

RELIGION AND SOCIETY IN STRATFORD UPON AVON, 1619-1638

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This article offers an account of the relationship between Thomas Wilson, vicar of Stratford from 1619 until his death in 1638, and the dominant figures on the town's corporation.¹ Wilson's initial appointment in 1619 was apparently engineered by a 'Puritan' or staunchly Protestant clique of aldermen and burgesses who defended him from the rioters and libellers denouncing him as a divisive hypocrite. Throughout most of the 1620s the corporation supported Wilson when his conformity was challenged by the bishop of Worcester, and backed his zealous assertion of his right to operate a local church court, a 'peculiar' jurisdiction, independent of the bishop. Things began to change from the later 1620s, however, and bitter conflict developed between Wilson and most of the corporation, including many men who had been the vicar's chief supporters ten years previously. In an extended Chancery case, Wilson sought to increase the stipend he received from the corporation; and the burgesses, far from defending their vicar, took every opportunity to denounce him for nonconformity before higher authorities. The source material available for these disputes is ample: Stratford's own records, for obvious reasons, have been better kept than those of many other small towns, while the family papers of the lord of the manor in these decades, Lionel Cranfield, earl of Middlesex, are also copious. The riots that accompanied Wilson's entry to his living provoked a suit in Star Chamber; there are full records also of the Chancery proceedings. We are able therefore to obtain a vivid picture of the shifting alliances in the town, and of the arguments and language used in these disputes.

Through a detailed analysis of these complex, long-lasting conflicts, I hope to unpick some of the contradictions and ambiguities in the social and cultural implications of Puritanism, matters much discussed by historians in recent years. Here Puritanism is defined as zealous, reformed Protestantism, founded on Calvinist or predestinarian theology of an 'experimental' type; dedicated to worship based on the preaching of the word, and driven to conscientious activism in the world as godly ministers and lay-people sought to gain assurance of their own salvation by striving to discipline the abuses of the ignorant and ungodly.² For some modern historians this impulse has been part of a 'culture of discipline', aimed at the regulation of the behaviour of the unruly poor; for others it is one pole of a social and cultural divide, opposed

to a more festive, communal but hierarchical vision. Some studies have stressed the divisive and disorderly implications of Puritan reform, while others see reformation as part of a move to a more ordered society.³ Equally interesting, however, is the fact that these disputes took place in a small town where boundaries were blurred and a fully corporate identity recently developed and insecure. The relationships between religious affiliations and corporate aspirations are important, yet little studied, areas of early-modern English history, although works by Patrick Collinson, John Craig and David Underdown are important exceptions. Underdown's recent work on Dorchester, a town no bigger than Stratford although as Dorset's county town it housed more significant legal and administrative functions, offers illuminating comparisons with developments in Stratford.⁴

The small town of Stratford upon Avon seems in general to have been expanding in the early seventeenth century, but in ways that increased social tension. In both the mid-sixteenth and the later-seventeenth centuries the population of Stratford approached 2,000, but it has been convincingly argued by J.M. Martin that this consistency masks a rapid population increase in the second half of the sixteenth century, following serious losses in a series of epidemics.⁵ Both higher immigration and natural increase brought about by early marriage meant that population was higher in the period around the turn of the century than it was in the 1660s, or indeed in the early nineteenth century. Stratford lacked a labour-intensive cloth industry; although glove-making early on, and, later, the malting industries were significant, the prosperity of the town depended on marketing rather than manufacture. The new charter of 1610 granted the town additional fairs, and the horse fair attracted buyers and sellers from a wide area of the midlands by the mid-seventeenth century. Routinely, Stratford, like other Warwickshire towns, benefitted from its position on the border between different farming regions. But the increasingly prosperous retail traders — the mercers, haberdashers, and drapers, who came to dominate the corporation — coexisted uneasily with a large group of underemployed poor who were said to number seven hundred in 1601 (about a third of the town's population).

The potential for social conflict was exacerbated by Stratford's suffering all the disasters to which early modern communities were prey. There were serious fires in 1594 and 1595, and again in 1614, when fifty-four houses were destroyed.⁶ Food was short in the 1590s and plague struck in the 1580s and in 1613-19. Stratford was thus a town (like Dorchester, half-destroyed by fire in 1613) which could be said to have felt God's wrath; John Bramhall, Stratford's vicar, regarded the fires of the 1590s, which broke out on Sundays, as a punishment for sabbath breaking.⁷ Such experiences frequently prompted a concern for zealous religious and social reformation: the urge to promote a community of which God would not be ashamed merged indistinguishably with the more obviously self-interested motives of imposing discipline at a time of social unease.

I will argue furthermore that religion was crucial to the attempts by the leaders of a small town to acquire a sense of urban identity and autonomy. The interest of a small town lies precisely in the complexity and instability

of its inhabitants' identities; and in the interweaving and overlapping of different types of jurisdiction, authority and hierarchy. The proud urban elite of a major city like Coventry could usually maintain their independence from the local county gentry, and exercised extensive autonomous legal and administrative authority. In a small town like Stratford, however, physical boundaries, legal jurisdictions and social networks were all much more blurred. Stratford was at one and the same time a borough, a manor and a parish, and the boundaries of all overlapped but were not identical. Stratford was founded by the bishop of Worcester in the late twelfth-century as a seigneurial borough; even in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the corporation as a distinct administrative and legal authority was only slowly becoming independent of the manor.⁸ The town's trades were gradually organised into companies authorised by bailiff and common council rather than being licensed by the manor; the borough's court rather than the manorial court increasingly dealt with offences. The first charter of 1553 established a corporation with a common council of fourteen aldermen and fourteen capital burgesses, from whom a bailiff was to be elected. But it did not authorise all the town's officials, nor all the activities undertaken by the corporation.⁹ The new charter of 1610 improved the situation but there remained problems: the relative responsibilities of the manorial court leet and the borough courts remained unclear; and in particular the lord of the manor's claim to supervise or ratify the election of the town's bailiff remained unclarified. This issue had occasioned bitter disputes with Sir Edward Greville of Milcote who tried to stop the election of Richard Quayney in 1592 and 1601; in the 1620s there were renewed conflicts with Lionel Cranfield.¹⁰

