost. Nevertheless, according to a survey conducted by the present author in 1984, at least some clergy visitation returns are extant for fifteen of the twenty-three English dioceses in the

period up to 1806. In a handful of cases, modern critical editions have been published.³ Secondary analysis has been patchy but is growing. Recent examples of comparative studies include the work of Mather (Dioceses of Chester, Lichfield and Coventry, London, Ripon, St Asaph, St Davids, York)⁴ and Gill (Dioceses of Canterbury, Carlisle, Chester, Durham/Newcastle, Lincoln, London, Ripon, York),⁵ whilst the most important monographs on the visitation returns for individual dioceses are by Barrie-Curien for London⁶ and Jago for York.⁷

The clergy visitation returns contain a variety of information relevant to a study of religious practice. Perhaps the most pervasive from the 18th century have been data about the number of parochial communicants, especially at Easter – the one specified occasion in the Christian year when all members of the Church of England are required to take Holy Communion, and therefore potentially the peak of Anglican church-going. Historians such as Gilbert have certainly been tempted to use communicants at Easter and the other Great Festivals as a proxy for church attendance in the 18th and early 19th centuries.⁸ However, as Gill has argued,⁹ evidence of marked fluctuations over time and space in the relationship between general church attendance and Easter communicant data considerably undermine confidence in the use of the latter as an indicator of Anglican conformity; his researches suggest that, whilst the Church's teaching on taking communion at Easter may have remained constant, changing patterns of churchmanship and social convention have significantly affected the extent to which the teaching was observed. This certainly seems to have been the case in the Diocese of Norwich.¹⁰ Returns of average congregations would have been altogether more revealing but, unfortunately, these only became general features of visitation returns from the second quarter of the 19th century. For the 18th century, however, episcopal investigations in at least six English dioceses (Canterbury, Chester, Durham, Norwich, Oxford, and Salisbury) did include one important question which probed non-attendance at church. As yet, the only diocese for which the replies to this question have been analysed systematically is Oxford,¹¹ although some use has also been made of those for Chester,¹² and, in the case of the Diocese of Norwich, by Jacob of the Norfolk returns in 1806.¹³ Analysis of the responses to this question for two of the Norwich diocesan visitations forms the basis of the present paper.

The precise wording of the question varied somewhat from diocese to diocese and from visitation to visitation, the six variants found in the extant returns being:

Are there any persons in your parish who profess to disregard religion, or who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day? And from what motives and principles are they understood so to do? And what is the number of such persons, and is it increased of late? And of what rank are they? (Diocese of Oxford, 1738, 1759, 1768, 1771, 1774, 1778, 1781, 1784, 1787, 1793, 1796, 1799; Diocese of Canterbury, 1758, 1786; Diocese of Chester, 1789)

Are there any persons in your parish who profess to disregard religion, or who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day? From what motives and principles are they understood to do so? What is the number and rank of such persons? And are they increased of late, and by what means? (Diocese of Chester, 1778)

Are there any persons in your parish who profess to disregard religion or who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day? (Diocese of Salisbury, 1783; Diocese of Durham, 1792)

Are there any persons in your parish who appear to disregard religion, or who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day? And from what motives and principles are they understood to do so? What is the number of such persons? And is it increased of late and by what means? And of what rank are they? (Diocese of Chester, 1804)

Are there any persons in your parish who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day? And what is the number and rank of such persons, and are they increased of late? (Diocese of Norwich, 1777, 1784, 1794, 1801, 1806)

Are there any persons who absent themselves from all public worship? And from what motives or principles are they understood to do so? (Diocese of Oxford, 1802, 1805, 1808, 1811, 1814, 1817, 1820, 1823)

Although the first known occurrence of the question in a clergy visitation return is not until 1738, there can be little doubt that the true origins of the enquiry are to be found in the Toleration Act of 1689 and its impact upon levels of church-going. Despite being a limited measure, granting liberty of conscience and freedom of worship to professed Dissenters, there is much circumstantial evidence that the Act opened the floodgates for those who preferred to forsake the public worship of God in any form. Some of this evidence derives from the Diocese of Norwich. Probably the earliest is to be found in two letters sent by Humphrey Prideaux, Prebendary (later Dean) of Norwich and Archdeacon of Suffolk, to John Ellis on 27 June and 18 July 1692. In these Prideaux bemoaned the fact that:

The Act of Toleration has almost undone us, not in increasing the number of dissenters but of wicked and profane persons; for it is now difficult almost to get any to church, all pleading the licence, although they make use of it only for the alehouse.

