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Robert Bearman

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# THE EARLY REFORMATION EXPERIENCE IN A WARWICKSHIRE MARKET TOWN: STRATFORD-UPON-AVON, 1530-1580[1]

By ROBERT BEARMAN

*Shakespeare Birthplace Trust, Stratford-upon-Avon*

Although there has been intense interest in the effect on English towns of the religious upheavals of the mid sixteenth century, detailed case studies are normally limited to places for which a reasonable body of evidence has survived.[2] For the market town of Stratford-upon-Avon, the situation in this respect is not ideal. The minutes and accounts of its Corporation, established in 1553, do not survive in helpful form earlier than 1564. Conversely, the records of the seigneurial court leet fail us in 1562, when the lordship was restored to the Dudley family. There are no churchwardens' accounts prior to 1617 and no churchwardens' presentments earlier than 1581. The peculiar jurisdiction which the warden, or dean, of the collegiate church enjoyed and, after its dissolution, the vicar, allowing him to preside over the church courts for two years out of three, seems to have prevented all but a handful of Stratford cases from reaching the bishops' court; but the records of this peculiar survive only from 1590. The county assize and sessions records are also lost. For the critical mid-century years the evidence is therefore deficient in several important respects, casting doubt on the wisdom of attempting a detailed investigation. Moreover, this is not a subject which has been neglected. Two essays in particular, by Patrick Collinson and Ann Hughes, have explored early Reformation issues in Stratford, the first briefly, and the second as a prelude to the better known events of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries when Stratford was the scene of a lively dispute provoked by the zealous wing of the Stratford Corporation and its favoured minister, Thomas Wilson.[3] However, both these

[1] I would like to thank Professor Ann Hughes and Dr Mike Winstanley for their helpful comments on earlier drafts of this paper.

[2] Several such studies, relating to Colchester, Doncaster, Beverley, Tewkesbury, Worcester, Reading and Halifax, are to be found in P. Collinson and J. Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns* (Basingstoke, 1998), 23-143. For Shrewsbury, see B. Coulton, 'The establishment of Protestantism in a provincial town: a study of Shrewsbury in the sixteenth century', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, XXVII (1996), 307-35.

[3] P. Collinson, 'William Shakespeare's religious inheritance and environment' in *Idem, Elizabethan Essays* (London, 1994), 219-52, especially 256-62; A. Hughes, 'Building a Godly town: religious and cultural divisions in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1560-1640' in Robert Bearman (ed.), *The History of an English Borough. Stratford-upon-Avon, 1196-1996* (Stroud, 1997), 97-109. Social and economic aspects of the town's history during these years was covered by another contribution in the same volume; A. Dyer, 'Crisis and resolution: government and society in Stratford, 1540-1640'. For a more detailed study of Thomas Wilson's career and his quarrel with the Stratford Corporation, see A. Hughes, 'Religion and society in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1619-1638', *Midland History*, XIX (1994), 58-84.

studies take as their central theme the evolution of Protestantism within the town without (in one case intentionally) placing this within the context of the other great upheaval of the mid sixteenth century, the sudden transformation of systems of local government which was also the direct result of Henry VIII's attack on the established church. These two inter-related themes will therefore be central to this study which at the same time will seek to establish whether, as some recent biographers of William Shakespeare have maintained, the town in which he spent his formative years was a stronghold of Catholic conservatism,[4] or whether his personal experience of traditional religious belief would, in fact, have been very limited.

The speed with which Protestantism established a foothold in urban settlements has been much debated in recent years but there is general agreement that it did at least proceed at a greater pace in towns than in the country, not least because the dissolution of religious institutions often required a civic response to the disappearance of schools, almshouses and gilds.[5] Larger towns, especially those in the south-east, also appear to have been more responsive to religious change than smaller settlements. In this context Stratford, a midlands market town with a population of some 1,500 in mid-century but rising, may just have qualified as a regional centre but is certainly not a likely candidate for brisk conversion to Protestantism. Nevertheless, it was a town where the civic élite had to take prompt action in response to the seismic changes of Edward VI's reign if it wished to preserve its status and influence within the community, a process which could not be divorced from an acceptance, however reluctant, of a new order in religious as well as civic affairs: so much so that, by at least the last quarter of the sixteenth century, in Stratford, as in many provincial towns even of modest size, a significant section of the town's governing élite, with the support of a succession of increasingly zealous ministers, was pushing the town in a direction far more radical than the Elizabethan settlement required. Such developments were not necessarily the result of upward pressure from the population at large but instead could be driven through by small minorities with secular, as well as religious, considerations in mind. For the majority of the population, reluctant acquiescence in the process appears to have been the prevailing attitude, with most people eventually finding themselves able to square their consciences with the requirements of the state. In Stratford, widespread support for this radicalisation of some, at least, of the

[4] See, for example, A. Holden, *William Shakespeare* (London, 1999); M. Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* (London, 2003); S. Greenblatt, *Will in the World: How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare* (London, 2004); P. Ackroyd, *William Shakespeare: the Biography* (London, 2005).

[5] For a summary of this process, see V. Harding, 'Reformation and culture 1540-1700' in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume II, 1580-1840* (Cambridge, 2000), 263-88.

town's civic leaders cannot therefore be assumed. On the other hand, it is generally agreed that the majority view of its ruling body was an important indicator of a town's position on the ideological battleground and that the influence of enthusiastic ministers was an important factor in bringing their parishioners to the point of accepting the new order – with the result that, in Stratford's case, persistent Catholic recusancy can be shown, by the end of the century, to be limited to less than a dozen households. However, if we wish to address the issue of William Shakespeare's religious background, it is necessary to investigate the chronology of this process in more detail. By the late sixteenth century, some members of Stratford's governing body may have been pushing hard for the establishment of a godly town, but when did this tendency emerge? And was it sufficiently developed by the 1570s to have affected the religious beliefs of the young playwright?

The first impression of Stratford in the 1530s might be one of a town under the firm control of the bishop of Worcester. Nearly the whole parish had formed part of the episcopal estates for the past seven hundred years and it also lay within the diocese of Worcester, thus making the bishop of the day both the town's temporal lord and its spiritual one. But from 1498, three successive bishops of Worcester had been absentee Italians, acting as royal envoys at Rome. There is no evidence that this had an adverse effect on the day-to-day conduct of episcopal business, which, in the bishops' absence, appears to have been carried on with efficiency by a succession of competent chancellors.[6] But it did allow government intervention: the supervisor of the bishopric from 1521 was Henry VIII's chief minister, Cardinal Wolsey, succeeded, shortly after his fall in 1529, by Thomas Cromwell. So, when in 1532 Thomas Parker, chancellor of the diocese, ordered the exhumation and burning of the corpse of William Tracy on the grounds that he had made a 'Lutheran' will, Cromwell saw to it that Parker was fined £300 and removed from his post, to be replaced by the more pliant Thomas Bagarde.[7] Two years later even Bagarde, when accused of supporting opponents of Henry VIII's religious policy, found it necessary to plead for Cromwell's forgiveness.[8] In matters spiritual, the personal authority of the bishop had not therefore been evident for some years.

Within Stratford, his influence, this time as its temporal lord, had also been undermined in a more fundamental way. In 1196, a predecessor, bishop John de Coutances, had established a manorial borough within the parish, carving out of agricultural land an area on which to establish a new town, and granting privileged burgage tenure to those who came to rent the plots into which this area was divided. His intention was to generate income, in rents and market tolls and

[6] K. Down, 'The administration of the diocese of Worcester under the Italian bishops, 1497-1535', *Midland History*, XX (1995), 1-20.
[7] Ibid., 14-5.
[8] Ibid., 15.

other dues from which he would increasingly benefit as the town prospered. But in the longer term, this led to the creation of a body of free tenants who sought to influence the manner in which the town was governed. Officially, this was done through the manorial court which by 1500 was still being held in the bishop's name; but it is doubtful by this time that the bishop, or his officials, had any real interest in Stratford except as a source of income. His authority, in any case, was further weakened by the growing dominance in town affairs of the Gild of the Holy Cross. Re-established in 1403, through the amalgamation of three earlier foundations, the Gild had continued to discharge its original function – the maintenance of a body of priests to pray for the souls of its departed members. But through the generosity of early benefactors, its endowments were soon providing an income sufficient for the building and maintenance of a chapel, a meeting hall, almshouses and a school. A strong measure of social cohesion was provided through annual feasts, 'lovedays' and other communal activities, and alliances beyond the town established through the recruitment of influential 'outsiders'.[9] By the early sixteenth century the proceedings of the manorial court leet were dominated by the Gild's chief officers – or, if not, were threatened by disturbances, as in 1504, when the bishop's deputy steward swore a jury of 'the most senglest & symplest persones, and some of them wer but mennys servantes', instead of 'substantial men of honest conversacion', in order to force through the election of his preferred candidates as high bailiff and constables.[10] The Gild may have been religious in origin but its wealth conferred on its leaders significant influence and authority within the town, a status they would be concerned to uphold, if necessary by bowing to the wind of religious change.

A further complicating factor in the governance of the town was the existence of the Stratford-upon-Avon College. This had evolved out of a chantry of five priests established in the parish church in the 1330s. Amongst other privileges and endowments, the College had secured a peculiar jurisdiction, giving to its warden, later dean, for every two years out of three, the right to sit in judgement on cases which would normally have been heard in the bishop's court. But there was also some friction, if not hostility, between the College and the Gild. In 1430, the bishop of Worcester had intervened to settle a long-running and often acrimonious dispute between the two bodies concerning their relative status within the town, centring on the Gild's reluctance to pay tithes

[9] C. Dyer, 'Medieval Stratford; a successful small town', in Bearman (ed.), *History of an English Borough*, 43-61; C. Carpenter, 'Town and "Country": the Stratford guild and political networks of fifteenth-century Warwickshire', in Bearman (ed.), *History of an English Borough*, 62-79.

[10] I.S. Leadam (ed.), *Select Cases before the King's Council in the Star Chamber* (Selden Society, XVI, 1902), 230-34. Of the three named ringleaders, Richard Bentley had been master of the Gild in 1492-3.

and oblations.[11] The bishop, in ruling in favour of the College, stipulated the compulsory attendance of the master of the Gild, its priests and members at the parish church on the four great feast days, ordered that the Gild priests should bury no dead or administer any sacraments except bread and holy water to the sick, and that, as a token of submission, the Gild should make an annual payment to the College of four shillings.[12] Stratford, then, may have been nominally under both the spiritual and temporal authority of the bishop of Worcester but by the beginning of the sixteenth century, its secular affairs were being increasingly managed by the Gild of the Holy Cross, albeit acting through the seigneurial borough court: and at the same time, the Gild had an uneasy relationship with the College, in theory representing episcopal authority through the exercise of its peculiar jurisdiction but in practice acquiring a certain independence from it; and this overall picture was further complicated by the permanent absenteeism of the bishops since 1498, which made the diocese vulnerable to government interference.

Such was the state of local affairs when Henry VIII finally broke with Rome. In Stratford the effects were soon felt due to the appointment of the radical Hugh Latimer as bishop of Worcester in September 1535, following the forfeiture of the see by Jerome Ghinucci, the last of the 'Italians'. Whatever the reason for Henry VIII's decision to advance Latimer in this way, the placing of the diocese in the hands of a man whose preaching over the past few years had outraged traditionalists was bound to have dramatic local effects. And though his tenure of the office was brief, it is clear not only that Stratford was made to feel the effect of his endeavours but also that there were at least a few townsmen who supported him. During his first year as bishop, Latimer spent much of his time in London, closely involved with Thomas Cromwell and Archbishop Cranmer in the formulation of the Ten Articles. But by the summer of 1537, he was back in his diocese eager to begin his work, authorising the destruction of images within his cathedral church and personally drawing up a set of injunctions for a visitation of his diocese. Though the text of these injunctions survives, evidence of the visitation itself is fragmentary; but in October 1537, we know that Latimer passed through Stratford, co-operating with Cromwell in the removal of the dean of the Stratford College, John Bell.[13] Bell was a man of considerable influence within the diocese: having served in Rome under Silvestro de Gigli, one of the Italian bishops of Worcester, he was, in

[11] At one point, in 1429, the archbishop of Canterbury's proctor, attempting to adjudicate, fled from an armed crowd of townspeople and was allegedly nearly burnt alive in the house in which he had taken refuge: The National Archives (T.N.A) SC8/67/3350; C1/7/127. I am indebted to Mairi Macdonald for these references.

[12] Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Records Office (S.B.T.R.O.), ER 2/4; and see *VCH, Warws.*, II, 114.

[13] G.E. Corrie (ed.), *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer, Sometime Bishop of Worcester, Martyr 1555*, 2 vols. (Parker Society, XXXIII, XXXIV, 1844-5), I, 383-4.

1518, appointed archdeacon of Gloucester and chancellor of the diocese. In the same year, he was further rewarded with the grant of the valuable wardenship of the Stratford College, worth annually £55.[14] Bell was a strong traditionalist: in Gloucester, he had aided and abetted opposition to Latimer, orchestrated by two men who were probably his relatives, Thomas Bell and his half-brother of the same name.[15] He had further prejudiced himself in Latimer's eyes by treating the wardenship of the Stratford College as a sinecure which did not require his residence. So Latimer had no compunction in supporting Cromwell's proposal that Bell should be replaced by one of Cromwell's protégés, Anthony Barker, who to him 'seemeth a man ... of honest conversation, and also not without good letters'.[16] But he did have reservations. First, he was concerned that the annual pension of £22 which had been offered to Bell to buy him out should not be a charge on the 'poor college' but paid out of Barker's pocket. Though Latimer was critical of the alleged shortcomings of religious foundations, he believed that, purged of their abuses, they might still have an important role to play as centres of the new learning. Their impoverishment was therefore to be avoided, and in this instance Cromwell clearly gave way – when the College was finally dissolved, Barker was still paying Bell his annual pension of £22.[17] Latimer was also worried that Barker, like Bell, might just become another absentee post holder. He must be persuaded, he urged Cromwell, 'to tarry upon it [ie Stratford], keep house in it, preach at and about it, to the reformation of that blind end of my diocese ... and the houses (I trow) be towards ruin and decay and the whole town out of frame for lack of residence. When the head is far off, the body is worse'.[18]

In fact, the appointment of Anthony Barker did not usher in a new era. There is good evidence for his strongly Protestant outlook: in 1543, with two of his brothers, he witnessed the Protestant will of a leading Reading radical, Stephen Cawood, and in 1549, he received a bequest from another Reading Protestant, Nicholas Niclas, Cawood's son-in-law.[19] In his will, drawn up two years later, there is no invocation of the saints, only an expression of trust that he would be saved 'by the merits of the Passion of ... Jesus Christ my Saviour and Redeemer'.[20] But, despite this, he appears to have been no less worldly

[14] For Bell, see S. Wabuda, '"Fruitful Preaching" in the diocese of Worcester: Bishop Hugh Latimer and his influence', in E.J. Carlson (ed.), *Religion and the English People 1500-1640* (Kirksville, 1998), 49-74, esp. 58-72; *Oxford DNB*, IV, 947-8; Down, 'Administration of the diocese of Worcester', 6-9; A.B. Emden, *A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford, A.D 1501 to 1540* (Oxford, 1974), 38-9.