In general the relationship between the borough and the rural parts of the parish was difficult. The inhabitants of the rural townships resented contributing to poor relief for the borough, and local gentlemen, in particular, objected to interference from the corporation. The major gentry of the locality could pose serious threats to the economic interests of the town: Sir Edward Greville's encroachment on the town commons in 1601, and William Combe esq's bitterly contested attempts to enclose grazing land at Welcombe were the most striking instances. Threats like this were periodically met by licensed disorder led by the aldermen and burgesses, as we shall see below.

The ambiguities of the corporation's position were very clearly seen in relation to the church and the vicar: the parish church was outside the borough's boundaries, and the lord of the manor, rather than the corporation, had powers of presentation, although it was the corporation's responsibility to pay the salary of the vicar (and the schoolmaster). Wilson's initial appointment seems to have involved a dubious stratagem, through which the corporation obtained the *de facto* patronage of the living, in the short term, and acquired for the town 'a Master of Arts and a learned minister'.¹¹ Wilson was presented in formal terms by the Lord Chancellor on behalf of the crown, on the pretext that the living was vacant because the existing minister, John Rogers, had accepted an additional living without permission. In law, there had to be a year's vacancy before patronage lapsed to the crown, whereas it is clear that Rogers was active in the town, presiding at the peculiar court and taking

services, right up to Wilson's formal admission.¹² The corporation had failed to obtain patronage of the living in the 1610 Charter, and now, on the advice of their assistant town clerk Thomas Lucas, they took advantage of a legal loophole and an interregnum in manorial control, to remove Rogers. From 1615, Sir Edward Greville, in Prestwich's words, had become a 'whining and impoverished dependant', living at Milcote only through the condescension of the rapacious creditors into whose hands his extravagance had delivered him. Moreover, the two principal creditors, Sir Arthur Ingram and Lionel Cranfield, were busily engaged in trying to cheat each other out of the spoils of the Greville estate.¹³

This situation offered an opportunity; it is less clear why advantage was taken of it to remove Rogers. It was by no means a unanimous decision. The bishop of Worcester first planned to admit Wilson in March, but there were second thoughts. Two months later the town council agreed by eighteen votes to seven, to petition the Lord Chancellor to confirm the presentation, 'and not to repeal the said grant'; and to obtain the 'good wills and consents' of Sir Edward Greville and Sir Arthur Ingram to this *fait accompli*.¹⁴ There is evidence of corporation dissatisfaction with Rogers from at least 1614 when Sir Fulke Greville of Warwick, Sir Edward's cousin, and the future Lord Brooke, mediated in disputes over the churchyard. In 1618 the council agreed to buy Rogers a gown, 'in hope that he will well deserve the same hereafter and amend his former faults and failings'. Perhaps, also, Rogers was regarded as too friendly with powerful gentlemen, for in 1615 he was 'intreated to perswaud with Mr Combe about the enclosure'. Above all, however, Wilson's opponents saw his appointment as a Puritan plot, while his supporters accepted a version of this, by presenting themselves as concerned with moral reformation.¹⁵ It may be that Rogers, vicar for fifteen years, had grown old and complacent and the majority of the corporation, following fire, plague and rapid population increase, wanted a more active religious leader. Wilson, living at nearby Evesham, would have been well-known to several of the aldermen and burgesses.¹⁶ One area of dismay was perhaps the breaking in 1618 of a corporation order against plays. In 1612 plays had been banned on penalty of the enormous sum of £10, considering, 'how contrary the sufferance of them is ... againste the example of other well governed citties and burrowes.'¹⁷

On Sunday 30 May 1619, Rogers conducted his last service in Stratford, in the presence of Thomas Wilson who was to be formally admitted to the living by the bishop the following day. Our knowledge of what happened next comes from the Star Chamber case brought by the Attorney-General on Wilson's behalf.¹⁸ A group of rioters, armed with swords and stones, gathered outside the church to oppose the new vicar. Four of these rioters were described as yeomen, three were craftsmen; there was one woman and one tradesman. Significantly, however, five of the culprits were described as gentlemen, mainly from the rural part of the parish; two of these, John Nash and John Lane, were regarded as the ringleaders. The 'confederates' — as Wilson's allies termed them — had, it was alleged:

formerly conceived and borne a most deep malice and causeless displeasure against the said

Thomas Wilson only for that they understood that if he should be their vicar there, he would by his sermons reprove their great vices and disorders.

The crowd broke into the church, uttering 'vaunting and boasting speeches'

that whensoever or wheresoever they could catch the said Thomas Wilson, they would flay him and dispatch him of his life, adding further then and there most falsely, slanderously and untruly, with loud voices in the manner of an uproar, that the said Thomas Wilson was an ill-liver, and incontinent person, that he had the French pox, and was burnt by means of his incontinency with lewd women.