He warned: 'unless there be some regulation made in it, in a short time it will turn half the nation into down right atheism'.¹⁴ Prideaux developed the point in 'A Circular Letter to the Clergy of the Arch-deaconry of Suffolk, concerning the Act of Toleration, and the Impious Liberty which too many take thereon wholly to absent from Church without worshipping God any where at all'. Dated 17 August 1692, the circular enjoyed a long published life as an appendix to most, if not all, editions of Prideaux's *Directions to Church-wardens*. In it Prideaux criticized churchwardens for falling prey to:

a wicked perswasion propagated among them, and now generally spread through the whole body of the people, as if by the late Act of Indulgence they were now wholly let loose from all manner of laws relating to religion, and every man left to the freedom of his own choice, whether he will pay any worship to God or no.¹⁵

It was almost certainly as a result of Prideaux's efforts that the articles addressed to churchwardens at the primary visitation of the Bishop of Norwich, John Moore, in 1692 included one which asked: 'Are there any in your parish, who under pretence of Liberty of Conscience, wholly neglect all publick worship of God...?'.¹⁶ This wording was retained in all subsequent visitation queries put to churchwardens until at least 1777.¹⁷ Moore's successor, Charles Trimnell, re-emphasized the point in his *Charge* to the clergy in 1709, counselling them that the Act of Toleration did not 'protect any from the penalties of not coming to church, but such as prove themselves to be of some separate congregation; and consequently it is not, as it never was intended to be, any shelter to the careless and profane.'¹⁸ Despite all the rhetoric, however, surviving presentments reveal minuscule efforts by churchwardens to bring non-church-goers before the consistory courts of the early 18th-century Diocese of Norwich.¹⁹ Public complaints about slack attendance and profanation of the Sabbath continued to be voiced by the Bishops of Norwich throughout the Georgian era, including by Thomas Green in 1721,²⁰ Philip Yonge in 1763,²¹ and Lewis Bagot in 1784.²²

Such, then, was the local background to, and episcopal rationale for, the inclusion of a question about common absentees from all public worship on Sunday in the Diocese of Norwich clergy visitation returns between 1777 and 1806. The sheer extent of the diocese, in terms of area and number of parishes, has precluded an analysis of all five visitations. This study is based upon 1,674 replies from incumbents surviving for 1777, when the returns were far from complete, and 1801, when a high response rate was secured. The basic statistical picture is set out in Table 1.

	<i>none</i>	<i>none known</i>	<i>'qualified none'</i>	<i>some</i>	<i>many</i>	<i>no answer</i>
<i>Total:</i>	28%	15%	16%	24%	8%	8%
<i>Year:</i>						
1777	25	11	21	26	5	12
1801	29	17	14	24	9	6
<i>County:</i>						
Norfolk deaneries	26	15	17	26	9	9
Suffolk deaneries	31	16	16	22	7	8
<i>Community size:</i>						
1-25 houses	38	14	18	19	4	7
26-50 houses	29	14	18	28	6	5
51-100 houses	18	19	16	29	12	6
101+ houses	18	17	13	29	18	5
<i>Comparison:</i>						
Oxford Dio., 1738-93	26	15	10	27	9	12
Oxford Dio., 1802-23	23	16	21	20	6	13

TABLE 1. Incidence of Common Absentees from Public Worship: Parishes in the Diocese of Norwich, 1777 and 1801. *Sources:* Norfolk Record Office, VIS 27/1-10, 27a/1-8, 28/1-10, 36/1-15, 37/1-13, 38/1-11, 39/1-12; Oxfordshire Archives, ODP d. 552-557, d. 561-581, b. 6-18