[15] Wabuda, '"Fruitful Preaching"', 58, 67-9.

[16] *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, I, 383-4.

[17] *VCH, Warws.*, II, 124.

[18] Corrie (ed.), *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, I, 384.

[19] J. Martin, 'Leadership and priorities in Reading during the Reformation', in Collinson and Craig, (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns*, 267 n. 30, 270-1 n. 47.

[20] T.N.A. PROB11/36/14.

than Bell and, as far as his wardenship of the College was concerned, he was almost certainly an absentee as well. In the year he acquired the wardenship, he was granted a dispensation to hold any number of benefices provided their total value did not exceed £300. So, to the livings of Wroughton, in Wiltshire, and Offord d'Arcy in Huntingdonshire, he added those of West Ham, in Essex, in 1538 and Burford, in Oxfordshire, in 1542, together with prebendaries at Lincoln, Winchester and Windsor.[21] By convenient foresight, he also ensured long-term security for himself and his family: when, in the 1540s, it became clear that the Stratford College would be suppressed, he leased all its possessions to members of his own family on 92-year leases at advantageous rents.[22] Although this property was confiscated by the Crown soon afterwards, the leases were allowed to stand, giving Barker and his family the opportunity to exploit them to their own advantage for nearly a hundred years. It is scarcely surprising, then, that Latimer soon began to find fault. In January 1539 he wrote querulously to Cromwell: 'I like not these honey-mouthed men, when I do see no acts nor deeds according to their words. Master Anthony Barker had never had the wardenship of Stratford at my hand, saving at contemplation of your lordship's letter'.[23] The point at issue concerned the behaviour of Stratford's parish priest, who, in the presence of one of Latimer's chaplains, was about to make a public recantation of statements which he had made, allegedly under Barker's instructions.[24] Given Barker's known sympathy for the Protestant agenda, this would seem an unlikely accusation and had probably more to do with Latimer's dislike of Barker's worldliness and his failure to take up residence at the College which had allowed one of his Stratford priests to stray from the path of righteousness. But, in fact, there is no other evidence to suggest that the College fraternity was anything but compliant. Indeed, it is worthy of remark that the nine Stratford wills dating from the years of Latimer's ascendancy, 1537 to 1539, are markedly neutral in tone, with no invocations to St Mary and the saints and with no arrangements for funeral masses and obits, despite the fact that they were almost certainly written or composed by two of the College priests, John Payne and Humphrey Sadler,

[21] Emden, *Biographical Register*, 25-6.

[22] The Bridgetown tithes were let to William Barker on 2 October 1541, the tithes of Old Stratford and other Stratford hamlets to John Barker on 2 October 1543, the real estate of the College in Warwickshire and Worcesteshire (except the College itself) to William Barker on 7 September 1544, and the College building to William Barker on 5 October 1544. The leases of the tithes are recited in later assignments, particularly those of 24 June 1580 and 1 May 1610 (S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/9/11; BRU 15/10/8). For the lease of the College building itself, see BRU 15/ 9/2.

[23] Corrie (ed.), *Sermons and Remains of Hugh Latimer*, I, 413-4.

[24] Doubtless in connection with one of the 1538 injunctions requiring public revocation of any statements 'extolling or setting forth of pilgrimages, feigned relics, or images for any such superstition'.

who between them witness all but one.[25] This is in marked contrast, as we shall see, to those wills drawn up subsequent to Latimer's removal in 1539.

These events alone – Latimer's visitation in 1537, the replacement of Bell, and the parish priest's public confession two years later – all impressed upon the town that reform was in the air. But the year 1537 also affords more dramatic evidence of discord in the town due to religious differences. In April of that year, the radical curate at Hampton Lucy, Edward Large, had delivered a controversial sermon, in the presence of many Stratford people, including the high bailiff.[26] Complaint was made to the local justices that he had declared that 'all who use our Lady's psalter shall be damned' and that he had made an unseemly joke to the effect that the origin of the term ember days was derived from the name of a former pope's paramour.[27] He was therefore committed to prison. But Large had his supporters, including Latimer, who persuaded Cromwell to appoint a three-man commission to look into the matter. Two of them, John Combe, a prominent Stratford townsman, and William Lucy of nearby Charlecote, were already closely allied to Latimer, members of a coterie of local gentry on whom Latimer depended for the policing of his reforms.[28] Not surprisingly, this one-sided investigation both exonerated Large and condemned the actions of a group of Stratford men, who they claimed had been manipulated by William Clopton, the local Stratford squire, into making false allegations. Thomas Badger, the foreman for the jury which had laid the indictment, could not, when examined by the commission, swear that he had personal knowledge of Large's statements, only that he knew that several Stratford men had put their names to a bill specifying the words which Large had allegedly uttered. The commissioners then demanded to see this bill, which was eventually brought to them by two other townsmen, Thomas Dixon, alias Waterman, and John Jeffreys. The commissioners became suspicious when neither of these witnesses was able to recall anything else which Large had said during the course of his sermon, nor would they 'swear upon a book' that they had heard the offending words in the first place. Efforts to get other signatories

[25] Richard Harris, 1537 (Worcestershire County Record Office (Wo.C.R.O.) 008.7 1538/247); John Mathew, 1537 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/245); George Smith, 1537 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/246); Isabel Andrew, 1538 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/251); William Facey, 1538 (Wo.C.R.O., 008.7 1538/249); John a Charley, 1538 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/252); John Atwood (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/55); William Hands, 1538 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/250); Richard Burman, 1539 (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1538/253).

[26] The main details of this episode are contained in a long letter from William Lucy to Cromwell (T.N.A. SP1/123, fos. 46-57), written in September 1537, much of it published in the *Athenæum*, 18 April 1857. The fullest secondary account is in G.R. Elton, *Policy and Police: the Enforcement of the Reformation in the Age of Thomas Cromwell* (Cambridge, 1972), 375-80. Further references to these sources are not given.

[27] We have only his supporters' version of his offence. Later, more serious charges were laid.

[28] Wabuda, '"Fruitful Preaching"', 65-6; and see below, 76-7.

to the bill to appear before the commissioners also proved fruitless 'as they were not at home but forth at divers markets'. Eventually Dixon and Jeffreys agreed that the bill 'be broken'. However, a few days later John Combe brought news to Lucy that another bill against Large was openly being drawn up by William Clopton who 'came unto the Chapel of the gild within the same town of Stratford ... and sent for divers of the same town to come unto him ... some twice, some thrice, willing them to put their hands unto a certain bill'. One of the reluctant witnesses was Richard Lightfoot, who only appeared after a third summons, and to whom Clopton then said: 'For so much as you are my tenant, I trust you will do as your neighbours do'. The bill, with Large's offending words, was then read out. Large was now accused of more serious indiscretions, that he had said, firstly, that Christ suffered death only for those who had died before his incarnation and, secondly, that 'if Christ were now alive again, he should die a cruel death, as ye see how their heads goeth off nowadays'.[29] But Lightfoot refused to sign 'for that he never heard him preach such words'. Clopton retorted: 'You will not put your hand unto this bill for Master Combe's sake, because he will make you Master of the Gild'. Lightfoot was equally forthright, declaring: 'I will never belie no man falsely', before stalking off.[30] The case dragged on and, in the context of the present discussion, need not be pursued: suffice to say that Latimer and Cromwell ensured that Large was eventually exonerated and Clopton's campaign overridden.

This case, then, indicates a controversy in the town ostensibly of a religious nature. On the one hand was the representative of a local landed family, William Clopton, sympathetic to traditional religion, with his country seat a mile or so out of town but with some compliant tenants within it, and on the other less accommodating members of the business community, represented by Combe and Lightfoot, unwilling to submit to Clopton's authority and at the same time not unsupportive of the 'preachers of the new learning'. The measure of support for each side is less easy to quantify. The success of the pro-Large lobby was clearly due to Latimer's influence with Cromwell and the appointment of an overwhelmingly one-sided commission. John Combe, for instance, was already one of Latimer's chief lieutenants, having been appointed in the bishop's first year of office as steward, or under-steward, and keeper of the bishop's manor courts throughout his diocese.[31] In August 1536, he had been responsible for the imprisonment of the President of Warwick College for the inappropriate ringing of church bells; in December of the same year he had been at Hartlebury, helping Latimer take evidence concerning the Pilgrimage of Grace; and in March 1537, he had acted for Cromwell in taking the abbot of

[29] T.N.A. E36/120, fo. 1

[30] Lucy's account is broadly supported by Lightfoot's own signed deposition: T.N.A. E36/120, fo. 1.

[31] T.N.A. C1/951/15-16.

Evesham to task for his treatment of the cell at Alcester.[32] Later, in 1539, we find him sitting on another commission, this time to investigate why Robert Maunde, the vicar of Whatcote, had protested against reading from his pulpit, as he was required to do, Henry VIII's injunctions concerning the reformed conduct of church services.[33] Combe had settled in Stratford, it would seem, in 1534 at the time of his marriage into the influential Quiney family.[34] He was immediately elected an alderman of the Gild of the Holy Cross and, at the time of its dissolution, he was holding the post of its steward for life.[35] In 1538 he had secured from the bishop of Worcester a lease of three houses and two virgates of land, part of the manor of Old Stratford, on very favourable terms – ninety-nine years at an annual rent of just over £5 – and later he also acted as the bishop's bailiff there.[36] Clopton's accusation that Lightfoot had refused to sign his bill against Large because of Combe's ability to influence Lightfoot's standing in the town was therefore not without foundation. He was a man, too, who was not slow to enrich himself with the acquisition of land which came onto the market at the dissolution of the monastic houses. In 1538 he invested in a speculative lease from Gloucester Abbey of the manor of Clifford Chambers and, having acted as one of the commissioners to whom the hospital of St Wulstan in Worcester was surrendered in 1540, he struck a deal in 1544 to acquire its former possessions in Crowle and Huddington.[37] In the following year, he acquired from the crown considerable property formerly belonging to Coventry Priory which he subsequently sold on.[38] He was thus typical of many men of his time, with an enthusiasm for the Protestant agenda which may not have been unrelated to the opportunity this provided for advancing his own material interests. Of Lightfoot, his only recorded ally within the town during the Large affair, we know little. High bailiff of the town in 1532 and an alderman of the Gild almost continuously from 1520, he was eventually elected its Master in 1544 and again in 1545, taking the opportunity to lease to himself Gild property in High Street and Church Street for eighty years at a very

[32] *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, XI, 172-3 (nos. 431, 432); XI, 522 (no. 1286); XII (1), 280 (no. 620).
[33] *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, XIV (1), 211 (no. 542).
[34] J.W. Gray, *Shakespeare's Marriage* (London, 1905), 224.
[35] J.H. Bloom (ed.), *The Register of the Gild of the Holy Cross at Stratford-on-Avon* (London, 1907), 239-40; T.N.A. E301/31 fo. 23v.
[36] E.I. Fripp and others (eds.), *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon and Other Records (M&A)*, 5 vols (Dugdale Society I, III, V, X, XXXV), IV, 113; Wo.C.R.O. 009.1 BA2636/18 (ii) (43764); /19 178/92513-14; S.B.T.R.O. DR 75/14. His acquisition of extensive lands in Old Stratford and Welcombe is recorded on a court roll of 25 April 1539: Wo.C.R.O. 009.1 BA 2636/18 (ii) (43765).
[37] S.B.T.R.O. DR 33/2; *Letters and Papers, Henry VIII*, XV, 324 (no. 695), 409 (no. 831(64)); XVI, 327 (no. 678 (25)); XIX (1) 285 (no. 444 (10)).
[38] S.B.T.R.O. DR 10/416.

favourable rent of five nobles (£1 13*s.* 4*d.*) a year.[39] But his later obscurity – he lived on until 1572 but played no further part in town politics – suggests that his support for Combe had done him no favours.