The rioters yelled, 'hang him, kill him ... cut off his pocky and burnt member, let us pull, drag, and haul him out of the church.' Rather banally, Wilson was also said to refuse obedience to the ecclesiastical laws. His defenders predictably retorted that he was both 'conformable' and 'of a very honest life and conversation, without any crime or aspersion of incontinency'.

For his own safety, Wilson was locked in the chancel by Henry Smith, alderman and Stratford J.P., along with other supporters who came to the minister's aid, being 'in very dreadfull manner, astonished, affrighted and amazed'. The church windows were broken, the walls battered, but Wilson survived to take possession of the living. Conflict was now diverted into other channels, mainly verbal and legal rather than violent, although five women and a man were presented to the churchwardens in mid-July for rioting in church.¹⁹ The reinvigorated vicar's court dealt with several of Wilson's opponents: John Lane was presented for drunkenness in June, and absence from church in October, along with three women who had denounced the vicar as a 'knave'.²⁰ The confederates — Wilson's enemies — retaliated by publishing 'several false, scandalous, infamous and wicked libels in rhymes, verses and prose ... maliciously and slanderously defaming and disparaging' the minister and his allies amongst the aldermen and chief burgesses, especially Henry Smith, William Smith, Richard Castle and Daniel Baker. Such libels were a common aspect of religious, political and personal disputes in early modern England, and the Stratford Star Chamber case has many parallels. It was alleged that the Stratford libels were scattered around the whole of Warwickshire, and particularly communicated in taverns and alehouses. The libels reported to Star Chamber, presented Puritans as hypocritical busybodies, who pried into their neighbours' affairs in the name of godliness, but were really promoting their own avaricious ends. Puritans were accused of being the source of community division and disorder.

Stratford is a towne that doth make a great shewe,
 But yet it is governed but by a few,
 O Jesus Christ of heaven,
 I thincke they are but seaven,
 Puritans without doubt
 For yow maye knowe them, they are soe stout
 They saye 'tis no sinne their neighbours howse to
 take
 But such lawes their father the devill did make

These men seeme of a puer faction,
 But like the devill in dissemblacon,
 As smooth as oyle outward, in words,
 But within they are full of dissension and discords
 But woe to those whited walles,
 They are the causes of all these brales,
 A heavy curse, O Lord, upon them send,
 Because they have bereft us of our best freinde,
 And in his steede here have they plast,
 A fellow that hath neither shame nor gracc,
 Yet these men are true religious without Quirkes,
 For one of the chiefest hath red far in Perkins'
 workes,
 The rest are deepe dissemblinge hypocrites,
 That in good workes have no delite,
 But their delights is to doe wronge,
 ... But faste bethinke thee, where's the cause
 They saye they doe nothing but lawes,
 But suer the lawes they doe wrest,
 For to bring poore people in distress,
 Be suer their lawyer is of God accurst
 For he begune this mischief first
 And with his malice and his spite,
 Was first that brought this lapse to light,

Harmony at Stratford had been breached by the ejection of Rogers, 'our best freinde', and now the poor were at the mercy of stout Puritans who scorned 'good works' because they had absorbed the pre-destinarian teaching of the Cambridge Puritan William Perkins. A second libel, in prose, was endorsed, 'To any honest Puritant where yow finde him', and came from 'Romanye, this merry moneth of Maye'. It, too focused on the disunity brought about by the removal of Rogers:

Sirra ho, the greatest news since Pentecost. Where there is report that all the old bitinge and younge suckinge Puritants of Stratford are joyned with their two Justasis a peace, maliciously to displace and utterly undoe their minister, and to bringe in his place as arrand a k. [nave] as themselves, of purpose to assist them in their hypocrisye, And now seinge they have sett all the towne together by the eares, which is the true office of a Puritant, and fyndinge their plott hath not their wisht effecte, it is thought that diverse of them will runn harve madd.

Two further libels attacked the lawyer Lucas in particular, and hinted at Puritan sexual immorality amongst the barley-fields of Stratford.

For anyone who hadn't grasped the point, the outraged victims solemnly decoded the libels for the Star Chamber. By the 'Chief Rulers of the Synagogue' was meant the justices of the peace and borough council of Stratford; 'a fellow that hath neither shame nor grace' was Thomas Wilson; while 'Be suer their lawyer is of God accursed' referred to Thomas Lucas of 'Gray's Inn, in your highness' county of Middlesex'. In the prose libel, '2 justassis a peace' referred to John Wilmore and Henry Smith, J.P.s, and were 'ridiculous words in derision of them.' Further personal insults were elaborated and denied: 'because I never learned to carry coles' was 'very despightfully and untimely pretended' to allege that Lucas' father had been a collier, 'whereas

in trueth his said father was a gentleman well esteemed'; 'too busy' referred to William Smith, haberdasher, 'whom they conceived to be a busy person.' By 'like a monster with four elbows', 'is described one Richard Castle, a mercer of the town, because he useth in his gate or going as some observe, to shake his elbows.'²¹

This language of outraged respectability, assaulted by accusations of hypocrisy and undignified behaviour of all sorts, including sexual immorality, is typical of the conflict over Puritan reformation, or what was perceived as such, in early Stuart England. Puritans may have aimed at a reformed social and moral order, but they were widely presented as sowers of discord and destroyers of harmonious communities. The anti-Puritanism at Stratford may have been encouraged into the open by James I's 1617 endorsement of Sabbath day recreations in the 'Book of Sports', as Underdown suggests.²² Certainly the issues in dispute and the language used are reassuringly emblematic. At Dorchester following the appointment in 1605 of the great Puritan preacher John White, libels were circulated which denounced 'Puritan knaves' and singled out William Perkins as a teacher of hypocrisy. At Nottingham in 1617, Puritan hypocrisy was satirised in explicitly sexual terms. Both these incidents provoked Star Chamber suits.²³