It will be seen that an average 8 per cent of incumbents in 1777 and 1801 chose not to respond to their diocesan's enquiry at all, or replied in such an ambiguous fashion as to make classification of their answers impossible ('the church appears to be regularly fill'd', 'attend as regularly as in the neighbouring parishes', and so forth). Overall, 28 per cent denied unequivocally that any common absentees existed in their parishes. A further 15 per cent left ajar the door of doubt by stating that they had no direct or indirect knowledge of such absentees, the implication being that they could not deny their existence absolutely. Sometimes, as at Woolverstone in 1801, the language of their denial was so tortured as to stretch credulity: 'I hope, & believe, that there are no such persons; or if such are to be found, that their number is not increased'. A comparable proportion, 16 per cent, identified various exceptions which, according to their very generous interpretation of the question, did not disprove the rule of general conformity. Two-fifths of this group of clergy suggested that their parishioners were 'tolerably regular' or 'attend for the most part pretty regularly'. Others intimated that infrequency rather than non-attendance was the problem; thus, 'some who do not constantly attend ... but not any yt I can learn who are in ye habit of not attending at all', 'not any but what come at times tho' not every Lord's Day', 'too many persons who do not assemble themselves regularly ... but none who commonly absent themselves', or 'no person that absents himself entirely from the church'. Yet others filed miscellaneous qualified answers along the lines of 'very few ... unless hindered by sickness or some unavoidable business', 'no absenters of any extraordinary note', 'no complaint to make against any particular person', 'none who wilfully absent themselves', or 'no such persons except the Dissenters & they sometimes come to church'.

The presence of some absentees was admitted in 24 per cent of parishes in 1777 and 1801 combined. Most of these clergy chose not to quantify the problem, writing in terms which implied that the neglectors were relatively few and far between, and otherwise downplaying their significance. Arguments frequently advanced in defence of incumbents were that: the situation was no worse than in other places ('There may be some such persons as is usual in all

parishes'); absentees had been admonished and had often promised to mend their ways; most neglect sprang 'more from carelessness than any settled aversion to religious duties'; some individuals may have worshipped at other churches closer to their home; and that travelling distance to church was a deterrent factor in more sprawling parishes, especially in the morning, winter or poorer weather,²³ and for the aged and infirm. As the incumbent of Ringsfield with Little Redisham expressed the last-mentioned point in 1777:

the parishioners in general, in summer, when the weather is fine & divine service in the afternoon, frequent public worship; but at other times, which I believe to be the case with most of the small country parishes, there is too often hardly the face of a congregation

Where, all too rarely, more precise figures were given (as at Banham and Tibenham in 1777 or Sutton in 1801), they tended to average up to one non-worshipper per household, suggesting an absenteeism rate of 15 to 20 per cent of the population.

Hockering apart (where there was an average of more than three absentees per household in 1777), a similar lack of quantification was evident in the 8 per cent of parishes where 'many' absentees were to be found, although incumbents here seemed more open in acknowledging their difficulty and felt less need to minimize the seriousness of the situation. Specimen responses from this group of parishes included:

There are too many that absent themselves from all publick worship of God on the Lord's Day. But as ours is a small fishing town, the inhabitants are very changeable and uncertain; so that the no., rank or increase is not easily ascertain'd (Pakefield, 1777)

Too many of all ranks ... here as in other places (Beccles, 1777)

There are many that I believe resort to no publick place of worship. Baccus their God and alehouses their temples (Hardwick, 1777)

The alehouses are more frequented than the church (Hardingham, 1777)

Except very few, there is but little or no religion - the greatest part of the parishioners have their sal[vatio]n to seek ... There are only few who attend public worship regularly (Upwell, 1777)

I fear there are too many in all parishes who commonly absent themselves from public worship (Docking, 1801)

Too many ... absent themselves from all public worship ... it must be confessed that one cause is the want of proper accommodation in the church, the number of inhabitants being so increased that there scarcely is room enough to contain them. It were much to be wished, a gallery were built (Wangford, 1801)

Too many I fear of this discription in every parish (Ipswich St Margaret, 1801)

There are few that attend regularly the church - as they make it a day of feasting & visiting (East Winch, 1801)

Too many absent themselves ... too little restraint is laid upon alehouses in country villages whither many ... resort on the Sabbath, & even in the time of divine service - I have done every thing in my power but without effect to prevent it, and I find the parish officers pay little attention to such irregularities (Wormegay, 1801)

That there are too many who do absent themselves from all public worship on ye Lord's Day is a truth that is most painfully acknowledged & that a sense of religion is gradually decaying is a fact too obvious to be controverted in ye several classes to be found in country villages. Luxury & dissipation have found their way into all ranks, & ye neglect of religious duties increased with them, I am afraid to say (Caister, 1801)