By way of contrast, Clopton's known supporters were both more numerous and more influential within the town, and also held conventional religious views. Three have already been mentioned, John Jeffreys, Thomas Badger and Thomas Dickson, alias Waterman. Jeffreys, as late as 1566, made a decidedly Catholic will, expressing the hope that he would be 'in joy with our Blessed Lady and with the holy company of heaven'.[40] Thomas Badger was the executor and residuary legatee of Thomas Attwood, who made a similarly elaborate 'Catholic' will in 1543;[41] and, although he evidently had no scruples about buying up property in Bidford which had previously belonged to Bordesley Abbey, he referred to the noted Catholic recusant, Thomas Throckmorton, as his 'especial good friend' when he appointed him executor of his own will in 1571.[42] Thomas Dixon was also sympathetic to the old religion: in 1543, he was a beneficiary under the will of Richard Kerstone, a College priest, as well as being appointed one of its supervisors.[43] Other prominent townsmen who were prepared to give evidence against Large were Henry Samwell, William Smith, Henry Biddle and John Horseman.[44] Samwell, who had been an alderman of the Gild almost continuously from 1530, and its master in 1532-3 and 1533-4, made an elaborate 'Catholic' will in 1546, invoking 'the glorious Virgin St Mary Our Lady with all the company of heaven', and making arrangements for the 'whole choir, with all the priests in the chapel' to attend his burial and thereafter to celebrate masses monthly for a year.[45] William Smith, an alderman of the Gild since 1533 and to be its master in 1540-1, may later have shown some favour towards the new Protestantism: but in 1543 he witnessed the very traditional will of Thomas Attwood and, before that, had agreed to act as one of the feoffees of Attwood's estate.[46]

However, it is a moot point as to whether these men were motivated primarily by religious feeling or by a simple wish to remain on good terms with William Clopton, who had clearly made it his mission to bring Large to book. For Clopton was not only a major property owner in the town: less than forty

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[39] S.B.T.R.O. DR 75/13; Bloom (ed.), *Register of the Gild of the Holy Cross*, 222, 228, 238-9; S.B.T.R.O. BRT 1/2/603-4, 606-8; BRT 1/3/196.
[40] Wo.C.R.O. 0008.7 1567/20.
[41] T.N.A. PROB 11/30/7.
[42] *VCH, Warws.*, III, 53; T.N.A. PROB 11/54/14. His son, George Badger, was one of the town's most obstinate Catholics, implicated in a minor way in the Gunpowder Plot: E.I. Fripp, *Shakespeare's Haunts* (Oxford, 1929), 131.
[43] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1543-4/78.
[44] T.N.A. E36/120, fos. 165-6.
[45] T.N.A. PROB11/31/6.
[46] S.B.T.R.O. BRT 1/2/591; T.N.A. PROB11/30/7.

years before, his great-great-uncle, Hugh Clopton, had left money in his will for the lavish rebuilding of the Gild chapel, and during his lifetime had also funded the building of the stone bridge over the River Avon.[47] He was therefore clearly a man to whom other prominent townsmen would have felt a need to defer. And such pragmatic taking of sides can be just as easily demonstrated in the Large camp; for Combe and his fellow commissioner, William Lucy, had no difficulty in finding over twenty witnesses from Large's parish of Hampton Lucy, adjoining the Lucy family seat at Charlecote, who were prepared to testify that Large had not made the heretical statements of which he had been accused.[48] Lucy denied Clopton's allegation that this was because they dared not do otherwise but it is one which is as likely to be true as Lucy's view that Clopton had suborned the Stratford witnesses.

This dispute arising out of a sermon preached by one of Latimer's protégés, may thus also reflect sensitivities which were less obviously of a religious nature. John Combe, for reasons, one suspects, of self-advancement, had quickly attached himself to the Latimer interest, at the same time seeking to work his way into a position of influence within the town of Stratford. This threat to the traditional authority of the Cloptons thus led to a natural antipathy, epitomised in Clopton's outburst that Lightfoot would not support his campaign against Large because Combe had the necessary influence to make him master of the Gild. Those who came out in open support of Clopton probably shared his traditional religious outlook and may have been equally resentful of Combe's activities as Latimer's agent. But, as later events suggest, they were able to modify these views when the Clopton interest began to wane and to adopt other strategies in order to retain their status within the town.

Latimer's years as bishop may have introduced a note of religious controversy into the town, not only as the result of his personal visitation and his obvious interest in the affairs of the College, but also because one of his most active servants, John Combe, was also a leading player in local politics. However, further activity of this sort was brought more or less to a halt in 1539, when Henry VIII, reacting against the forces he had unleashed through the dissolution of the monasteries and the attack on traditional religious observance, applied a brake on the process and indeed attempted to reverse some of the innovations introduced by Cromwell and his followers. Latimer was induced to resign his bishopric that year, to be succeeded by the conservative John Bell, the man who two years earlier Cromwell and Latimer had removed from his post as dean of the Stratford College. Combe lost his job as steward of the bishop's estates and was pursued by Bell in Chancery for mal-administration.[49] In 1540, Edward Large,

[47] For Hugh Clopton, see *Oxford DNB*, XII, 181-2.
[48] T.N.A. E36/120, fos. 2-3.
[49] T.N.A. C1/951/15-16. The dean of the College of Westbury-on-Tryme brought similar charges against him: T.N.A. C1/959/10-11.

one of the local champions of Latimer's position, was forced to deliver three sermons, the first at Stratford, on lines dictated to him, and serving in effect as a public recantation of his earlier views.[50] This change of mood is nicely reflected in the wording of those Stratford wills which were drawn up during this period, all markedly different from earlier examples dating from the years of Latimer's ascendancy. Richard Hunt, a Gild priest, requests the intercession of Mary and 'all the glorious company of heaven', with pecuniary bequests to the mother church at Worcester and to the high altar in Stratford.[51] John Wilkinson's (alias Sadler's) will of 1542 is very similar.[52] In 1543, Richard Walker, another College priest, left money for the safety of his soul, and later that year no less than four wills made elaborate provision for obits and masses.[53] In 1546, Henry Samuel provided for a priest to celebrate masses for his and his wife's souls for a year and requested that the whole college choir and the full complement of Gild priests attend his funeral.[54] Much has been written about the reliability of such evidence as an indication of a testator's religious views, the objection being that such statements could merely reflect the views of those advising the testator and/or writing the will itself. But this would make the case even more strongly that the change in terminology was the result of a change of regime. We know that two of these wills were drawn up by the College curate, John Bartlett, as were in all probability the others too.[55] Conversely, those nine written in the earlier period were almost certainly drafted by two earlier College curates, John Payne and Humfrey Sadler, who disappear after Bell took over as bishop.[56] Cromwell's protégé, Anthony Barker, was not replaced as dean but he was almost certainly then living at Sonning, (near Reading) his family home, where he was active as vicar during these years and where he died in 1551.[57]

Other evidence of a conservative reaction in these years is the charge brought against the sub-warden of the College, James Barker, presumably a relative of the absentee warden, Anthony Barker, who in May 1541 was

[50] Wo.C.R.O. 802 BA2764 ('Bishop Bell's Book), pp. 151-2; Wabuda, '"Fruitful Preaching"', 72.
[51] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1540/34.
[52] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1543-4/123.
[53] T.N.A. PROB11/29/28; Thomas Goolston (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1543-4/56); John Pemberton (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1543-4/76); Richard Kerston (Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1543-4/78); Thomas Attwood (T.N.A. PROB 11/30/7).
[54] Above, 78.
[55] Pemberton's and Kerstone's.
[56] Above, 74-5. On the issue of will-making and the influence of local scribes, with particular reference to Tewkesbury and Cirencester, see C. Litzenberger, 'Local responses to religious changes: evidence from Gloucestershire wills', in Carlson, *Religion and the English People*, 245-70.
[57] Above, 73.

denounced by William Smith for having a woman 'suspiciously in his cham bre'.[58] Indeed, Smith had accompanied Barker to his room where, having unlocked the door, 'they saw and found the said woman ... and she then and there confessed ... that the same Sir James had that day thrice carnal knowledge with her in that chamber and that the said Sir James gave her 3s 4d. sterling'. However, when Smith, in the presence of John Jeffreys, asked him to commit his confession to writing, he refused. Smith was bound over in the sum of five pounds to appear before the justices at the next sessions of the peace in order to substantiate his accusation. The prosecution may have been unsuccessful as James Barker was apparently still sub-warden on his death a few years later but there can be little doubt that the accusation was brought in a deliberate attempt to reverse previous policy.[59] The accusers, William Smith and Thomas Jeffreys, had been amongst those conservative thinkers, willing to give evidence against the alleged heretic, Edward Large, a few years earlier;[60] and action against James Barker, in all likelihood a relative of the man who had replaced Bell as warden, would have been entirely consistent with other evidence of the conservative reaction of these years.

It would therefore seem unlikely that Latimer's brief tenure of the bishopric had made a deep or lasting impression on the town. Although there had been controversy, Latimer's only known Stratford ally was John Combe, and he in turn is known to have been supported by only one man, Richard Lightfoot; by way of contrast, several notable townsmen, as evidenced by the statement taken during the Large affair, were clearly hostile to reform. In Stratford, as elsewhere, the pace set by Cromwell, Latimer and their supporters was too fast to win widespread support and, when Henry VIII turned his face against further changes in the liturgy, it was probably with some relief that communities looked to return to former ways.

However, on Henry VIII's death at the beginning of 1547, and the accession of Edward VI, there was another, this time more dramatic change in the direction of government policy, as the new administration introduced a programme of radical Protestant reform. This made itself quickly felt in Stratford on the arrival in November of the commissioners charged with implementing a new set of injunctions regulating the behaviour of clergy and the conduct of church services, and requiring the destruction of 'all shrines, covering of shrine, all tables, candlesticks, trentals or rolls of wax, pictures, paintings and all other monuments of feigned miracles, pilgrimages, idolatory and superstition'.[61] In the nearby parish of St Nicholas, Warwick, the churchwardens' accounts record

[58] 'Bishop Bell's Book', 111-3. I owe this reference to Kevin Down.

[59] The charge was brought under the reactionary Act of the Six Articles, intended, amongst other things, to re-instate clerical celibacy.

[60] Above, 78.

[61] The presence of the commissioners at Stratford is recorded in the parish register of St Nicholas, Warwick: Warwickshire County Record Office (Wa.C.R.O.), D 181/1-3.

the expenses of taking down the rood loft, re-glazing the church, lime-washing, and buying a poor chest to receive money hitherto bequeathed for the purpose of lighting candles and other traditional rights associated with the safety of the souls of the departed.[62] At St Mary's, Warwick, payments were made for repairing the windows in the chancel and Lady Chapel (implying removal of the old), for service books in English, for removing the Paschal standard and for dismantling the altars and associated timber and ironwork: and what could be salvaged was sold.[63] At Rowington, the rood loft was taken down and its images destroyed and the altar removed.[64] The churchwardens' accounts for Stratford have not survived but there is no reason to suppose that the town's experience was any different, both in respect of the parish church and of the chapel maintained by the Gild of the Holy Cross.[65] And for the record, we do at least know, from the evidence of the will of Thomas Whateley, that a poor man's box, one of the requirements of the injunctions, was installed in the parish church.[66]

But hard on the heels of the visitation came an even more obvious manifestation of change, the suppression of the College and the Gild, as the result of the Chantries Act, which came into force at Easter 1548, and the confiscation by the Crown of all their possessions. This was not unexpected. Henry VIII, despite the hostility to Protestant reform which characterised his later years, was nevertheless still short of money and for some time had had his eye on the wealth of minor religious institutions. An Act of 1545, directed against some of the chantries and which lapsed on the king's death,[67] was a signal to such bodies to take evasive action. In Warwick, a Corporation had been formed in 1545 to which the Gild of the Holy Trinity and St Mary promptly gave a third of its property: when the Gild was dissolved three years later, confiscation of this was thus avoided.[68] As we have seen, the dean of Stratford College, Anthony Barker, as early as 1541, set about granting his family long leases of the

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[62] R. Savage (ed.), *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of St Nicholas, Warwick, 1547-1621* (Warwick, 1917), 3, 5.

[63] Wa.C.R.O., CR 1618/ WA1/1, fos. 18-18v, 22-22v, 25v, 28, 31, 32. This, the first surviving book of accounts for the Warwick Corporation, also confirms the work at St Nicholas recorded in the churchwardens' accounts (see note 62).

[64] Or so may be implied from the evidence of their later re-instatement.

[65] Even in the remote Devon parish of Morebath, and with a priest hostile to reform, there was no escape and no surviving churchwardens' accounts record anything but general compliance: E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (2nd ed. Yale, 2005), 497-503; E. Duffy, *The Voices of Morebath: Reformation and Rebellion in an English Village* (London, 2001); R. Hutton, 'The local impact of the Tudor Reformation', in C. Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), 114-38.

[66] T.N.A. PROB11/32/15.

[67] C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), 163-4. This earlier act was aimed at chantries and gilds which had, in effect, been privatised since 1536 and it also authorised a survey of those which remained.

[68] *VCH, Warws.*, VIII, 490-1.

College's property at favourable rents.[69] Also in the1540s, there was a marked increase in the number of long leases granted by Stratford's Gild of the Holy Cross, several for ninety years, and not without benefit to its leading members.[70] Nevertheless, despite such worldly attitudes, the impact of these confiscations was profound. The College was emptied of its priests and the parish church stripped of its treasures. The Gild was also no more, the town deprived not only of the body which had unofficially run the town but with its chapel defunct and the future of its almshouses and school, which the Gild had supported, also in doubt.

The Chantries Act made provision for the payment of stipends to parish priests in cases where a suppressed institution had hitherto had that responsibility. Two College priests remained active in Stratford after the Dissolution, Edward Alcock, who had been appointed sub-warden in December 1545, and Roger Dyos, a curate at the College since at least 1540.[71] Of the two, Alcock may have been regarded as the more senior and more sympathetic to the new learning. In June 1550, Robert Perrott, on the evidence of his will a firm adherent of the reformed faith, leased to Alcock a house which later became accepted as the vicarage.[72] Alcock's will, drawn up in 1557, by which time he was vicar of Wootton Wawen, is also suggestive. Despite dating from the 'safe' years of Queen Mary's reign, it contains no phrases suggesting an attachment to the old faith.[73] Finally we may note that, despite Alcock's former seniority within the College hierarchy, he was apparently side-lined early in Mary's reign, when the Catholic queen appointed Dyos as the town's first vicar.[74]

The dissolution of the Gild of the Holy Cross, however, would have been of more immediate concern. Not only did this place in doubt the continued existence of the school and almshouses: more important, its leading members now found themselves no longer the guiding lights of an institution which had acted as the town's semi-official governing body, with its lavish annual feast a symbol of its wealth and its impressive property portfolio a constant reminder of its dominance in town affairs. No doubt there was genuine concern amongst some Gild members that they would no longer be buried with all the traditional ceremonies and safeguards: but the loss of prestige and a fear that the town's for-

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[69] Above, 74.

[70] In 1544, four of the five leases were for 80 or 90 years, the fifth for 61 years. Before then only occasionally did terms exceed 51 years, although terms of 90 years occur once only in 1536 and 1537.