Besides the central quarrel over Wilson's appointment, the Star Chamber suit revealed two further sources of division in the town, again reflecting Puritan reformation opposed by easy-going festivity. The first was a may pole or 'somer pole' erected by Nash and other supporters of Rogers on 1 May, and apparently kept up near the site of the horse fair until 13 September, when bailiff John Wilmore and alderman Henry Smith removed it, ostensibly to avoid obstructions at the autumn fair. It was alleged that Nash, and his supporters gathered in force, restored the pole and refused to take it down. Finally, particular accusations were made against William Nixon, an apparitor of the bishop's consistory court at Worcester. He was accused of illegally summoning Stratford people to Worcester, and of procuring discharges at Worcester for offences presented to the Stratford court. He himself was said to be 'a lewd person ... [who] standeth excommunicate'.²⁴ This aspect of the case represents both divisions over the imposition of reformation, and conflicts over jurisdiction, as we shall see below.

In March 1620 all Star Chamber suits were referred to a local gentleman, Sir Bartholomew Hales, for mediation.²⁵ The outcome is unknown, but it seems clear that for the first years of his ministry in Stratford, Thomas Wilson enjoyed the active support of the majority of the corporation, and, with their help, was able to exercise significant 'godly' influence in the town. From 1623, the corporation paid Wilson £40 p.a. rather than the meagre £20 allowed by charter. The gild chapel, in the centre of the town, and under corporation control, was repaired at some expense, with 'the floer and walls made hansom', and new seats and doors. A weekday lecture and exercise was established in the chapel. For his cooperation with 'the said godly and profitable preaching', and his 'great paines and learned sermons ... in the tyme of the late visitation and sickness of the plague', Wilson's stipend was raised to a generous £60 p.a., in January 1627.²⁶

Personal enthusiasm for Wilson was revealed in the 1623 will of Francis Smith, twice bailiff of the town. Besides bequests and keepsakes to many kin and friends amongst the Stratford elite — Daniel Baker, Henry Smith, William Chandler, Richard Castle, Baldwin Brookes and John Eston — Smith arranged for Wilson to preach his funeral sermon and left money to support the weekday lecture as long as Wilson remained in the town.²⁷ More generally, leading parishioners and energetic churchwardens, frequently members of the corporation, meeting as the parish vestry, levied, and largely collected, large sums for the repair of the church throughout the 1620s.²⁸

The cooperation between vicar and most of the borough elite can be clearly seen in the operation of the local peculiar court. As the inheritor of the rights of the medieval collegiate church, the vicar of Stratford claimed a jurisdiction independent of, and equal to that of the bishop of Worcester in two years out of every three. The increase in surviving records, and the outraged reaction of the bishop, John Thornborough, suggests that this jurisdiction was exercised much more energetically by Wilson, than it had been in recent years, by Rogers. An Act Book recording spasmodic sessions of the court between 1590 and 1616 survives in the Sackville papers. There are no records of proceedings between 1608 and 1616. For Wilson's incumbency there are two Act Books covering 1622 and 1624 (1623 being a 'Worcester' year), and 1633-4; and extensive churchwardens' presentments from 1619 to 1628, and again for 1633-4. The gaps before 1628 occur where one would expect on a three year cycle.²⁹ The bishop described Wilson as 'peremptory' and 'refractory' in a tetchy letter to Cranfield after the latter had intervened on Wilson's behalf; ten years later, in a testimonial to the Court of High Commission, mainly intended to clear Wilson of charges of non-conformity, the vicar's activities in the 1620s still rankled.³⁰

I found him peremptory in his pretended absolute jurisdiction, labouring then by all means to shake off the jurisdiction of me his ordinary, when by his behaviour he seemed to me to labour by all means to govern the people and town of Stratford, and to order all things in the church, according to his own will, as if he had been another Calvin or Beza in Geneva.

From the point of view of local reformation, however, the Stratford court in the early 1620s seems to have been an energetic and effective body by early modern standards. It dealt with all matters covered by ecclesiastical jurisdiction: licensing of curates, schoolteachers and medical practitioners; testamentary cases; recusancy and absence from church; sabbath breaking and misbehaviour in church; failure to be catechised; fornication, adultery and especially pre-marital pregnancy; swearing and defamation; drink-related offences, especially tipping during divine service. Between 1619 and 1624 the churchwardens presented offenders about every six weeks, with a formal visitation by Wilson each April or May. There were usually some eight or ten presentments, but the court was especially busy in the sessions following the visitations, when over twenty cases were dealt with, forty-seven at the peak in May 1622. Twelve of these are in the Act Book only, and are probably continuing cases. Twenty-two of the forty-seven offenders appeared in court

and as thirteen of the others were recusants or obdurate excommunicates, this is a creditable record. The court seems to have been careful at this stage not to offend the powerful. Only two of those presented by the churchwardens were not cited to the court: a servant of Mr William Combe was the only one of eight sabbath breakers not summoned; while Combe's brother Thomas heard nothing more of his presentment for not taking Easter Communion.³¹