Such was the overall picture for the two visitations combined. The other statistics in Table 1 enable us to refine it in various ways. Least obvious were the differences between the two years, the number of parishes reporting some or many common absentees rising only modestly from 31 per cent in 1777 to 33 per cent in 1801. It should be remembered, however, that far fewer returns are extant for the former than the latter date and that a greater proportion of those which have survived for 1777 did not attempt to answer the question about church attendance. Rather more noticeable was the fact that non-church-going was a somewhat greater problem in Norfolk than in Suffolk deaneries. Norfolk had 5 per cent fewer parishes with no absentees, and 4 per

cent and 2 per cent more than Suffolk with some and many absentees respectively. Most remarkable of all was the effect of community size on religious practice. The number of incumbents reporting some or many absentees increased from 23 per cent for communities with up to twenty-five houses, to 34 per cent for those with between twenty-six and fifty, to 41 per cent for those with between fifty-one and one hundred, and to 47 per cent for those with 101 or more houses. Clearly, the smaller the population of a parish, the easier it was for a clergyman to exercise control over the worshipping habits of his flock.²⁴ Comparisons with the Diocese of Oxford are rendered difficult because of variations in question wording, but, setting this aside, Table 1 would seem to suggest that absenteeism was fractionally less of a problem in Norwich in 1777 than in Oxford in 1738-93 but slightly more in 1801 relative to Oxford in 1802-23.

In addition to the basic question about the incidence of non-attendance at church, incumbents were also asked to give information about trends in church-going and about the social standing of absentees.²⁵ Only a minority complied, 57 and 91 respectively in 1777 and 190 and 159 in 1801. Of these 7 per cent in both 1777 and 1801 reported that non-attendance had increased, 70 and 74 per cent that it had not increased or hopefully not increased, and 23 and 19 per cent that it had decreased or hopefully decreased. With regard to social status, 8 per cent of clergy in 1777 and 15 per cent in 1801 claimed that absentees were drawn from all ranks. The overwhelming majority, 78 and 70 per cent, identified them as coming from the lower strata of society, variously describing them as: 'of low rank', 'the vulgar sort', 'the lower class', 'ordinary persons', 'the meanest sort', 'the common people', 'the inferior class', 'of low degree', 'of ye inferior station', 'the laboring hand', 'the peasants', 'of the lower order', 'the labouring poor or farmers' servants', 'not of any note', 'the poor', 'labourers and mechanics' and 'cottagers'. The indifferent attendance of these groups, which was especially complained of as regards morning worship, was attributed to a variety of reasons. These included attention to family duties, immorality, 'want of decent apparel' (a characteristically 19th-century excuse for working-class absenteeism, but here voiced at Kenton in 1777), the attractions of the alehouse, the desire to engage in leisure pursuits on what was for many the only non-working day of the week, inadequate supervision by their employers, and the adverse effects of Dissent. A particularly revealing overall analysis came from Little Bealings in 1801:

Many; principally labourers & mechanics. The increase of Anabaptists tends to this. They are told that the gospel is not preached in the church & that it is not a Church of Christ, they quarrel with it & forsake it for the conventicle of which, many perceiving the glaring absurdities of the preachers, they soon grow disgusted; and then secede from all social worship of God whatever. Another cause of this evil is that labourers belonging to other parishes resort hither for the sake of lodging nearer their employers who have no knowledge of them or their families beyond their daily employments; & have no influence beyond their farms. The Sunday is spent at the alehouse or in visiting their friends at a distance, whilst their children are roaming about the fields in idleness, breaking of fences & purloining various small articles which fall in their way. The great farmers pay no attention to the moral or religious character of their workmen & servants & are not the most constant at divine service.

The residue of incumbents – 14 per cent at both dates – considered that non-attendance mainly affected the middle and upper ranks. Farmers were alleged to be particularly notorious in this regard, although it was sometimes said in their defence that this was a reflection of the great distance of the church from many of the farms. To a lesser extent tradesmen and small businessmen were also singled out for criticism, as were lawyers and physicians at Ipswich St Stephen in 1801. Relatively few clergy had cause to complain of the behaviour of the principal residents in their parish. At Houghton in 1801 the example of Earl Cholmondeley's family, resident for four months in the year, was said to have drawn many to the church.

A literal reading of the clergy visitation returns for the late 18th-century Diocese of Norwich might suggest that non-church-going was confined to about a third of all parishes overall,

disproportionately the larger ones, and to the working classes. That, however, was probably only a rather sanitized picture which incumbents wished to portray to their bishop. A more realistic reading of the returns must allow for the high incidence of clerical non-response, evasiveness, ambiguity, excuses, and references to the universality of the problem. It should also take a broader definition of absenteeism to subsume seriously irregular patterns of worship as well as total non-attendance, and take into account what the bishops themselves had to say in their published visitation charges. This would probably indicate that non-church-going was an issue of sorts in more like two-thirds of all parishes.