[71] For Alcock's appointment as sub-warden, see Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA2337/2/100; W. Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, 2 vols. (1730 edn), II, 694. In 1548, he was bequeathed 13s 4d. by Thomas Whateley (T.N.A. PROB11/32/15). Dyos, 'my ghostly father', received the same amount and witnessed the will.

[72] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 9/5/2. For Perrott's will, see below, 90.

[73] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1560/157. His inventory lists '40 books in number of divers sorts'.

[74] Below, 93-4.

tunes would go into decline without the social cohesion which the Gild had provided was probably an equally powerful consideration. The point is often made that the religious beliefs of the country were not transformed as the result of the radical Protestant agenda of Edward VI's brief reign and that it took several decades even for the Elizabethan settlement to win grudging acceptance across the country. But in another sense, the early years of the Reformation did mark a point of no return. The destruction of religious houses and the confiscation, and then widespread sale, of their lands and possessions suddenly brought to an end a way of life dominated by the wealth and influence of religious institutions.[75] Although, in the next reign, Mary found it possible to re-introduce many of the rituals of the old faith, it was clear from the start that the restitution of any church property, either by the Crown itself, still short of money, or by those to whom it had since been sold on, would not be possible. In towns such as Stratford, where the wealth of a religious institution had provided the mechanism for the establishment of a civic élite, new strategies had to be quickly found if its members, regardless of their own personal beliefs, were to maintain their social position.

The Chantries Act had also made modest provision for the support of civic facilities which the dissolved institutions had supported, including schools and almshouses; and we know that arrangements were made for William Dallam, the last Gild schoolmaster, to continue to receive his annual salary of £10.[76] We also know that the parish sold off two broken bells to pay 'for the maintenance of their Bridge, the pavements of the town and the relief of the poor'.[77] But if the leading townsmen wished to find a more secure method of financing such operations and at the same time to recover the authority which they had enjoyed as officers and members of the Gild, the most obvious course of action was for them to petition the Crown for a charter of incorporation, giving to them legal powers to re-acquire the recently-confiscated property. Quite when Stratford's élite decided to venture down this road is not known, but in February 1553 they are found petitioning the Privy Council for a

> book to be signed by His Majesty for the incorporating of the town by the name of the Bailiff and burgesses that they may purchase certain lands belonging to the late monastery [i.e. the College] and guild there of the yerely value of about 200 marks for the erecting there of a grammar school with £20 yearly stipend, for the relief of 4d. weekly to every

[75] R. Tittler, 'Reformation, resources and authority in English towns: an overview', in Collinson and Craig, *Reformation in English Towns*, 190-201; *Idem, The Reformation and the Towns of England: Politics and Political Culture, c. 1540-1640* (Oxford, 1998), especially Part II, 'Material implications of the reformation'.
[76] A.F. Leach, *English Schools at the Reformation* (London, 1896), 245.
[77] T.N.A. E315/513 fo. 21.

> of the 24 poor men being in the almeshouses there, with 5 marks towards the maintenance of a bridge of stone there; the which all were before maintained by the said guild being now dissolved.[78]

Such a bid would clearly have affected the interests of the lord of the manor whose authority remained unaltered by the dissolution of the Gild, and, in fact, may in theory have been strengthened on the removal of this quasi-official rival to his authority. In this respect, there had recently been unsettling changes which might have added to the townsmen's concern to redefine their role. In July 1549, the lordship of the town, comfortably vested in the bishops of Worcester since Saxon times, passed into the hands of John Dudley, earl of Warwick, as part of an elaborate exchange which typically worked to his advantage at the expense, in this case, of the bishop, Nicholas Heath.[79] Dudley's motives are not entirely clear: when he had been created earl two years previously, he had been granted the castle at Warwick and may therefore have been minded to begin building up a power base in the county. However, six months later, Stratford was included in another one-sided deal, this time with the Crown, whereby Dudley exchanged many of his Warwickshire properties for others, worth nearly £500, mainly in Oxfordshire.[80] It may be, then, that at this stage he viewed Stratford as merely a pawn in an elaborate game by which he sought to manipulate a fluid property market to his advantage. However, a deal with the Crown early in 1550 must be seen in the context of Dudley's coup against his principal rival, Protector Somerset, for control of government policy during Edward VI's minority: and even though the king may now have become Stratford's nominal lord, any petition for incorporation would still need to meet with Dudley's approval. This became even more obviously the case, when, in March 1553, only a few weeks after Stratford's petition reached the Privy Council, the town passed back into his immediate control as a result of a third exchange, arranged a few weeks earlier, whereby he surrendered to the Crown property mainly in Kent in return for extensive royal estates spread through several counties, including Warwickshire and the town of Stratford.[81] In fact, there is clear evidence of Dudley's determination to resume the lordship of the town at precisely the time that the matter of incorporation had been raised; for a royal warrant, outlining the principal clauses to

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[78] *Acts of the Privy Council, 1552-4*, 226.

[79] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1548-1549*, 255. For Dudley's complex land deals, both on this and subsequent occasions, see D. Loades, *John Dudley Duke of Northumberland 1504-1553* (Oxford, 1996), 288-303. See also, S. Adams, '"Because I am of that countrye & mynde to plant myself there": Robert Dudley, earl of Leicester and the west midlands', *Midland History*, XX (1995), 29.

[80] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1549-1551*, 71-4.

[81] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1553*, 179.

be included in the town's charter, issued on 28 February, the day after the petition had been presented to the Privy Council, already has his name inserted into the text passages which would affect his interests;[82] and the speed with which this draft was produced indicates that he must already have been involved in detailed negotiations with the townsmen, albeit, initially and in theory, on behalf of the king rather than himself.

Negotiations over precise terms continued throughout the spring and the charter was formally issued on 28 June, only a week before the young king died. The main purpose of the negotiation was to ensure that the property restored to the town would generate sufficient income to support the services it was to provide. This was eventually whittled down from the 200 marks (£133 6s 8d.) mentioned in the petition – the combined value of the Gild and College property – to around £80, out of which the newly-formed Corporation was to pay the schoolmaster and support twenty-four almsfolk (and by implication to maintain the school and almshouses) and pay the combined salaries of the vicar and assistant minister.[83] The difference (£80 instead of £133 6s 8d.) was accounted for by the Crown's retention of most of the College estate: whereas all the Gild property was included in the grant, the only College possession relinquished was a portion of the parish tithes. The principal negotiators on the town's behalf appear to have been William Smith, John Jeffreys and William Whateley, to whom an early draft of the charter had been sent by 14 April.[84] Other men involved would presumably have included the remaining eleven of the fourteen 'foundation' aldermen, all of whom were named in the charter.[85] The majority of these had played a leading part in civic affairs as members of the Gild. Half had been aldermen (four of them masters) and two had been proctors – men, in other words, who, as leading members of the Gild, had played an essential role in the town's social and business life and who thus had the greatest reason for supporting incorporation as a means of regaining some, or all, of that influence.[86] Quite how they achieved this objective is not entirely clear. The re-possession of confiscated property, judging from the experience of other towns, would normally have involved some form of payment.[87] Indeed, in its petition to the Privy Council, the town had quite openly stated its wish to purchase the property. Yet in Stratford's case, no sum of money is

[82] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/6/163.
[83] *M&A*, I, 1-22.
[84] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/6/163.
[85] *M&A*, I, 6
[86] The former Gild masters named as aldermen in the charter of incorporation were Hugh Reynolds, William Smith, Thomas Winfield and Thomas Phillips. Former Gild aldermen were Richard Lord, John Jeffreys and Adrian Quiney. Former proctors were Henry Biddle and Robert Moors.
[87] Tittler, *Reformation and the Towns of England*, 350.

recorded as having been paid to the Crown, although Richard Harrington is later said to have lent 40s 'unto the purchesyinge of the corperatyon'.[88] If money had had to be raised in this way, then it may simply have been paid directly to Dudley, who had an interest in the grant of the charter, both as regent for the king and as the lord of the manor.

Dudley was clearly reluctant to hand over too much authority to his new corporate borough. The new Corporation was not, as happened elsewhere, granted the court leet, which continued to be held in the lord's name, an anomaly which was to cause much irritation and uncertainty in subsequent years; and, although the charter confirmed the town's markets and fairs, Dudley retained the rights to the tolls. The first high bailiff was named in the charter and Dudley reserved to himself the right to de-select any future high bailiff if he thought the man chosen by the Corporation was unacceptable. Nominations to the posts of vicar and schoolmaster also required his consent. By such means did one of the main architects of the religious and social changes of these years seek both to retain his patronage and to influence the way in which his new Corporation would develop.

His plan, of course, went disastrously wrong. Edward VI died on 6 July, only a few days after the charter was sealed. Some months later, following his ill-fated attempt to put his daughter, Lady Jane Grey onto the throne, Dudley was executed and his estates forfeited to the Crown; the Catholic Queen Mary thus became the town's manorial lord. But before moving on to consider the effect of this on civic affairs, it is worth pointing out that, though Dudley might have sought to push his newly-incorporated borough in a Protestant direction, its fourteen founding aldermen were chosen not for their religious views but for their social standing within the town. Twelve of them were among the most highly assessed townsmen in the lay subsidy of 1549-50.[89] Indeed, only four assessed at 12 s or more did not make it onto the aldermanic bench.[90] Another common feature was their tenancy of former Gild property, with ten of the fourteen holding one or two of these, some on very long leases.[91] The main consideration, then, in the compilation of this list of aldermen for Dudley to approve, was that these men should be representatives, not of any religious

[88] *M&A*, I, 87.

[89] The two exceptions were Thomas Phillips and Robert Bratt who do not occur in the subsidy at all. The return is printed in *Extracts from Ancient Subsidy Rolls ... in Respect to the Inhabitants of Stratford-upon-Avon* (London, 1864), 22-3, from T.N.A. E179/193/189.

[90] Thomas Samwell, William Fydkyn, John Wheeler and John Adkins, although it cannot be established that they were all still alive in the summer of 1553.

[91] The exceptions were Thomas Gilbert, Thomas Philips, Robert Moors and Robert Bratt. Those who held one leasehold property were Hugh Reynolds, John Jeffreys, Thomas Dixon, George Whateley and Adrian Quiney. Richard Lord, William Smith, Thomas Winfield, Henry Biddle and William Whateley held two. The tenants are listed in the charter (*M&A*, I, 6-7). The rental closest to the 1553 charter in date is 1548 (S.B.T.R.O. BRT 1/3/153: near contemporary extract from the ministers' account: T.N.A. SC12/26/28).

faction, but of the town's business and social élite. Under the terms of the charter, the fourteen nominated aldermen then chose the fourteen capital burgesses. Here again, social status was clearly important, with six of their number assessed in the 1549-50 subsidy at between 10s and 12s.[92] They too had had connections with the Gild, but, as befitted their status, in less prominent roles. Only two had reached the rank of proctor and only two were tenants of former Gild property.[93]

As one might expect, especially in view of the general lack of enthusiasm for reform which had so far been characteristic of the establishment, the founding aldermen seem to have been generally conservative in their religious outlook. For Thomas Gilbert, the first high bailiff, we have little to go on, but for his widow, Eleanor, we have a long and detailed will of 1557 which, in the appointment of 'my trusty and well-beloved Clement Throgmorton' as one of the supervisors, might be thought to indicate Protestant tendencies.[94] But the other supervisor was Thomas Badger whom we have already met in the context of the prosecution of Edward Large,[95] and Eleanor also requests the attendance at her funeral of 'the whole choir, priests and clerks'. She also nominates as feoffee of her lands another of the 'foundation' aldermen and one of the three men most closely involved in the negotiations over the terms of the charter, namely John Jeffreys, also prominent in the anti-Large party in the late 1530s, and one of the men involved in the attack on James Barker, the College priest, for non-celibacy.[96] His will, made as late as 1566, expresses his hope 'to be in joy with our blessed Lady and all the holy company of Heaven'.[97] William Smith, another of the principal negotiators over the terms of the charter, and one of the wealthiest of Stratford's townsmen, had taken the lead in denouncing Barker and, in the late 1530s, had been one of those willing to give evidence against Large. In 1543, he had witnessed the very traditional will of Thomas Attwood and, before that, had agreed to act as one of the feoffees of Attwood's estate.[98] Nevertheless, in 1565, five of his sons were left books by the Protestant vicar, John Bretchgirdle, and one of them, Richard, after graduating at Christ Church, Oxford, became vicar of Mottistone on the Isle of Wight.[99] At the time of the grant of the charter, Smith had recently taken as his

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[92] Robert Perrott, Ralph Cawdrey, Lawrence Baynton, William Munske, John Burbage and Humphrey Plymley: see above, note 89.

[93] Lawrence Baynton and William Munske had been proctors: Daniel Philips and Richard Simons were former Gild tenants.

[94] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 BA3590/2, fo. 86. For Throckmorton, see P.W. Hasler (ed.), *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1558-1603,* 3 vols (London, 1981), III, 491-2.

[95] Above, 75,78.

[96] Above, 75-6, 78.

[97] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1567/20.

[98] T.N.A. PROB11/30/7.