There is ample evidence in the Stratford court of the problems of enforcing religious and moral discipline. John Allen was presented in May 1622 for morris dancing; he appeared at the next court, and 'saith that he will never commit the lyke', agreeing to perform penance. In July it was reported, 'since that tyme he hath committed the lyke offence againe' and this time he did not appear at the court and was excommunicated. But hearing of his excommunication apparently drove him to the court later that day, when he again professed his penitence.³² As the Allen case thus shows, a very local jurisdiction had some advantages: in several cases besides this, offenders absent when the court first sat turned up as soon as they heard about their excommunication. Penance was habitually performed before both the churchwardens, and the bailiff and aldermen of the town, in a visible sign of lay-clerical cooperation. The performance of penance by those guilty of pre-marital incontinence was especially conscientiously reported: this was clearly a pressing concern for an apparently over-populated town in the early 1620s.³³ The court was more bogged down with continuing cases by 1624: in October 1624, it dealt with seven continuing cases, along with five new cases from the church-wardens.³⁴ Throughout, most cases arose from churchwardens' presentments rather than the disputes of individuals. Testamentary matters and a rare defamation case brought by an individual rather than, as was more common, reported by the churchwardens, were the only exceptions. Wilson's peculiar court was thus organised for reformation rather than the pursuit of grievances between individuals. This might have made it less acceptable to many local people from the start, while, as we shall see, increasing problems and opposition developed as Wilson became more settled in Stratford.

But for the early 1620s a plausible picture can be constructed of a well-ordered Puritan borough, where the minister's zealous pursuit of his ecclesiastical jurisdiction meshed well with the lay authority's long-standing concern with social discipline. Reformation was aimed mainly at the poor, but was also imposed on recalcitrant members of the rural parts of the parish, and on the occasional delinquent amongst the town elite itself. In the troubled times from the 1590s, the lay leaders of Stratford frequently resorted to the standard policies of order. Alehouses, which encouraged idleness and waste, as well as being offensive to the godly, were limited to thirty in 1610, and in the corporation's 'Orders' or bylaws approved by the judges of assize in 1612.³⁵ The corporation laid down harsh penalties for those harbouring inmates and strangers likely to become charges on the poor rate. From 1602 at least, the town's quarter sessions as well as the manorial court presumably enforced these measures, although surviving records are scanty.³⁶ In 1614 a whipping stock for the punishment of rogues and vagabonds was erected at High Cross, while more positively in 1625, levies were raised to set the poor on work,

and establish a house of correction.³⁷ The opposition to plays and the pressure to organise all male inhabitants into companies, can also be linked to a desire for social discipline in a difficult period.³⁸ Detailed demographic research has shown that a more settled Stratford was emerging by the later 1620s, although it is, of course, impossible to demonstrate that the measures of godly reformation undertaken by both town council and church court, were directly responsible. Nonetheless, it is significant that pre-marital pregnancy rates in 1625-49 were half those of 1580-1624; the female age of marriage was three years higher in the later period; and the population was stable.³⁹

The peculiar court can thus be seen as a valuable agency for disciplining the borough's inhabitants, but there are other important contexts within which the corporation's backing should be understood. The court's jurisdiction covered the whole parish, including the rural hamlets, not merely the borough. The vicar of Stratford had the power to license clergy and schoolmasters in the hamlets, and to try the offences of inhabitants. A twenty-year dispute over rural liability for contributions to the borough's poor rate was the most serious of several conflicts between borough and hamlets; there were clear advantages in extending the energetic Protestant attitudes operating in the town.⁴⁰ The surviving records suggest this was an extremely difficult task, however at Bishopton, for example, the curate himself, Richard Holder, was frequently presented by the borough churchwardens, for being drunk, for marrying wandering people without license and for baptizing a bastard child.⁴¹ The opportunities offered for intervention in the parish as a whole, along with the advantages of a very intimate local jurisdiction for urban discipline, encouraged the corporation to regard the peculiar jurisdiction as 'this ancient privilege', an essential part of 'our liberties'.⁴² Hence a further advantage for the corporation was the means the court offered for cementing corporate identity.

For several reasons, then, the corporation did all they could to help Wilson defend his independent jurisdiction against challenges from the bishop of Worcester between 1619 and 1626. Uncertainty about the rival jurisdictions allowed endless confusions to develop. Offenders sentenced in Wilson's court could appeal to Worcester and be absolved. Wilson gave communion to at least one person excommunicated at Worcester, in order to show he did not recognise the jurisdiction of the bishop.⁴³ Most seriously, Wilson and the churchwardens were cited to Worcester for their refusal to make presentments to the consistory court. Rather than recognise the authority of the consistory, Wilson refused to appear and was thus excommunicated for contempt, apparently on three occasions between December 1624 and October 1625. On the first occasion, as the vicar indignantly reported, the notice of excommunication was pinned to the door of his own parish church. Again, Wilson felt he could not apply for absolution because that would imply recognition of the bishop's authority, and he apparently continued to serve the cure regardless, until the conflict was resolved, in Stratford's favour, by the Court of Arches.⁴⁴

The corporation paid for Wilson's legal costs, sent aldermen on trips to London and Lichfield to search for precedents, and to Worcester and the bishop's residence at Hartlebury for lobbying and legal hearings.⁴⁵ They also

appealed to influential local men, Lord Brooke, the town's Recorder, and Lionel Cranfield, effective lord of the manor by the mid-twenties, for support against Bishop Thomborough.⁴⁶ The borough council's attitude is revealed in a minute recording the expulsion of one of their number in September 1625:

At this hall the company, taking into consideration, that Christopher Smith hath much wronged this company and disgraced them, not only by his heinous offence in comitting adultery but also in that he hath refused to be censured by the judge of our peculiar jurisdiction appealing to the court of Worcester, thereby weakening our liberties of this borough, as we conceive it, contrary to his duty, wherefore they have removed him from the place of a principle burges.