Certainly, as Jacob has argued in respect of the 1806 visitation, the claims of some urban ministers to high levels of religious practice seem hard to square with the fact that the seating capacity of their churches had been outstripped by population growth.²⁶ This more pessimistic reading of the evidence is borne out by the 1851 religious census. This revealed that, in Norfolk and Suffolk combined, over a quarter of residents absented themselves from all worship on the census day if no allowance is made for 'twicers' (those who were present at more than one service on the day), with some two-fifths being absent once a correction is made for twicing. The Church of England provided sittings for no more than two-fifths of the population and attracted a very similar proportion of them to its services.²⁷ During the third quarter of the 19th century the Anglicans at least seem to have lost more ground, even before the negative impact of agricultural trade unionism on the size of their congregations.²⁸

Although these conclusions derive from evidence for a single diocese, it is conceivable that they have a more general applicability. The Diocese of Norwich conforms in many respects to the stereotypes of the late 18th- and early 19th-century Church of England, not least in that it was a large and ancient diocese, predominantly rural and agricultural in nature, divided into a great number of small parishes where single Sunday duty and non-residence prevailed. It was, moreover, a region where the archetypal country parson seemed to reign supreme, an impression readily fostered by the survival of a series of fascinating diaries from the pens of celebrated Norfolk clergy like James Woodforde of Weston Longville, William Andrew of Ketteringham, and Benjamin Armstrong of East Dereham.²⁹ At the same time, the diocese had a long and vibrant tradition of religious dissent, fuelled in part by its proximity to the Low Countries which provided a haven for those persecuted for their beliefs.³⁰ If the Church of England was encountering opposition and, in terms of non-church-going, degrees of apathy in what might be thought of as its traditional heartland, then its chances of success in northern and industrialising regions experiencing rapid demographic change, where its historical resources were so much less, were inevitably limited.

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- 1 For an introduction to the statistical sources of church attendance in Great Britain in the 19th and 20th centuries see C.D. Field, 'Non-recurrent Christian Data', in *Religion*, Reviews of United Kingdom Statistical Sources, edited by W.F. Maunder, XX (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 189-504, and especially 288-97. For the 1851 census see C.D. Field, 'The 1851 Religious Census of Great Britain: A Bibliographical Guide for Local and Regional Historians', *Local Historian*, 27 (1997), 194-217.
- 2 For studies of the process of episcopal visitation in England in the 16th to 18th centuries see: W.J. Sheils, 'The Bishops and their Dioceses: Reform of Visitation in the Anglican Church, 1680-1760' (Unpub. paper, Colloque de la Commission Internationale d'Histoire Ecclésiastique Comparée, Strasbourg, 1983); R. O'Day, 'Geschichte der bischöflichen Kirchenvisitation in England, 1500-1689', in *Kirche und Visitation: Beiträge zur Erforschung des frühneuzeitlichen Visitationswesens in Europa*, edited by E.W. Zeeden and P.T. Lang (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1984), 191-215; and W. Gibson, *The Achievement of the Anglican Church, 1689-1800: The Confessional State in Eighteenth Century England* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995), 127-51.