[99] E.I. Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies* (Oxford, 1930), 26; S.B.T.R.O. DR 237/1.

second wife the sister of John Watson, a Fellow of All Souls, a cleric of sufficiently flexible views to be appointed dean of Winchester in 1570 and then its bishop, and with whom two of William's other sons went to live.[100] For the third member of the triumvirate, William Whateley, another founding alderman who succeeded Thomas Gilbert as High Bailiff in 1554, there is no evidence to indicate a particular religious standpoint. He was the son of Thomas Whateley, a wealthy vintner and a prominent member of the Gild from 1529, whose will, though drawn up in Edward VI's reign, may indicate some traditional respect towards the old order – two of his bequests were to priests of the College, one of whom, Roger Dyos, he describes as his 'ghostly father'.[101]

Other traditionalists amongst the founding aldermen probably included Richard Lord, a yeoman, who had been master of the Gild back in 1525 and alderman almost continuously from that date. He died in 1555 or 1556, and his widow, Emma, did not long survive him. Her will, albeit made in Mary's reign and doubtless influenced by her 'ghostly father', Roger Dyos, who witnessed it, made provision for paying 'all the priests and clerks being singing men ... for singing mass and dirge', to be repeated in a month's time in her memory 'in like manner as my late husbands was'.[102] By way of contrast, Hugh Reynolds, who died in 1556, having enjoyed a civic career very similar to Lord's, and whose will was also witnessed by Dyos, struck a more reformist note in his belief that he would 'be saved by the merits of his [God's] passion', at the same time requiring, for the next seven years, the annual distribution of 4s to the poor.[103] George Whateley, a woollen draper, to become chief alderman in 1554 and high bailiff ten years later, lived on to 1593, marrying three times and fathering children until 1587. His will is very similar in tone, though by that time it is doubtful whether this is any longer of significance, especially as one of the beneficiaries was his brother, Robert, who was cited as 'an old massing priest' in the recusancy returns of 1592.[104] But in 1586 he had founded a school in Henley to teach reading, writing and arithmetic to up to thirty children, suggesting some sympathy with reformers.[105] Thomas Phillips, draper, made a will in 1556 which certainly indicated no traditional loyalty to the Catholic faith and was witnessed by Edward Alcock, recently passed over as vicar when Dyos

[100] For Watson, see *Oxford DNB*, LVII, 625-6. Two of Smith's sons are mentioned in Watson's will (T.N.A. PROB11/67/1). See also, Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 59-61.
[101] T.N.A. PROB11/32/15.
[102] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1556/3.
[103] T.N.A. PROB11/38/19.
[104] For his will, see Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1593/85, and J. Jones (ed.), *Stratford-upon-Avon Inventories 1538-1699, I* (Dugdale Soc., XXXIX, 2002), 123-9. For his brother's recusancy, see M. Hodgetts (ed.),'A certificate of Warwickshire Recusants, 1592', *Worcester Recusant*, VI (December 1965), 10.
[105] W. Cooper, *Henley-in-Arden: an Ancient Market Town and its Surroundings* (Birmingham, 1946), 79-83; *Further Report [15] of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities*, 576-7.

was appointed.[106] But, in the context of the Corporation's long-term future, the most significant appointment as a founding alderman was probably that of Adrian Quiney. He must have been only a young man at the time – he lived until 1607 – but went on to play the role of true patriach, serving three times as bailiff and the only 'foundation' alderman to remain a member of the Corporation as it moved in the direction of Protestant oligarchy. In 1582, whilst serving his third term as bailiff, his son, Richard, his step-son and the husbands of two of his step-daughters were all members of the Corporation.[107] Of the remaining aldermen, little can be said.[108]

A similar pattern is reflected in the make up of the founding capital burgesses. Like the aldermen, they too may have included men of differing religious outlooks. Robert Perrott, for instance, moved steadily towards a radical Protestant position: his will contains a devout preamble and included provision for an annual sermon 'to be preached in the churche or chapell of Stretford'.[109] Ralph Cawdrey, on the other hand, at least on later evidence of the persistent recusancy of other family members, may be presumed to have retained a loyalty towards the old faith.[110]

From a purely religious perspective, the new Corporation, then, appears to have been made up of men of differing views, with a preponderance of staunch conservatives but including others less resistant to change. However, such affiliations were of less importance than the creation of a body politic composed of men of sufficient substance, who clearly showed a willingness to be involved in one another's affairs despite what might be seen as differences in their views on religious change.

Stratford was one of many towns to experience such transformations in the management of civic affairs; the replacement of religious institutions operating as quasi-official bodies with legally appointed bodies whose members had invested heavily in the re-acquisition of the property which had under-pinned their former influence.[111] But in regaining possession of what had hitherto been church property, they in effect became complicit in the suppression of those institutions, however much they may have regretted their passing. So when, in

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[106] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1556/36.

[107] Charles Baynton, Nicholas Barnhurst, who had married Elizabeth Baynton, and George Bardell, who had married Joyce Baynton. Charles, Elizabeth and Joyce Baynton were the children of Elizabeth Baynton, widow of Lawrence Baynton, who had married Adrian Quiney in 1557: E.I. Fripp, *Master Richard Quyny* (Oxford, 1924), 16-17, 28-9, 33.

[108] Thomas Winfield, who died at around the same time, made no will, nor did Thomas Dixon (although he had been one of those who drew up the indictment against Edward Large in 1537), Robert Moors (or Morris), buried in October 1558, Henry Biddle, a yeoman, buried as 'senex' in 1564, or Robert Bratt.

[109] T.N.A. PROB11/73/39; extracts in *M&A*, IV, 60-3.

[110] Below, 106-7.

[111] For a list of towns incorporated in the 1550s, see Tittler, *Reformation and the Town of England*, 345.

Mary's reign there was talk of the restitution of church property, there was understandably little enthusiasm on the part of those, whatever their own religious views, who were now the owners of such property, either corporately, or personally. In Stratford, this threat of restitution may have been seen as very real. Not only was Mary the lord of the manor: in November 1556 she granted the lordship of the adjoining manor of Old Stratford to the re-founded Hospital of the Savoy, together with some property lying within the town.[112] Any desire on the part of the more conservative members of the Corporation to return to the old forms of religious worship must therefore have been tempered by a determination that this would not be at the expense of their newly-won status, acquired as the direct result of the Protestant agenda of the previous reign.

Mary may have found it impossible to reverse the process by which much of the church's wealth had passed into lay hands but she was certainly more successful in restoring traditional Catholic worship. For Stratford, we again lack any details but we can assume that what happened elsewhere – the re-erecting of altars and rood lofts – would have happened in Stratford. The churchwardens' accounts for St Nicholas, Warwick, confirm the bishop's visitation in the first year of the reign,[113] and early the following year there were obscure financial transactions whereby the Stratford Corporation purchased new bells for the church, apparently from the dissolved Hales Abbey, part of the money for which appears to have been contributed by those in possession of bell metal from the old bells.[114] There was also an interesting attempt to revive the town's annual pageant of St George and the Dragon held on Ascension Day which, combined with the 'bridge ale', and income from small parcels of land, had helped to raise funds for the maintenance of the town's bridge, erected in the 1490s. The arrangements had been managed by annually-elected bridgewardens, whose legal status is unclear, but whose other duties – maintaining the altar of St George in the parish church and the clock and bell in the Gild Chapel – suggest their office had evolved from within the Gild of the Holy Cross. Indeed, the petition for incorporation mentions an annual sum of 5 marks required for 'the maintenance of a bridge of stone there ... before maintained by the said guild being now dissolved'.[115] The cult of St George was an early casualty of the Reformation and the pageant was discontinued on Edward VI's accession. This had little or no effect on the income from the bridge ale which raised an annual sum of around £2 10s. throughout this peri-

[112] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1555-1557*, 544-6. On Mary's difficulties generally in attempting to make restitution of confiscated lands, see R.H. Pogson, 'Revival and reform in Mary Tudor's church: a question of money', in Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised*, 139-56.
[113] Savage (ed.), *The Churchwardens' Accounts of the Parish of St Nicholas, Warwick*, 14.
[114] *M&A*, I, xliv, 79, 86.
[115] Above, 85.

od.[116] But under Mary, the townsmen clearly felt able to revive the pageant which was held for at least the first three years of the new reign.[117] Thereafter, the accounts peter out as the maintenance of the bridge, although not specifically mentioned in the charter, appears to have passed to the Corporation.

Nevertheless, even if this reversal of policy may, for religious or even sentimental reasons, have been generally accepted, or, in the case of the pageant, even supported in the town, the intervention by the crown into town politics may have been less welcome. The charter laid down no procedural rules on how the Corporation should conduct its business and, with the exception of the election of the bailiff in September 1554, there are no records of its independent proceedings until 1564. Before then, either the minutes of its meetings have been lost or the Corporation was at first content to conduct its affairs through the twice-yearly court leet, which continued to be held, though in whose name it was not at first clear. This, before and after the grant of the charter, dealt with minor breaches of the peace, the observance of orders concerning waste disposal, restrictions on the movement of livestock and dogs, and the making and selling of bread and ale. But, from June 1553 there are added to this mix various orders concerning the dignity and status of the newly-appointed Corporation. In October 1553, for instance, 'all and every the officers and other persons from henceforth be obedient unto the High Bailiff in pain of every offender to forfeit and lose for every default 20s and that no person be so hardy to revele or rebell against any officers on like pain, and to have three days and three nights punishment in the open stocks'.[118] Thomas Powell almost immediately fell foul of this order – 'revelynge as well ageynst Mr Hye Beyly as also agenyst other the Quenes Magestyez offeceres' – and was fined at the next court.[119] It was also agreed there that for every fine amounting to more than 3s. 4d., a third should be given to the high bailiff and a third to the Corporation's chamberlains.[120] In October 1555, orders were introduced to penalise anyone refusing civic office and the court was also used for the appointment of the high bailiff and other officers for the coming year.[121] In September 1557, a new set of orders was drawn up to regulate the election of the high bailiff, to provide for monthly meetings of the Corporation, in addition to the two meetings of the leet, to define the circumstances in which aldermen or capital burgesses could be expelled, and generally to regulate their behaviour and define their responsibilities.[122] The oath required of aldermen and burgesses also emphasised their

[116] The bridgewardens' accounts survive for 1514 and 1516, and then in a more or less annual sequence from 1533 (S.B.T.R.O. BRT 2/1).
[117] S.B.T.R.O. 2/1, pp. 36-8, which include payments for 'bearing the dragon'.
[118] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/9/4.
[119] *M&A*, I, 24.
[120] *M&A*, I, 25.
[121] *M&A*, I, 44-5.
[122] *M&A*, I, 62-6.

duty to 'maynteyne & defende the liberties and rights' of the town, and to give their best advice for its benefit and good governance.[123] And for the next six years, the proceedings of this same court leet are all that have survived to indicate how the town was governed.

The wording of these records suggests that the members of the Corporation had assumed, intentionally or otherwise, that the court leet had in fact been granted to them. Although Queen Mary was still, in theory, the town's lord, the courts were not held in her name, or before her representative, in marked contrast to those dating from before the charter of incorporation, which made respectful note of the current lord. The name of the court also evolved, from the simple 'Curia lete' of April 1554, to 'visus franci plegii cum curia et sessione de pace' by October 1554, to 'Visus franci plegii cum curia ballivi, aldermannorum et burgensium de Stratford' in October 1557.[124] The court rolls recording these proceedings also remained in the town, to become part of the borough archive.[125] The tendency in these years would appear, then, to be towards establishing the town's independence of the Crown, not towards greater co-operation; and whatever might have been the religious views of individual members, they appreciated the political advantages of distancing themselves from royal influence. Whether this arose out of a genuine misunderstanding of the terms of the charter, either on the town's part or that of the new royal administration, or both, or whether the Corporation quietly assumed powers in the hope that Queen's advisers would not notice, it is difficult to say. What we do know, however, is that, when Queen Elizabeth granted the lordship of the manor to Ambrose Dudley, earl of Warwick, in 1562, he resumed control of the court leet (the records for which are now lost) and that the Corporation began to record its slimmed-down proceedings in a different way.[126]

Ambivalence towards royal authority may also have made itself felt in issues where religious allegiances were a factor. For instance, due to Dudley's downfall, the appointments of the first vicar and schoolmaster were in Mary's gift. Edward Alcock, who had been the sub-warden of the College until it was dissolved, and Roger Dyos, a former curate, appear to have continued as stipendiary priests until November 1553.[127] Then, Mary presented Dyos to the new living, over the head, it would seem, of Alcock, who continued as curate until, in February 1557, he secured the living of Wootton Wawen.[128] Of the two men,

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[123] *M&A*, I, 69.

[124] *M&A*, I, 23, 27, 75.

[125] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/9/4; BRU 15/7/32-9, 56-9; BRU 15/3/11.

[126] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1560-1563*, 291-3. The last of the court leet records which survive in the Corporation archives is dated 4 May 1561 (*M&A*, I, 115-9). Meetings of the 'Hall' are recorded from 6 October 1563 (*M&A*, I, 123). The records of the courts held in Dudley's name are lost.

[127] Above, 83.

[128] For Dyos's presentation and bond, see Wo.C.R.O. 7312.4 BA2337/4, nos. 176-7; *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1553-1554*, 38. For Alcock's presentation as vicar of Wootton Wawen, see Dugdale, *Antiquities of Warwickshire*, II, 814.