It is by no means clear whether the corporation disapproved more of Smith's adultery — and he was a spectacular offender, presented by the churchwardens in three successive months for offences with three different women — or of his appeal to Worcester. Almost as an afterthought the council noted that, Smith 'standeth excommunicate and will not submit himself to the law.'⁴⁷

As well as opposing Wilson's independent jurisdiction, Thomborough attempted to charge the vicar with nonconformity to the ceremonies of the church. Again, the corporation staunchly defended Wilson, issuing certificates testifying to his conformity on at least three occasions between 1622 and 1632. The earliest of these, issued under the Common Seal of the borough, declared that Wilson:⁴⁸

behaved himself religiouslie, curteouslie and peaccabilie towards all men, And in the office of his ministrye without faccon or schisme. And hath observed those Rights and Cerrymonyes appoynted by Ecclesiasticall Cannons. As kneeling at the sacrament of the Lords super, baptiscing with the signe of the Cross, weareing the surplus, marryng with the ringe. And all other things in all Conformytie to the discipline of the Church of England. And hath preached to mayntaine the Lawfull use of them.

Wilson avoided any punishment for nonconformity until 1635.

From the later 1620s, however, the harmony between minister and borough elite began to disappear. Some of the occasions of conflict were financial, including a long-running dispute over whether the profits of the churchyard were the property of the corporation or belonged to the church itself.⁴⁹ More seriously, Wilson's stipend was reduced from £60 to £40 in July 1629, 'in respecte of certain suits and troubles put upon the company', and because he no longer preached the weekday sermon. The eminent moderate Puritan, Robert Harris of Hanwell in Oxfordshire, was appointed to preach a monthly sermon for £5 p.a.. In October 1630 the extra £20 was restored at the 'instance and request' of the earl of Middlesex; the chamberlain paid 2s 8d for sack when Mr Wilson and the company 'weare made frends', but the company also emphasised that the restoration was, 'during our pleasures'. Sir Greville Verney and Sir Thomas Lucy were asked to mediate over Wilson's 'grieffs and complaints' in March 1632 but in the autumn of that year, as we have seen, the corporation again defended Wilson from Thomborough's accusations of nonconformity. In September 1633, the £10 due Wilson was not paid, 'for certayne reasons' and the minister retaliated with a Chancery suit in which he sought a stipend of £60 a year, at least, as a right rather than 'during

pleasure'.⁵⁰

Associated with Wilson in his Chancery suit was the prominent local physician John Hall, who had been at odds with the council for several years. It took ten years for the corporation to persuade Hall to become one of their number, but his membership lasted only seven months until in October 1633, by nineteen voices to three, Hall was expelled for 'breach of orders wilfully ... and for the continual disturbances at our halls'.⁵¹ Here we may have another source of tension in this small town — the contempt of educated professional men like Hall (and Wilson), for common tradesmen. A correspondent of Hall's, admittedly an anxious patient whose consultation had been delayed, expressed incredulity that a physician should be made a member of a corporation, 'not onlie to interrupt his Studies, hinder his practice, but also to indaunger the liefe of his patient for want of his presence'. Hall's 'profession is to be most abroad and cannot be effected by an apprentice as theirs maie'.⁵²

As well as Hall, Wilson clearly had some other allies on the council, notably Alderman William Smith, the 'busy' haberdasher of 1619, and chief burgesses Francis Walford and John Eston. Smith and Eston were expelled from the corporation for supporting Wilson.⁵³ An influential group of aldermen were, however, determined to resist Wilson's claims, and were able to carry waverers with them. In July 1634, for example, a stormy meeting of the council was held to discuss an accusation by Hall that the aldermen and burgesses were 'forsworne villaines' in their answer to the Chancery bill of Hall and Wilson. 'Every man upon examination did expressly deny' saying as much to Hall, and 'all the whole company present have given their consent man by man' that some course be taken against the doctor and the minister for their 'severall scandalls and fawlce imputacions' against the corporation. Eston, Walford and Smith were all present at this meeting, but all were persuaded or intimidated into agreement.⁵⁴ The long and bitter dispute in Chancery created a permanent breach between Wilson and the corporation. A settlement, promoted by Middlesex, only reached completion in October 1638, but Wilson was dead six weeks later.⁵⁵

Besides this determination not to allow Wilson an increased and settled maintenance, the majority of the corporation also reversed their attitudes to the peculiar court, and to the conformity or otherwise of their vicar. The corporation asked their witnesses in the Chancery case about the charges in maintaining the particular jurisdiction, and 'other troubles which the said vicar occasioned'. They also asked if Wilson was 'obedient to the Lord Bishop of the diocese'.⁵⁶ Far from defending Wilson's conformity they prompted their witnesses to denounce him, asking if he was 'conformable to the ecclesiastical law'.⁵⁷ Evidence from some of the corporation helped to secure Wilson's suspension for three months in June 1635 following proceedings during the metropolitanical visitation conducted by Sir Nathaniel Brent on behalf of Archbishop Laud. Wilson's offences were 'grossly particularing in his sermons, ... suffering his poultry to roost, and his hoggs to lodge in the chancell; ... walking in the Church to con his Sermon in tyme of divine Service'. The suspension was limited because Wilson, 'is said to be a very good Scoler, and was the sonne of a very grave conformable doctor of divinity, and doth

promise a serious amendment for the future'.⁵⁸

This was not enough for some of Wilson's opponents, and in November 1635 a particularly aggrieved alderman, Henry Smith, began proceedings against the vicar in the High Commission, apparently taking up the accusations made by Bishop Thornborough in 1632, but not proceeded with. Wilson argued this suit was malicious revenge for his Chancery bill — 'to vex yor petitioner and force him to leave off this suite in behalfe of the Church' — especially when, on 9 February 1636, he was cited to appear in both courts simultaneously.⁵⁹ In contrast, again, to the 1620s, Wilson now had the support, however grudging, of Thornborough who reported to Laud that the vicar, 'of late years ... hath demeaned himself orderly and conformably in his ministerial function'. Laud, though, had heard that Wilson was 'conformable in nothing' and pressed him on the reading of the 'Book of Sports': asked, 'whether he had read or could read his Majesty's declaration touching lawfull recreations on Sundays ... [Wilson] gave no answer, but that it had been read.'⁶⁰ No record survives of later proceedings, but trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities seems to have prevented Wilson exercising his ministry and his jurisdiction in 1637-8.