- 3 *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Surrey: Replies to Bishops' Visitations* [1725, 1764, 1788], edited by W.R. Ward (Surrey Record Society, XXXIV, 1994); *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Hampshire: Replies to Bishops' Visitations* [1725, 1765, 1788], edited by W.R. Ward (Hampshire Record Series, XIII, 1995); *Articles of Enquiry Addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford at the Primary Visitation of Dr. Thomas Secker, 1738*, edited by H.A. Lloyd Jukes (Oxfordshire Record Society, XXXVIII, 1957); *Archbishop Herring's Visitation Returns, 1743*, edited by S.L. Ollard and P.C. Walker (Yorkshire Archaeological Society Record Series, LXXI, LXXII, LXXV, LXXVII, LXXIX, 1928-31); *The Diocese of Llandaff in 1763: The Primary Visitation of Bishop Ewer*, edited by J.R. Guy (Publications of the South Wales Record Society, 7, 1991); *Archbishop Drummond's Visitation Returns, 1764 - I: Yorkshire A-G*, [edited by] C. Annesley and P. Hoskin (University of York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research, Texts and Calendars, 21, 1997); *Wiltshire Returns to the Bishop's Visitation Queries, 1783*, edited by M. Ransome (Wiltshire Record Society, XXVII, 1972); *The Diocese of Exeter in 1821: Bishop Carey's Replies to Queries before Visitation*, edited by M. Cook (Devon & Cornwall Record Society, New Series, III-IV, 1958-60); *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford in the Year 1854*, edited by E.P. Baker (Oxfordshire Record Society, XXXV, 1954). In addition, there is a commercial microfilm edition of the returns for the Dioceses of London, 1693-1815, and Canterbury, 1716-1806: *The Visitation Returns from the Dioceses of Canterbury & London, 17th.-19th. Centuries* (London: World Microfilms Publications, 1983, 44 reels). The above list excludes: (a) printed editions of diocesan *specula*, surveys of the state of individual dioceses derived from multiple sources, including clergy visitation returns; and (b) printed editions of returns to archidiaconal visitations. The published *speculum* of one 18th-century Archbishop of Canterbury includes entries for a number of parishes in the Diocese of Norwich: *The Speculum of Archbishop Thomas Secker*, edited by J. Gregory (Church of England Record Society, 2, 1995), 261-7.
- 4 F.C. Mather, 'Georgian Churchmanship reconsidered: Some Variations in Anglican Public Worship, 1714-1830', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 36 (1985), 255-83.
- 5 R. Gill, *The Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993).
- 6 V. Barrie-Curien, *Clergé et pastorale en Angleterre au XVIII^e siècle: le diocèse de Londres* (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1992).
- 7 J. Jago, *Aspects of the Georgian Church: Visitation Studies of the Diocese of York, 1761-1776* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997).
- 8 A.D. Gilbert, *Religion and Society in Industrial England: Church, Chapel and Social Change, 1740-1914* (London: Longman, 1976), 27; R. Currie, A.D. Gilbert and L. Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 22, 26.
- 9 R. Gill, 'Mapping Church Decline', in *Religion and Power, Decline and Growth: Sociological Analyses of Religion in Britain, Poland and the Americas*, edited by P. Gee and J. Fulton ([London]: British Sociological Association Sociology of Religion Study Group, 1991), 135; 'Secularization and Census Data', in *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians debate the Secularization Thesis*, edited by S. Bruce (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 91-2; *The Myth of the Empty Church*, 17, 169, 296-7.
- 10 For example, in 1865 total communicants in the diocese were equivalent to just 14 per cent of attendances at Sunday worship, and average communicants to 9 per cent; J.T. Pelham, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Norwich by John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, at his Visitation in 1865* (London: Rivingtons, 1865), 13. By 1995, however, communicants at the best-attended festival (Christmas) were 31 per cent *more* than the usual Sunday attendance at services: *Church Statistics: Parochial Membership and Finance Statistics for January to December 1995* (London: Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, 1997), 25, 27.
- 11 C.D. Field, 'A Godly People? Aspects of Religious Practice in the Diocese of Oxford, 1738-1936', *Southern History*, 14 (1992), 46-73, especially 49-53.
- 12 R.B. Walker, 'Religious Changes in Cheshire, 1750-1850', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, XVII (1966), 77-94; R.J. Pope, 'The Eighteenth-Century Church in Wirral' (Unpub. M.A. thesis, University of Wales, 1971); J. Addy, 'Two Eighteenth-Century Bishops of Chester and their Diocese, 1771-1787' (Unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Leeds, 1972); E.J. Evans, 'Some Reasons for the Growth of English Rural Anti-Clericalism, c. 1750-c. 1830', *Past & Present*, 66 (February 1975), 84-109, at 99-100; J. Addy, 'Bishop Porteus' Visitation of the Diocese of Chester, 1778', *Northern History*, XIII (1977), 175-98.
- 13 W.M. Jacob, 'Clergy and Society in Norfolk, 1707-1806' (Unpub. Ph.D. thesis, University of Exeter, 1982), 328. Jacob also made more general use of the visitation returns for the Diocese of Norwich, especially for 1784 and 1806, as has P. Virgin, *The Church in an Age of Negligence: Ecclesiastical Structure and Problems of Church Reform, 1700-1840* (Cambridge: J. Clarke & Co., 1989) in respect of the Waxham and Repps Deaneries in 1794, 1806, 1813, 1820 and 1834.