Dyos would appear to have been the more conservative but there are indications that he was not a popular choice with the Corporation, who, under the terms of the charter, were now required to pay him his salary. Firstly, there is an agreement to pay this salary, plus 40s for the first fruits and tenths, but drawn up in February 1555, more than a year after his appointment, suggesting some disagreement over terms.[129] This is confirmed by a letter, written in October 1559, soon after Elizabeth's succession, by two local gentry with Catholic sympathies, Robert Throckmorton and Edward Greville, remonstrating with the Corporation for withholding the vicar's salary, which they said it was not entitled to do, even if it were suspected that he was about to leave.[130] When Dyos did depart, apparently later that year, he had still not been paid, nor, it would seem, for the first six months following his appointment.[131]

The circumstances surrounding the appointment of Stratford's first post-1553 schoolmaster, William Smart, also suggest some independence of spirit on the part of the Corporation. According to his own account, Smart had obtained his degree of BA in 1551, was elected a Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and was then ordained by the leading reformist bishop, Nicholas Ridley. But at the beginning of Mary's reign, he was expelled, together with the Master, Richard Wilkes, and several other fellows, 'three papistes only remaining'.[132] The next notice of him occurs in December 1554, as the Stratford Corporation's 'trusty & welbelovyd William Smart, bachelor of arts, now schoolmaster with us'.[133] There can be no doubt as to Smart's Protestant credentials: four at least of his five sons, one with the revealing forename Ezechias, went to University and one at least became an eminent Puritan divine.[134] Prevented, in Mary's reign, from seeking a position in the church, it is no surprise that Smart should have turned to teaching but the question does arise as to how he had managed to secure the schoolmaster's post in Stratford, given that in theory his appointment needed Mary's approval as lord of the

[129] *M&A*, I, 37-40.
[130] *M&A*, I, 101-2.
[131] *M&A*, I, 102. In 1562, he was presented to the living of Little Bedwyn in Wiltshire, where he died in 1582, survived by 'Morrys Dyos, my base begotten son'. For his will and inventory, see Wiltshire County Record Office, P5/4Reg/52C; P5/1582/20. In 1576, the Corporation eventually paid him £11, after the threat of legal action (*M&A*, III, 110, 115, 118).
[132] This was his account of his early career, as given in 1585, when he was rector of Lighthorne: D.M. Barratt (ed.), *Ecclesiastical Terriers of Warwickshire Parishes*, I (Dugdale Soc., XXII, 1955), 142-3. Contemporary documents confirm his election as Fellow and his presence at Christ's College until Lady Day 1554: J. Peile, *Biographical Register of Christ's College Cambridge, I* (Cambridge, 1910), 41. The upheavals at Christ's College at this time, including Wilkes's removal, are well-recorded: J. Peile, *Christ's College* (Cambridge, 1900), 52-8.
[133] *MA*, I, 33-4.
[134] Barratt (ed.), *Ecclesiastical Terriers of Warwickshire Parishes*, 143, and n.

manor. The document which records his presence in Stratford in December 1554, when he was already 'with us', is a confirmation of his salary, as defined in the charter, namely £20, in return for teaching 'all suche scolares & chylder as shall forten to cum thether to lerne godly lernynge & wysdom'.[135] But a suggestion that this agreement may have been drawn up to resist external pressure is to be found in the final clause: 'over and above the covenauntes above recyted, the said hy bely, aldermen & capytall burgesez ... shall warrant & defend' William Smart's salary 'agaynst all people'. Nevertheless, a fortnight later, Smart was obliged to surrender £6 13s 4d. of this salary to engage as his assistant William Dallam, the old Gild schoolmaster, who had been kept on after the suppression of the Gild at a salary of £10.[136] It is difficult to be certain what lay behind these agreements but it could surely reasonably be proposed that the Corporation had taken Smart on without proper authority and that later, on complaint being made, he had had to compensate the old Catholic schoolmaster whom he had replaced, despite the Corporation's declaration of confidence two weeks earlier. We have seen, in respect of the court leet, how confusion in the wake of Dudley's impeachment and execution may have led the Corporation to assume rights and privileges which the charter had not, in fact, conferred. The appointment of Smart as schoolmaster may have been another, modified a year or two later after Mary's advisors sought to question the appointment.

These incidents in the first few years of the Corporation's existence suggest the uncertainty over how the town was to be governed. But it is also to be expected, as happened in other towns, that the aldermen and burgesses of this fledgling Corporation, having taken steps to re-establish themselves as the town's governing élite, would take advantage of this uncertainty to limit the influence of a rival authority within the town. This may be sufficient to explain the apparent tension between the lord of the manor, Queen Mary, and the Corporation which arose over the former's promotion of Dyos as vicar and the latter's engagement of Smart as schoolmaster. It would therefore be difficult to maintain that the Corporation, even at this stage, was an enthusiastic supporter of the Marian programme, even though some of its members remained attached to the old faith. Given the town's circumstances, a newly incorporated borough established through the grace and favour of the town's Protestant lord, and, in respect of the property it had acquired at some cost to itself, the direct beneficiary of the suppression of the Gild and College, a cautious regard for its newly won status appears to have taken precedence over other considerations.

On Elizabeth's accession, with the tide once more flowing in favour of Protestantism, and for a sustained period, it becomes easier to track the town's fairly consistent move towards conformity with the Elizabethan settlement.

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[135] *M&A*, I, 33-4.
[136] *M&A*, I, 35-6.

This is not to say that the direction might not have once again been reversed as the result of another change in political leadership or that the townspeople were united in the pursuit of a Protestant agenda, only that its leaders accepted that the town's interests, and their own, would be best served by conformity with the requirements of the state. And, as the government became increasingly self-confident in its promotion of the new agenda, so did local resistance to the new order become restricted to a few determined opponents. But even here we can detect a reluctance to allow religious differences to threaten the well-being of the town, or at least of its leading members; and in the Corporation's early days a common enterprise to defend the town's, and their own, interests in the face of pressing problems associated with pestilence and poverty, and the maintenance of law and order clearly transcended any religious differences between its members.

To some extent, this transition was made easier through changes in the lordship of the manor. On Queen Mary's death, this passed to her sister, Elizabeth, and with it the right to nominate, or at least approve, appointments to the posts of high bailiff, vicar and schoolmaster. Then, in 1562, Elizabeth restored the manor to the Dudleys, in the person of the strongly Protestant Ambrose Dudley, earl of Warwick, a man who, one must assume, would have wished to see the town advance along the path of religious reform.[137] The appointments of both vicar and schoolmaster also needed the approval, of course, of the bishop – from 1559, Edwin Sandys, imprisoned and exiled under Mary.[138] Appointments of openly traditionalist figures to these posts was therefore very unlikely: instead, for example, we find the critical post of vicar occupied by a succession of ministers increasingly determined to promote the Protestant agenda. Dyos's immediate successor as vicar was John Bretchgirdle, presented by Queen Elizabeth in January 1561.[139] Bretchgirdle was no radical but he was a preacher himself and brought other preachers to the town during the plague visitation of 1564. He dictated, or even wrote, his own will with an appropriate Protestant preamble and bequeathed a number of Protestant books, including works by the 'prohibited' authors, Hermann Bodius and Wolfgang Musculus, to his fellow clergy and to the sons of the increasingly Protestant alderman, William Smith.[140] The Corporation showed its support by engaging as the assistant minister another figure, William Prickett, who it may be presumed had leanings

[137] *Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1560-1563*, 292-3.

[138] For a summary of Sandys's career, see *Oxford DNB*, XLVIII, 914-27.

[139] For Bretchgirdle, see Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 13-23. For his presentation, see Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA2337/7, no. 476.

[140] For the nature of his ministry, see Cambridge, Corpus Christi College (C.C.C.C.) MS 97, fo. 181v. For his will and inventory, see Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 23-31; Jones (ed.), *Stratford-upon-Avon Inventories*, I, 28-9.

towards the new learning: he went on to become vicar of Banbury, a notable centre of zealous Protestant reform.[141]

It was also during Bretchgirdle's incumbency that work was done on 'Protestantising' the Gild Chapel. In the Corporation's accounting year, Michaelmas 1562 – Michaelmas 1563, two shillings were spent on 'defacing the images', and the following year, the rood loft was taken down, new seats installed and various other alterations carried out.[142] Much has been written to the effect that this was late in the day, given that Elizabeth's proclamation once again to purge places of worship of their Catholic associations was issued in 1559.[143] However, it is debatable that this can be convincingly cited as an example of the town's conservatism. Evidence assembled by Christopher Haigh, Eamon Duffy and others would indicate that a delay of two or three years in implementing the 1559 proclamation was far from exceptional, even in respect of changes to a parish church.[144] But what is frequently overlooked, in the case of Stratford's Gild chapel, is that by then it was not a place of worship but a redundant building. Its wall paintings and other traditional furnishings should have been destroyed during Edward VI's reign and there is no proof that they were not. For the remaining four years of the reign, we must assume that the chapel, defaced or not, was simply locked up before being granted to the Corporation, under its 1553 charter, as a piece of real estate –'all that former chapel ... and all the lead on the same and the bell tower and all the bells'.[145] Under Mary, the chapel was given a partial reprieve: when, in 1555, William Dallam, the former Gild priest and schoolmaster, and Smart's usher since 1553, was eventually pensioned off, it remained his job to celebrate mass in the chapel on the eve of feast days for the welfare of the bailiff and burgesses.[146] As happened elsewhere, this could have involved the re-introduction of images and traditional church furnishings. But Dallam died in August 1558 and a successor with this responsibility is very unlikely to have been appointed, especially after the accession of Elizabeth a few months later. We must assume, therefore, that the chapel again fell into disuse. It is, of course, the case that the Corporation should have acted in 1560 to cleanse the buildings of its remaining Catholic ornaments, either the original ones or others re-introduced by Dallam, but any reluctance could have been as much to do with financial pru-

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[141] He was instituted at Banbury early in 1564: S.S. Pearce, 'Clergy of the ... Peculiars of Banbury ... of 1559 and afterwards', *Reports of the Oxfordshire Archaeological Society*, LXII (1916), 77-8. He died in February 1571: J.S.W. Gibson (ed.), *Baptism and Burial Register of Banbury, Oxfordshire, Part One, 1558-1653* (Banbury Historical Society, VII, 1964-5), 151.

[142] *M&A*, I, 128, 138-9.

[143] Mostly drawing on Collinson, *William Shakespeare's Religious Inheritance*, 246.

[144] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 568ff.; Haigh, *English Reformations*, 244-7.

[145] 'totam illam nuper capellam ... ac totum plumbum super dictam nuper capellam et campanile ... ac omnes campanas in eidem campanile': *M&A*, I, 8.

[146] *M&A*, I, 48-50.

dence as with any religious conviction. Twice in less than ten years parish authorities had been put to the expense of radical changes: first in removing images and other objects to which the reformers took exception and then in putting them back. If there was a way of delaying compliance with this latest proclamation – to get rid of them for the second time – this may simply have been wariness on the Corporation's part about wasting money, especially as the building was not actually in use.[147] But when Bretchgirdle, with the Corporation's clear support, decided to invite preachers to the town, the former Gild Chapel was the obvious venue, provided, that is, that it was suitable: hence the need to 'deface the images', certainly the wall paintings (if they had survived since 1548) but also, in the more usual meaning of the phrase, any three-dimensional images re-introduced by Dallam during Mary's reign, to remove the rood loft (again this could have been re-instated), and to install seating and other furnishings to turn it into an appropriate place for preaching. This activity, then, need not reflect the Corporation's conservative religious views. The delay, if such it was, was not untypical of what was going on in many other parts of the country and was just as likely to have been the result of the Corporation's perfectly understandable wish not to spend any more money on a building for which until that point they had had no use. And the very act of encouraging preaching was, in itself, of course, an indication of sympathy with the reformist agenda.[148]

Bretchgirdle died in June 1565. His successor, nominated by Ambrose Dudley, was Stratford's schoolmaster, William Smart, whom we have already met.[149] Prevented, in Mary's reign, from pursuing a career in the Church, he was able to do so under Elizabeth. He moved on to Lighthorne at the end of 1566 and was subsequently licensed to preach by John Whitgift, bishop of Worcester.[150] His successor, in May 1567, was William Butcher, described then as of Taunton in Somerset.[151] There has been considerable confusion over this man's identity. A man of this name, also from Somerset, was admitted to Corpus Christi, Oxford, in 1534 and rose to be its President. He was of staunch conservative views – in 1535 he was of the opinion that all followers of the new religion were 'adventurers and naughty knaves' – and resigned his post early in Elizabeth's reign and retired to the humble living of Duntisbourne Rous, in Gloucestershire, according to Anthony Wood, 'in animo Catholico', where he

[147] Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, 570-1; Hutton, 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformation', 114-38, especially 134-8.
[148] Two payments totalling £3 10s were made to the same preacher in the accounting year Michaelmas 1563 to Michaelmas 1564, the same year as the chapel was fitted out with seats: *M&A*, I,139-40.
[149] Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA2337/8, nos. 540-1; and see above, 94-5.
[150] Barratt, (ed.), *Ecclesiastical Terriers*, I, 143.
[151] Wo.C.R.O. 732.34 BA 2337/9, no. 565.

died in 1585.[152] This man has frequently been claimed as Smart's successor as vicar of Stratford, especially by those who wish to demonstrate the town's Catholic sympathies. But there was another William Butcher, who had graduated from Lincoln College in 1544, and who is almost certainly the man of that name who had been serving as vicar of West Harptree, also in Somerset, from 1553.[153] In 1561, he was recorded as a licensed preacher holding two Somerset livings, West Harptree and Laverton.[154] He surrendered Laverton the following year but was still reported as holding two benefices in 1568,[155] the most likely explanation for his continuing plurality being his acceptance of the Stratford living in 1567. Ultimately, he lost both, being succeeded in West Harptree by March 1570 and in Stratford by the autumn of 1569, when, on his successor's appointment, it is recorded that he had been lawfully deprived of the living. This plurality would account for the fact that there is no record of his ministry in the town and at the same time explain the prominence in these years of his curate, James Hillman.[156] But, given his status as a licensed preacher, there is in any case no reason to doubt his Protestant leanings.

Butcher's successor, in late 1569, was Henry Heycroft, and from this point, the Corporation's support for increasingly radical ministers becomes more obvious.[157] In 1576, it agreed to pay Heycroft's share of the lay subsidy due that year and in 1577 they lent him £4, later allowing him extra time to repay, and a further £5 in 1584.[158] He was licensed to preach early in 1572 and a new pulpit was erected in the Gild chapel for this purpose both for him and visiting preachers.[159] In 1584, his patron, the zealous Ambrose Dudley, promoted him, as a 'preacher of the word of God', to the living of Rowington, also in his gift, a more valuable benefice than Stratford to the tune of £35.[160] During his watch, the first of the town's annual sermons was endowed, 3s 4d. being granted to the Corporation for this purpose by Thomas Oken of Warwick.[161] His successor,

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[152] Emden, *Biographical Register*, 53-4; J.G. Milne, *The Early History of Corpus Christi College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1946), 22-3, 27-8, 30; Anthony a Wood, *Fasti Oxonienses ... to which are added the Fasti or Annals of the said University ...*, 2 vols. (London, 1691-2), I, 88.

[153] C.W. Boase (ed.), *Register of the University of Oxford, Vol. 1* (Oxford Historical Society, I, 1885), 207; Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1891), I, 221. Emden (see note 152) conflates the two men.

[154] C.C.C.C. MS 97, fo. 181v; Somerset Record Office (S.R.O.) D/D/Ca/30, pp. 34, 47. William Butcher of Duntisbourne also occurs in the 1561 survey (C.C.C.C. MS 97, fo.109) and is clearly a different man, being described as still semi-resident at his old college and without a preaching licence.