Why was there this shift from the attitudes of the early 1620s? Why had the Puritan alliance broken down? The contrast cannot be explained through a change in the personnel on the borough council. William Smith, like Wilson's other supporters, insisted in his evidence for the Chancery suit that the vicar's enemies were led by Aldermen Daniel Baker (especially), William Shawe, Henry Smith and Richard Castle.⁶¹ Shawe was a younger man, but the others were from the 'Puritan' clique who had engineered Wilson's appointment in 1619. Baker, in particular, had a long-standing Puritan reputation, confirmed by his nine page will, with meticulously arranged bequests of 'Mr Greenham's works' to the church and gowns to poor widows who had been 'of good name and fame and ... dilligent frequenters of the Church'.⁶² Neither is there any sign of a general shift in the religious attitudes of the corporation. When Wilson gave up the Wednesday lecture, they employed the Puritan Robert Harris, as we have seen; William Whateley of Banbury, another famous godly minister, also preached in the town. When Wilson died, the corporation tried very hard to procure Harris as his successor, although without success.⁶³ Despite their impatience with the peculiar court by the 1630s, it is clear that there was no opposition to moral reformation if it was carried out by, or with the cooperation of, the lay authorities. Anthony Smith, the bailiff in 1630-1, kept a detailed record of the summary fines he levied for offences: the forty-six swearers, thirty-one drunks, and twenty-four sabbath breakers far outnumbered the ten individuals he fined for offences against weights and measures regulations.⁶⁴

Wilson's experience before the High Commission suggests he too, could still be regarded as a 'Puritan'; certainly a minister who named a son born in June 1630 after Elizabeth's zealously evangelical Archbishop Grindal, could not be regarded as hostile to godly reformation.⁶⁵ The explanations for the breakdown in the relationships between Wilson and his previous allies do not lie in the defection of either minister or aldermen from some simply

defined Puritan party line. Rather they illustrate the instabilities and contradictions within Puritanism itself. Puritanism did not involve particular, exclusive positions, but rather the holding of conventional Protestant positions in an especially zealous and committed form. It offered an elevated sense of the minister's role and worth, and encouraged activism amongst the laity. Its sanction of zealous moral reformation could command broad support at times of social tension, but could easily get out of hand and provoke division and disorder. At Stratford by the 1630s, lay and clerical notions of Puritanism slipped apart, and the balance between order and disorder had shifted.

Attitudes which had united minister and lay leaders in 1619 now divided them. A more settled social context, which made the drive for reformation seem less pressing, or less worth the trouble, no doubt contributed to the split in the town. The personalities of those involved were also crucial.⁶⁶ Baker, Eston, and William Smith appear in the council minutes as self-important and quarrelsome men, but the main instigator of trouble was clearly Wilson himself. Increasingly resentful of his dependence on the corporation, Wilson adopted a highly controversial ministerial stance; a stance which helps us understand how one less successful minister came to associate Puritanism with using the ministry for personal, vainglorious ends.⁶⁷ The church became his personal stage, and the pulpit the arena from which he denounced not only the disorderly poor or a notorious deviant amongst the urban elite like Christopher Smith, but prominent and respected corporation figures. 'Particularizing' in sermons, as opposed to general denunciations of vice was one of the most common sources of discord between ministers and parishioners; it was a frequent complaint against Wilson in the 1630s. Corporation witnesses in Chancery were asked 'in what manner the said Mr Wilson from time to time abused and disgraced the magistrates of the said borough in his sermons and otherwise by particularizing and taxing them unjustly'.⁶⁸ The same accusation, along with misuse of the church, was made to Brent, and echoed by Thornborough in April 1636.⁶⁹

Wilson's increasingly clericalist vision of his role can be illustrated in several ways. Surviving church court proceedings from the late 1620s and early 1630s suggest a narrowing of concerns to a focus on the rights of the church rather than general moral reformation. In June 1628 churchwardens John Hall and Anthony Smith presented twenty-five people in all for absence from church including an old woman, 'at home a greacing her shoes'; a new-married woman, 'at home with twoo greate wenches with her ... feasting on the fast day'. Anthony Boyce, employed to oversee the bells and the lead, to supervise the scholars in the church and to collect the poor rate was reported as 'a verie unfitt man to bee in office for church or Commonwealth': he had failed to collect levies and had purloined the communion wine. Nine other people were reported for sabbath breaking or misbehaviour in church: only one presentation — for having an illegitimate child — concerned a broader moral issue.⁷⁰ Boyce remained a problem five years later when he was presented for tipping with the bell-ringers at the communion table, and 'slobbering and fowling the same'. Sixty people were presented in 1633 for not paying the clerk's wages; of twenty-eight other offences presented eleven

concerned failure to be catechised, three disorders in church (including the offence of Alderman William Smith discussed later).⁷¹ In a less threatening social atmosphere, the bad feeling caused by drives to check up on absence from church, or catechising might well seem more important than any potential improvement in the godliness of the population. The advantages in repeated prosecution of incorrigible offenders like Boyce were by no means obvious.