- 14 *Letters of Humphrey Prideaux, sometime Dean of Norwich, to John Ellis, sometime Under-Secretary of State, 1674-1722*, edited by E.M. Thompson (Camden Society, Second Series, XV, 1875), 154. Prideaux wrote in similar vein to his sister, Ann Coffin, on 21 August 1692: *Fifth Report of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts* (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1876, XL, London: printed by G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1876), 376.
- 15 H. Prideaux, *Directions to Church-wardens for the Faithful Discharge of their Office* (second edition, Norwich: printed by F. Burges for S. Selfe, R. Simpson and J. Nicholson, 1704), 35-41, (third edition, London: printed by F. Collins for J. Pemberton, 1713), 104-19, (fourth edition, London: printed for R. Knaplock and J. Tonson, 1716), 106-20, (London: printed for R. Knaplock and J. Tonson, 1723), 117-32, (London: printed for R. Knaplock and J. Tonson, 1730), 117-32. Cf. *The Life of the Reverend Humphrey Prideaux, D.D., Dean of Norwich, with several Tracts and Letters of his upon various Subjects, never before published* (London: printed for J. and P. Knapton, 1748), 93-5. The presumption is that the circular letter must originally have been published as a pamphlet in 1692, although it is not recorded in Wing's Short Title Catalogue.
- 16 *Articles to be enquired of and answered unto by the Churchwardens and Sworn Men in the Primary Visitation of the Right Reverend Father in God, John, Lord Bishop of Norwich, 1692* (London: printed for W. Rogers, 1692), 4.
- 17 *Articles to be enquired of and answered unto by the Church-wardens and Sworn Men, in the Ordinary Visitation of the Right Reverend Father in God, Philip, Lord Bishop of Norwich, 1777* (Norwich: printed by W. Chase, [1777]), 7. By 1801, however, the question asked of churchwardens had become identical to that asked of clergymen: 'Are there any who commonly absent themselves from all public worship of God on the Lord's Day?'; *Articles to be enquired of and answered unto by the Church-wardens and Sworn Men in the Ordinary Visitation of the Right Reverend Father in God, Charles, Lord Bishop of Norwich, 1801* (Norwich: printed by Bacon, 1801), 9.
- 18 C. Trimmell, *A Charge deliver'd to the Clergy of the Diocess of Norwich at the Visitation of that Diocess, in the Year 1709, by the Right Reverend Father in God, Charles, Lord Bishop of Norwich* (London: printed by F. Collins, 1710), 28.
- 19 The surviving records, taking the form of presentments or comperta books covering the years 1699-1777, are in Norfolk Record Office, VIS 9/5, 10/2, 14/1, 16/1, 17/1, 18/1, 19/1, 20/3, 22/2, 24, 25, 26/2. For an analysis of the Norfolk data see Jacob, 'Clergy and Society in Norfolk, 1707-1806', 244-5, 289, 327.
- 20 T. Green, *The End and Design of God's Judgments: A Sermon preach'd before the House of Lords, at the Abbey-church in Westminster, on Friday, December 8 1721, being the Day appointed for a General Fast, for obtaining the Pardon of our Sins, and averting those Heavy Judgments we have most justly deserved, and particularly the Plague, with which several other Countries are at this time visited* (London: printed for J. Wyat, 1721), 26.
- 21 P. Yonge, *The Charge of the Right Reverend Father in God, Philip, Lord Bishop of Norwich, delivered to the Clergy of his Diocese at his Primary Visitation, A.D. 1763* (Norwich: printed by W. Chase, 1763), 7.
- 22 L. Bagot, *A Charge delivered to the Clergy at the Primary Visitation of Lewis, Lord Bishop of Norwich, MDCCLXXXIV* (Norwich: printed by W. Chase, [1784]), 6.
- 23 Evidence for the adverse effect of bad weather on levels of church attendance may also be found in J. Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson: The Reverend James Woodforde, 1758-1781*, edited by J. Beresford (London: Humphrey Milford, 1924-31, 5 vol.), ii. 9, 177; iii. 74, 77, 270, 338, 398; iv. 14, 98, 169-70; v. 207, 236, 368.
- 24 This phenomenon was confirmed in 1851: *Suffolk Returns from the Census of Religious Worship of 1851*, edited by T.C.B. Timmins (Suffolk Records Society, XXXIX, 1997), xxiv.
- 25 Regrettably, incumbents were not asked to comment about the gender of common absentees from worship, although the implication of many replies is that they were overwhelmingly male. Certainly, what appears to be the first published gender breakdown of confirmands for the Diocese of Norwich in 1837 shows female confirmands outnumbering male ones by more than two to one; C. Mackie, *Norfolk Annals: A Chronological Record of Remarkable Events in the Nineteenth Century, compiled from the Files of the Norfolk Chronicle, 1801-1900* (Norwich: Norfolk Chronicle Office, [1901], 2 vol.), i. 366.
- 26 Jacob, 'Clergy and Society in Norfolk, 1707-1806', 328-9.
- 27 *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship, England and Wales - Report and Tables* (House of Commons Sessional Papers, 1852-53, LXXXIX, London: printed by G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode, 1853), ccxiv, ccxxiii, ccli. For the original returns of the 1851 religious census for the Diocese of Norwich see: *Religious Worship in Norfolk: The 1851 Census of Accommodation and Attendance at Worship*, edited by J. Ede and N. Virgoe (Norfolk Record Society, LXII, 1998); and *Suffolk Returns from the Census of Religious Worship of 1851*.
- 28 J.T. Pelham, *The Charge of John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, to the Clergy and the Churchwardens of the Diocese, at his Primary Visitation, 1858* (second edition, Norwich: Cundall and Miller, 1858), 16, 24; *A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens ... in 1865*, 13; *A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens*