[155] S.R.O. D/D/B/Reg. 15, fo. 8v; D/D/Ca/40.

[156] Below, 101.

[157] For his nomination by Ambrose Dudley, see Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA 2337/9, nos. 612-3.

[158] *M&A*, II, 109; III, 8, 21, 140.

[159] Wo.C.R.O. b716.093 BA2648/10 (i), fo. 5b; *M&A*, III, 96.

[160] Fripp, *Haunts*, 74-5; Wo.C.R.O. b716.093 BA2648/10 (i), fo. 63v.

[161] *M&A*, II, xxxvi-xxxviii.

Richard Barton, was encouraged along an even more radical path. Another 'preacher of the word of God', he received a gift of £4 on his appointment and in 1585 also had his assessment under the lay subsidy of that year paid for him.[162] In 1586 he is described as 'learned, zealous and godly and fit for the ministry: a happy age if our church were freight with many such'.[163] During his ministry, leading radicals – Andrew Boardman, Job Throckmorton and Thomas Cartwright – visited or preached in the town and were entertained at the Corporation's expense.[164] In 1589, the last year of his ministry, the Corporation voted through by a large majority a measure which would have given him an extra £2 a year.[165]

There would therefore seem to be little doubt that, following the departure, under pressure, of Queen Mary's nominee, Roger Dyos, in 1561, Stratford was by and large served by vicars of an increasingly Protestant persuasion. Smart was certainly a supporter of Protestant reform, and Bretchgirdle's ministry also saw moves in the same direction. From at least the time of Heycroft's appointment in 1569, we then have evidence of active support of a succession of ministers of increasingly radical views. This does not mean, of course, that the parishioners were all of an equally Protestant persuasion, but the incumbent's attitude towards reform was essential in bringing about change, and there is nothing in Stratford's experience to suggest anything but, at the very least, promotion of the Elizabethan settlement and, by the late 1580s, of something more radical.

Other hints of the Corporation's support of reform can be detected in the appointment of curates, though some of them remain shadowy figures. The charter of 1553 had provided for the engagement of an assistant minister, at an annual salary of £10; but, whereas the nomination of the vicar remained the prerogative of the lord of the manor, no such restriction had been placed on the appointment of his curate who could therefore be recruited by the Corporation.[166] The first to hold the post may have been William Brogden, a 'priest' of this name who was buried on 31 January 1559.[167] A possible successor was David Tonge, who in May that year witnessed, again as 'priest', the will of Thomas Atwood.[168] For Thomas Spicer, of Carnarvon, we have direct evidence of the Corporation's involvement in his appointment in the form of a bond of obligation, dated 16 March 1564, whereby Spicer is bound to the

[162] Wo.C.R.O. b716.093 BA2648/10 (i), fo. 30; *M&A*, III, 152, 157.
[163] *M&A*, IV, 3.
[164] *M&A*, IV, 16-17, 31.
[165] *M&A*, IV, 66.
[166] *M&A*, I, 17.
[167] R. Savage (ed.), *The Registers of Stratford-on-Avon ... Burials 1558-1652/3* (Parish Register Society, 1905), 3.
[168] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/6/70.

bailiff, George Whateley, for the proper performance of his duties as assistant minister for the coming year.[169] He was followed by William Prickett, who, as assistant minister, was present, in August 1565, at the making of the will of John Lewis, alias Atkins, the first in Stratford to record the testator's trust in the merits of Christ's Passion.[170] By that time he had been instituted as vicar of Banbury where he was already helping to lay the foundations of later Protestant ascendancy in the town.[171] He was followed by James Hillman, in Stratford by July 1566 (possibly from Leicester), when he drew up the very Catholic will of John Jeffreys, who was referred to as 'assistant' advising on church matters in another will dating from October that year which he also drafted and witnessed.[172] He clearly used his writing skills to supplement his meagre wage, being recorded as the writer of at least two other Stratford deeds of the late 1560s.[173] His prominence, coupled with the complete lack of evidence for the local activities, or even presence in Stratford, of the pluralist vicar, William Butcher, suggests that the incumbent was an absentee and that Hillman carried out his functions. In discharge of these he may have displeased the Corporation, as the bishop had to intervene to secure a payment to him of 20s in the accounting year 1568-69, and he received no payments after March 1570.[174] In April, when John Sadler sued him for a debt of £15 in the local court of record, he had left the town.[175]

His successor, after an interval of few months was William Gilbert, alias Higgs. He had been employed as usher at the school from around 1563, but in 1570 he was engaged as curate,[176] a post he filled, until his death thirty-two years later, to the complete satisfaction of the Corporation: so much so that in 1604 the high bailiff, vicar and six of the aldermen petitioned for the renewal of his licence to serve as curate, he being 'of a very honest, quiet, sober and good behaviour towards all men and diligent to do al such things as are required at his hands in his place, by the which behaviour he hath well deserved both our loving affections and also these our letters of commendations'.[177] Given that the vicar, Richard Byfield was deprived of the living the following year for his excessive zeal,[178] the implication of the petition of 1604, signed by Byfield, is that Gilbert had also come under suspicion for a similar reason.

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[169] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/12/23.
[170] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1566/13.
[171] Pearce, 'Clergy of the ... Peculiars of Banbury', 77-8.
[172] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1567/20; 008.7 1567/39. A James son of James Hillman was baptised at Leicester on 24 August 1562.
[173] S.B.T.R.O. ER 2/10, 12; BRU 15/2/15.
[174] *M&A,* II, 35, 45, 47.
[175] Distraint was granted 'quia predictus Jacobus est fugitivus': S.B.T.R.O. BRU 12/1 (i), fo. 89.
[176] Wo.C.R.O. b716.093 BA2648/10 (i), fo. 37v; *M&A*, I, 121, 140, 151; II, 35, 47, 67.
[177] Wo.C.R.O. 449 BA2049 (i), no. 31; Fripp, *Master Richard Quyny*, 61.
[178] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/16/13. John Rogers was presented in July 1605 on Byfield's deprivation: Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA2337/16, nos. 30-1.

If we turn to the schoolmasters, admittedly of less influence in the town but still of some significance as opinion formers, the picture is less clear. The first, William Smart, we have already met, expelled from his Cambridge College at the start of Mary's reign for his religious views but who still contrived to secure appointment as the master of the re-founded grammar school. He held the post until July 1565 when he became vicar.[179] His successor was John Brownsword, almost certainly introduced to the town by the vicar, John Bretchgirdle, who in the 1550s had been his teacher at the grammar school at Witton, in Cheshire.[180] Under the terms of the charter, his appointment should have been at the nomination of the lord of the manor, by then Ambrose Dudley, but there is no mention of his involvement in the two-year contract drawn up between the Corporation and Brownsword in April 1565.[181] Doubtless the schoolmaster would have shared Bretchgirdle's moderate Protestant views (he was the recipient of a Calvinist tract under the vicar's will) and, indeed, he came to the town at Bretchgirdle's invitation.

Difficulties in attracting suitable candidates may be reflected in the fact that his successor, one 'Acton' (possibly Thomas Acton, a Worcester man who had been at Brasenose, Oxford, in the 1550s) was only in post for fifteen months.[182] His successor, Walter Roche, on his appointment in 1570, was simultaneously presented by Queen Elizabeth to the living of Droitwich.[183] Apart from establishing his Protestant credentials (confirmed by his later presentation, in 1574, to the living of Clifford Chambers[184]), this would suggest that the schoolmaster's salary was insufficient to attract a dedicated candidate. Indeed, Roche served for less than two years, to be followed by Simon Hunt, who stayed for slightly longer, with a stint of three years from the autumn of 1571.[185] He has been identified with the Simon Hunt who enrolled at the Catholic College at

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[179] Above, 94-5.

[180] Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 36-40; *Oxford DNB*, VIII, 275-6.

[181] *M&A*, I, 142-3. The wording suggests there may have been some difficulty in filling the post, as arrangements were made for Brownsword to give up the post should he 'mislyke with anything'. Brownsword had been appointed master of the grammar school at Macclesfield in January 1561 and returned there in 1567 on the completion of his two years at Stratford, also suggesting his engagement at Stratford was not regarded as permanent (Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 40, 48).

[182] For the payment of his salary, 1568-9, 1569-70, and 1570-1, *see M&A*, I, 21, 35-6, 46. For Thomas Acton, who may also have been a student at Christchurch, Oxford, see *Brasenose College Register* (Oxford Historical Society, LV, 1910), 22; Boase (ed.), *Register of the University of Oxford, Vol. 1*, 237; Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*, I, 5.

[183] Wo.C.R.O. 732.4 BA2337/9, nos. 610-1, where Roche signs as of Stratford.

[184] J. Maclean, 'History of the manor and advowson of Clifford Chambers and some account of its possessors, *Trans. Bristol and Glos. Arch. Soc.*, XIV (1889-90), 80.

[185] He was licensed to teach by the bishop of Worcester on 29 Oct 1571: Wo.C.R.O. b716.093 BA2648/10 (i), fo. 5. For payment of his salary, from Michaelmas 1571 to Michaelmas 1574, see *M&A*, II, 68, 75, 97.

Douai, in France in the summer of 1575, and who later became a Jesuit.[186] There is no material evidence to substantiate what otherwise might just be a coincidence of names. This is not fatal to the argument, of course, but there is also mention of a Simon Hunt late of Stratford whose inventory was drawn up in 1598 by two men from Hewell, in Tardebigg, comprising only debts 'by specialty' due from two men, one of whom, Henry Morgan, was of nearby Northfield.[187] There are unanswered questions here, but also sufficient evidence to cast doubt on the claim that, during Simon Hunt's years as Stratford schoolmaster, the boys were taught by a Catholic, closet or otherwise. Hunt's successor, Thomas Jenkins, in post by midsummer 1575, has also been promoted as a Catholic on the grounds that he was educated at St John's, Oxford, in the mid 1560s at a time when the College was in difficulties as the result of the Catholic beliefs of its president and some of its fellows.[188] Certainly the College reflected in many ways the traditionalist views of its founder, Thomas White; no less than twelve fellows resigned, or were deprived, between 1567 and 1574, including some half a dozen who decamped to Douai to train as seminary priests.[189] However, we know that Jenkins was admitted to the College, not for any religious views he may have had, but because he was the son of one of White's servants.[190] Moreover, the six or seven fellows who became active opponents of Protestant reform were only a small proportion of the fifty or so who attended the College during these years and it is not difficult to demonstrate that some of this majority went on to serve as ministers in the reformed church.[191]

Jenkins's period of office lasted four years, until the summer of 1579, longer than those of his five predecessors but not long enough to indicate stability. His successor was John Cottam, licensed to teach in Stratford by the bishop of Worcester, John Whitgift, in September 1579.[192] Cottam is the man

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[186] The attribution was first made by J.H. Pollen, 'A Shakespeare Discovery, his Schoolmaster a Jesuit', *The Month* (October-November 1917).

[187] Jones (ed.), *Stratford Inventories*, I, 176-7. It is not certain, however, that this unusual inventory was drawn up immediately after Hunt's death and his burial is not recorded in Stratford or Tardebigg. Hunt the Jesuit had died in 1585, so it is not impossible that this inventory was drawn up later to settle his affairs.

[188] W.H. Stevenson and H.E. Salter, *The Early History of St John's College, Oxford* (Oxford, 1939), 197.

[189] Edmund Campion had attended St John's, and those known to have settled in Douai in the 1570s were Henry Holland, Henry Shaw, William Wiggs, Gregory Martin and Humphrey Ely, and probably John Bavant and Thomas Bramston: Stevenson and Salter, *Early History of St John's*, 197, 323-4, 329-30, 332, 334-5, 339.

[190] Stevenson and Salter, *Early History of St John's*, 426.

[191] John James was a prebendary and Subdean of Salisbury Cathedral, Francis Wyllys became a canon of Bristol Cathedral and then Dean of Worcester, and John Robinson became precentor of Lincoln Cathedral: Stevenson and Salter, *Early History of St John's*, 322-3, 329, 336.

[192] *Journal of Education*, n.s. XXX (1908), 211.

who has attracted the most attention of Catholic historians, and rightly so, for he may have been the brother of the Catholic priest, Thomas Cottam, who was arrested in 1580, when making his way to Stratford, and who was executed two years later.[193] This does not establish John Cottam's Catholicism, of course, and he had clearly not aroused Whitgift's suspicions when he was granted leave to teach in 1579; and, when news broke of his brother's arrest, he gave up his post almost immediately.[194] We cannot be sure that he was pushed into resignation by the Corporation, but this must remain the most likely explanation. For the record, Cottam's own religious views are far from clear. On leaving Stratford he eventually returned to his native parish of Tarnacre, in Lancashire, living on there until his death in 1616. But although the assumption is often made, given the evidence of his brother's career, that he was, or remained, a Catholic, this has not been easy to substantiate.[195]

With the appointment of his successor, Alexander Aspinall, in 1581 or 1582, we suddenly enter a new era of stability.[196] Aspinall remained in post until his death in 1624 and was clearly a man in whom the Corporation had complete confidence. He was elected a capital burgess in 1596 and an alderman in 1601 and served as chamberlain in the years 1604-5. On only one occasion was his teaching called into question, presumably on a doctrinal point as the allegation, brought in 1608 by Richard Wright, the minister at Luddington, was referred to the vicar, John Rogers, and Henry Sturley, who until 1604 had been Aspinall's usher.[197] But otherwise, there is no reason to doubt a harmonious relationship between him, the increasingly zealous vicars and the radical wing of the Corporation.

The overall impression left by this survey, then, is that, before Aspinall's appointment, no master, with the exception of the first, William Smart, who served from 1553 until his appointment as vicar in 1565, ever established himself in the town, the intervening six terms of service covering only sixteen years between them. Question marks remain over the religious persuasions of two of these short-term post-holders, Hunt and Cottam, but there is no evidence that they enjoyed the Corporation's support; in Cottam's case, in fact, the opposite, as he seems to have been levered out of his post when his brother's arrest and execution made him a liability. Moreover, as we have seen, the reformist vicar, Henry Heycroft, had been in post since 1570, pursuing, with the Corporation's

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[193] For John and Thomas Cottam, see T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, 2 vols. (Urbana, 1944), II, 480-6.

[194] Cottam was paid his full salary from Michaelmas 1580 to Michaelmas 1581, but was replaced by Aspinall in the following accounting year (*M&A*, III, 95, 117).

[195] His name, for instance, is not included in published recusant lists.

[196] For Aspinall, see Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, 78-81; M. Eccles, *Shakespeare in Warwickshire* (Madison, 1961), 57-8; Baldwin, *William Shakspere's Small Latine*, I, 466-89; Fripp, *Master Richard Quyny*, 61-4.

[197] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 2/2, 160.

approbation, an increasingly radical agenda.[198] It would seem very unlikely, given the fact that appointments of both the vicar and schoolmaster required the consent of both Ambrose Dudley and the bishop of Worcester, that it was ever the intention of the authorities that the school should be managed by anyone not of a similar outlook.

The fact that the oligharchic Corporation was becoming more radically Protestant and that the religious outlook of the town's vicars, and to a lesser extent the schoolmasters, reflected this, may not in itself establish widespread support of Protestantism within the community as a whole. But nor is there any significant evidence of recusancy. The last Stratford will to include mention of St Mary and the Saints was that of John Jeffreys, drawn up in 1566.[199] For reliable evidence for the presence of active recusants within the town, we have to wait until 1592, when we are presented with two lists compiled on a systematic basis.[200] Earlier than that we are clutching at straws but we may note that in 1564, the bishop of Worcester, responding to a nation-wide enquiry, names only one Stratford man 'as an adversary of true religion', compared, for instance, with five members of the Warwick Corporation and its town clerk.[201] In 1577, a return of recusants in Worcester diocese includes no Stratford people at all, nor does a brief survey of 1580-1;[202] and no Stratford recusants were fined, under the new draconian legislation of 1580, from that date until well into the seventeenth century.[203] Only the lists of 1592, one dating from the spring and

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[198] Above, 88.

[199] Wo.C.R.O. 008.7 1567/20.

[200] For the Stratford excerpts, see *M&A*, IV, 148-9, 159-62, but they are better read in the context of the complete returns. The first is edited by John Tobias in 'New light on recusancy in Warwickshire', *Worcester Recusant*, XXXVI (December 1980), 8-27; the second by Michael Hodgetts in 'A certificate of Warwickshire recusants, 1592', in *Worcester Recusant*, V (May, 1965), 20-3; VI (December, 1965), 7-20. See also R. Bearman, 'John Shakespeare, a Papist or just Penniless?', *Shakespeare Quarterly* (Spring 2006), 428-31.

[201] M. Bateson (ed.), 'A collection of original letters from the bishops to the Privy Council, 1564', *Miscellany IX* (Camden Soc., n.s. LIII, 1895), 7-8. This one exception is something of a surprise, namely John Combe, the son of the John Combe (d. 1550) who had been so active on Latimer's behalf in the1530s (above, 76-7). Certainly there is no evidence of his attachment to the Protestant cause although, by 1567, he does appear to have been sufficiently trusted by Ambrose Dudley, earl of Warwick, to serve as steward or bailiff of his manor of Old Stratford, collecting a chief rent from the Corporation from that date (*M&A*, II, 2). See also E.K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: a Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1930), II, 132.

[202] Patrick Ryan (ed.), 'Diocesan Returns of Recusants for England Wales, 1577', in *Miscellanea XII* (Catholic Record Society, X (XXII), 1921), 64-5; C.D. Gilbert, 'Catholics in the Diocese of Worcester, 1580-1', *Midland Catholic History*, I (1991), 19-27.

[203] George Cook, alias Cawdrey, and John Buswell were cited on the Recusant Roll of 1592-3 but no action was taken against them: M.M.C Calthrop (ed.), *Recusant Roll No. 1 1592-3* (Catholic Record Society, XVIII, 1916), 346. Thirteen names are listed on the roll for 1596-7, but again no action was taken against them: T.N.A. E377/6, mm. 15v, 20v. They were doubtless amongst the bishop of Worcester's 'meaner sort' and therefore not worth fining: C. Talbot (ed.), *Miscellanea, Recusant Records* (Catholic Records Society, LIII, 1961), 127-9.

the other from the early autumn, are sufficiently detailed to allow a proper assessment of the extent of recusancy within the town. Thereafter, returns of 1596-7, 1605-6, and 1606-7 confirm those with a serious and long-term commitment to the Catholic faith.[204] However, persistent offenders really comprise no more than the members of a few families: the Badgers, the Barbers, the Cawdreys, the Dibdales, the Jeffreys, the Reynolds and the Wheelers.

The 1592 lists contain some forty-two Stratford names, a very small percentage given that the town's population at that time was between 1,500 and 2,000. But even this would be to exaggerate the extent of Catholic recusancy. Of those forty-two, only ten were indicted for obstinate recusancy, and of these, four had fled the town anyway.[205] Of the remainder, sixteen were said to be absent from church for secular reasons, seven because of infirmity and nine (including Shakespeare's father) because they feared arrest for debt.[206] The rest, some fourteen, were described as absenting themselves from church in the first list but as having resumed attendance, or at least of having agreed to do so, by the time the second list was drawn up. Not only, then, was the number of determined adherents to the old faith tiny but there was also clearly no wish to divide the community by persecuting them. On the contrary, only those half dozen who refused to compromise were threatened with indictment: the others either had their reasons for non-attendance accepted with little, or no, questioning, or allowed themselves to be persuaded to attend at least to the extent that they met the state's minimum requirement. Although later returns suggest that this persuasion was in some cases ineffective, the numbers cited remained consistently low – thirteen in 1596-7, eleven in 1605-6 and eighteen in 1606-7[207] – confirming the impression gained from the 1592 lists that recusancy was not a serious issue in the town.

Toleration towards the adherents to the old faith is apparent in other ways. Although their presence in the town might have distressed the radical Protestant clergy, some Catholic sympathisers were able to play a significant part in civic affairs. This was partly achieved by the head of the family showing outward conformity by attending church on the minimum number of occasions – the typical church papist – but with the women-folk, and sometimes the children, staying away.[208] A good example is Ralph Cawdrey, who served as

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[204] T.N.A. E377/6, mm. 15v, 20v; Ronald Halstead and others (eds.), 'Return of Recusants in Kineton and Barlichway Hundreds, county Warwick, 1605-6', *Worcester Recusant*, XVIII (December 1971), 19, 31; S.B.T.R.O. BRU 15/16/29; T.N.A. E377/15, m. 55v.

[205] *M&A*, IV, 160.

[206] *M&A*, IV, 161. It is possible that these were excuses rather than reasons, although other evidence does establish either infirmity or indebtedness in about half of these cases: Bearman, 'John Shakespeare Papist or Just Penniless?', 429.

[207] See notes 200, 201.

[208] Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge, 1993), 78-82.

high bailiff on three occasions, and died in harness in 1588 despite the fact that his wife, Joan, was a persistent recusant, and that his son George was suspected of being a seminary priest.[209] John Wheeler also had a long civic career, from 1554 until 1586, serving as high bailiff twice; as in Cawdrey's case, it is principally citations against his wife, and later his sons' and grandsons' families which establish long term Catholicism in the family.[210] John Jeffreys, the town's second high bailiff in 1554-5, and later a chief alderman, was, as we have seen, a strong traditionalist: he was the father of John Jeffreys who became steward to the Corporation, was sworn a capital burgess in July 1590 and promoted to alderman a mere two months later, even though his wife, Frances, was accused in 1592 of helping seminary priests and was subsequently named on several occasions as a recusant.[211] This tolerance extended into the early seventeenth century, even though attitudes were hardening. This is typified in the case of Thomas Barber. Barber, a member of the Corporation since 1564 and three times high bailiff, was becoming increasingly vulnerable because of his wife's recusancy. Eventually, in March 1611, the Corporation resolved that Barber should be dismissed as alderman because he felt unable to take on the office of bailiff for the fourth time because of his wife's conduct.[212] But two months later, this order was over-turned, the Corporation deciding that, as long as Barber agreed to serve as bailiff when next elected, or pay the necessary fine, he should be restored to the rank of alderman.[213] Tempting though it might be to interpret this, and the earlier evidence of tolerance, as sympathy for Catholicism itself, it can, in fact, be readily explained as a wish on the part of the governing élite not to make religion a divisive issue. It was not a matter of Catholics protecting Catholics but of the majority of, by then, supporters of mainstream Protestantism, not wishing to split the community on issues of personal faith. If Catholics could reconcile their beliefs with loyalty both to the Crown and to the interests of the local community, then they would not be generally penalised for holding them.

The reformation experience in Stratford, then, was not an unusual one for a town of its size, a move, by the end of the century, from a situation in which town life was dominated by two religious institutions and ostensible bulwarks of the Catholic faith, the College of the Holy Trinity and the Gild of the Holy Cross, to one where a body, which to a great extent had taken their place, was

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[209] *M&A*, IV, 148, 160; Halstead (ed.), 'Return of Recusants', 19, 31.

[210] For 'Widow Elizabeth Wheeler', probably his wife, see T.N.A. E377/6, m. 15v; for his son, John II, see E. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (Chichester, 1972), 131: for John II's wife, see Halstead (ed.), 'Return of Recusants', 19, 31; T.N.A. E377/15, m. 55; S.B.T.R.O. ER 1/115/7, 15.

[211] *M&A*, IV, 148; T.N.A. E377/6, m. 15v; Talbot (ed.), *Miscellanea, Recusant Records*, 129.

[212] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 2/2, p. 208.

[213] S.B.T.R.O. BRU 2/2, p. 209. Then, in September 1612, the Corporation went even further, agreeing that he need not serve as bailiff anyway: S.B.T.R.O. BRU 2/2, p. 229.

actively promoting a radical Protestant agenda. Although there were some stirrings of reform in the 1530s, principally associated with Latimer's determination to introduce change into his diocese, there is no evidence to suggest that the town was particularly enthusiastic in its support of his radical agenda or that of Edward VI's reign. But nor was it of the Catholic reaction of Mary's: indeed, there is some evidence of only grudging acceptance. In these respects, developments in Stratford were not dissimilar to those in Tewkesbury, a town of similar size where the moves towards Protestantism made only halting advances.[214] What was crucial, however, to Stratford's evolution was the early grant of the charter of incorporation at the very end of Edward VI's reign (unlike Tewkesbury where incorporation was delayed until 1575) creating a governing body which owed its very existence to the suppression of the Gild and College. Whilst some members of the Corporation clearly remained loyal to the old faith, as a body they became complicit in the reform programme. Its guiding principle became not one of support for either the Protestantism of Edward VI's reign or the revived Catholicism of Mary's, but the cautious treading of a path which would ensure that the authority of those who had dominated town affairs in the early sixteenth century was re-established on a sounder footing and thereafter defended, if not extended. In a town of some 1,500-2,000, there were, of course, a few families who refused to come to terms with the Elizabethan settlement, as was the case in nearly every town. No doubt there were many more who were not enthusiastic supporters of reform and who cherished memories of the old rituals; but as the older generation died off, what was by then mainly an emotional attachment faded away too, giving to an increasingly zealous Corporation, with the support of a succession of equally enthusiastic ministers, the opportunity to push forward with their more radical Protestant agenda. Up to a point this was tolerated by the town at large, in the same way as the Catholic die-hards were accommodated; only when, in the 1620s, the vicar, Thomas Wilson, pushed things too far, did this consensus fail.[215]

So finally, what of the influence, if any, of this on the young William Shakespeare? Stratford was clearly not a bastion of the Catholic faith and provides no evidence of exceptional forces at work which might have tipped him in that direction. This is not to say, of course, that he, or his family, might not have been Catholic, only that there was nothing about Stratford generally which would have made this more likely. Indeed, although John Shakespeare, born into a small village community in the late 1520s, would not have grown up with any personal experience of papal authority in England, he would nev-

[214] C. Litzenberger, 'The coming of Protestantism to Elizabethan Tewkesbury', in Collinson and Craig (eds.), *Reformation in English Towns*, 79-93.

[215] On this breakdown of consensus, see Hughes, 'Religion and society in Stratford-upon-Avon, 1619-1638', 58-84.

ertheless have been reared in a religious environment which, in other respects, differed little from the one his father had known. His move to Stratford, though, could be of significance, evidence, perhaps, of a man with business ambitions unlikely to be realised in a village situation. This is borne out by evidence of his business dealings from 1556 and his civic ambition, quickly recruited into the service of the Corporation and rising rapidly up its ranks.[216] This would not make him an eager Protestant in those early years of the Reformation and nor would we expect it in a man from his background. On the other hand, he would no doubt have been typical of the majority of the town's population who, when it came down to it, were able to reconcile their religious beliefs with the requirements of the state in the knowledge that not to do so might pose a threat to their livelihood and an obstacle to the advancement of a family's civic and social standing. In fact, John Shakespeare failed, over-reaching himself and running out of credit in his attempt to make money out of various business ventures, and ending up mortgaging or selling much of his freehold property; but this was a failure which had little, or nothing, to do with his religious views, only to a combination of bad luck and lack of capital. There is no better support for this proposition than to compare his career with that of Ralph Cawdrey, for whom there is strong and persistent evidence of Catholic recusancy but who continued to play a major role in town politics. As for William Shakespeare himself, the chances are that he would have been typical of second-generation Reformation England. He was only eight when the zealous Henry Heycroft was appointed vicar of Stratford. In his formative years, he would have had no experience of the outward trappings of the old faith, and, with no reliable evidence that the old faith was nevertheless drummed into him by his family, there seems little reason for supposing that they, or religious dogma generally, ever meant much, if anything, to him. Instead, Shakespeare's writings, on one level, have a universal appeal because they concern the eternal mysteries and emotions of the human experience; on another, they reflect an age of social and economic upheaval which would have had a far greater effect on his family's fortunes, and his own feelings and ambitions, than any theological debate.

[216] On John Shakespeare's career, see Bearman, 'John Shakespeare: a papist or just penniless?'