- of the Diocese of Norwich by John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, at his Visitation in 1872 (Norwich: Samuel Miller, 1872), 8-9; A Charge delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Norwich by John Thomas, Lord Bishop of Norwich, at his Visitation in 1879 (Norwich: A.H. Goose & Co., 1879), 10-11.
- 29 Woodforde, *The Diary of a Country Parson*; W.O. Chadwick, *Victorian Miniature* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1960); B.J. Armstrong, *A Norfolk Diary: Passages from the Diary of the Rev Benjamin John Armstrong, M.A. (Cantab.), Vicar of East Dereham, 1850-88*, edited by H.B.J. Armstrong (London: G.G. Harrap and Company, 1949) and *Armstrong's Norfolk Diary: Further Passages from the Diary of the Reverend Benjamin John Armstrong, Vicar of East Dereham, 1850-88*, edited by H.B.J. Armstrong (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [1963]).
- 30 Recent works on Nonconformity in the region include: *Religious Dissent in East Anglia*, edited by E.S. Leedham-Green (Cambridge: Cambridge Antiquarian Society, 1991); *Religious Dissent in East Anglia: Historical Perspectives*, edited by N. Virgoe and T. Williamson (Norwich: Norfolk Archaeological and Historical Research Group and Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1993); J. Ede, N. Virgoe and T. Williamson, *Halls of Zion: Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Norfolk* (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1994); and *Religious Dissent in East Anglia, III*, edited by D. Chadd (Norwich: Centre of East Anglian Studies, University of East Anglia, 1996).

SIR THOMAS BROWNE'S KNIGHTHOOD

by Trevor Hughes

In September 1671, Browne was knighted in Norwich, deservedly but unexpectedly. He was then 65 years of age, with no conspicuous activities to excite his sovereign. His earlier fame as the author of *Religio Medici* had receded. Although *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* was in its sixth English edition – to be the last in the author's lifetime – it was outdated, despite many revisions. *Hydrotaphia* and *The Garden of Cyrus*, published in 1658, gave pleasure to a select circle, but would scarcely have been read by Charles II. In medical and scientific circles, Browne was known as a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and a frequent correspondent of the Royal Society, to which, however, he did not belong. Browne's knighthood came from the chance of meeting his sovereign during the progress of King Charles through Norfolk. Descriptions of the scene by modern biographers of Browne have wrongly suggested that he was a substitute candidate for this honour.¹ The phrase 'gained by default' has been used.² Yet witness accounts and records provide an accurate portrayal of these events, the purpose of this communication.

Three contemporary accounts of the royal visit exist: a poem by Mathew Stevenson; a letter from Thomas Corie, the Town Clerk of Norwich; and a report in the *London Gazette*, dated Oct 1st, from the Court at Whitehall.³ Mathew Stevenson (fl. 1654-1685), a poet of local renown, resided for the greater part of his life in Norfolk.⁴ Thomas Corie was of a family prominent in Norwich for civic offices, and his part in this narrative is that of a correspondent to Joseph Williamson, founder and editor of the *London Gazette*.⁵ The verse quotations below are from the poet whilst those in prose, without separate identification, derive from the letter of Thomas Corie. Records of the incorporations of Yarmouth and Norwich refer to the event,⁶ as do state papers.⁷ The account in Echard is mainly derived from the *London Gazette*.⁸ That of Blomefield, although widely quoted, has been misread, as was noted by Ketton-Cremer.⁹