Wilson's impact on individual aldermen can be illustrated by his relationship with Henry Smith, half-brother of the Francis Smith whose will revealed esteem for Wilson in 1623.⁷² Henry Smith played an important part in the corporation's purchase of the leases of the tithes which formed a major part of the income granted it on incorporation, lending the large sum of £80 to help buy up the lease of half of the tithes held by the ex-town clerk Thomas Greene in 1617. In a connected transaction the corporation sold Smith Greene's house for £200 on condition that Smith took over the lease of the tithes at a greatly improved rent. It was Smith again who bought the church house for £40 when the parish agreed to sell it to raise a stock for church repairs; this time Smith was to give 50s p.a., for ever, towards church repairs.⁷³ Smith presumably profited from these transactions, but also, presumably, could regard them as a contribution to the public good. To a minister like Wilson, they could just as easily appear as a robbing of God. Whatever the reason, it is clear that Smith was a major victim of Wilson's 'particularizing'. When he prosecuted Wilson in High Commission, Smith complained he had been 'scandalized by Mr Wilson in his preaching' while a grotesque insult was reported to Brent. Wilson, 'refused to give way to Mr Trapp his assistant minister to preach the funerall sermon of Mrs Smyth, late wyfe of Mr Henry Smyth an Alderman ... but sate himself on the public stayres and forbad Mr Trapp to preach albeit he were requested to doe it by the sayd deceased.'⁷⁴

The clearest divergence between ministerial and corporate attitudes is found in the conflicts over the town's tithe income rehearsed in the Chancery case. In its original charter of 1553, the corporation had been granted the tithe income of the former collegiate church, then let on a long lease for £34 p.a.; out of this, along with some £46 of former gild income, it had to pay £67 in all to the vicar, assistant minister, schoolmaster and almspeople.⁷⁵ In two transactions of 1617 and 1624, however, the corporation bought up the leases of the tithes for almost £800, using loans from Aldermen Baker and Francis Smith as well as Henry Smith. By 1633, the leases of the tithes were worth £201 p.a., while Wilson and Hall alleged that corporation income in all amounted, or should amount, to £400 p.a. The gild lands were let for £80 p.a., but could be worth £230.⁷⁶ Wilson and Hall claimed that Hall had only sold his lease of half the tithes (for £100 less than it was worth) on condition that the corporation paid the vicar the £60 p.a. they had promised; given their large revenues that was the least they could do. They alleged that leases were made for private profit rather than the public good, and that the tithes, in particular, were let 'to such as they most favoured and affected or to some person in trust to and for their own uses ... at under values'. These were conventional accusations; more fundamentally, Wilson and Hall argued that it was illegitimate for tithe income to be spent on corporation expenses; rather it should

be devoted to the ecclesiastical and charitable uses laid down in the first charter. They objected to the town's 'greate superfluous and unnecessary feasts and entertainments for their vaine ostentacon'; and to the payments made to officers, claiming that the office of bailiff had become a source of private profit. To Wilson and Hall:⁷⁷

It seemeth alsoe verie requisite that the said defendants if they be affected to places of rule and government should support the same att their owne private charge and not spend and convert the tythes, being the dower of the Church, and other lands and profitts given to good and charitable uses to satisfie their owne vaine affectations endeavouring to outstripp other corporations by haveing and keepinge a greater number of officers to attend upon them than is requisite for soe small a corporation.

At the start of the case, Wilson was merely arguing for the restitution, as of right, of his original £60, although he also argued that £100 p.a. would not be unreasonable. By 1636, however, he held that as in 1553 all the tithe income was spent on the minister and his assistant, so all the current revenue from the tithes should be so spent:⁷⁸

It canote bee otherwise conseed but that the kinge [EdwardVI] intended the whole increase of the sayde collidge tythes to mayntayne the sayd cure, seeinge the king gives the whole for that purpose at the time of his grante.

This argument was intolerable to the majority of the council. Precisely because they were part of 'soe small a corporation', Stratford aldermen were concerned to maintain a certain amount of pomp and ceremony. This they regarded as essential to their corporatate identity, not at all superfluous or unnecessary. The aldermen and chief burgesses were required to attend council punctually in 'convenient gownes', and to process in like manner to church on the Sabbath or festival days. The council recorded with pride the donation of two fine gilt maces by sons of Stratford aldermen who had prospered in London; and corporate sponsored feasting provided the major post-reformation ceremonial in the town. Generous sums were spent on wine at sermon and feast days marking charitable bequests to Stratford, and at the annual perambulation of corporation property. Special occasions were marked as when two dozen of silk points were distributed to the grammar school boys to celebrate the possession of Thomas Greene's house; or feasts were provided for the new recorder, Sir Thomas Lucy, and the new high steward, Sir Greville Verney.⁷⁹ Chamberlains' accounts were produced in evidence for the Chancery suit, and former chamberlains were prominent deponents for the corporation who felt no sense of guilt over how tithe income was spent.⁸⁰ For the corporation tithe income was simply part of the general income of the town, which the aldermen and burgesses had improved at some considerable personal cost. As Wilson's counsel noted, 'the defendants allege the lands and tythes were given as well to defray the great charges and burdens of the corporation as for the maintenance of the vicar, schoolmaster, poor people and assistant minister.'⁸¹ The chamberlains claimed that in many years income was insufficient to cover expenses (although it is hard to substantiate this from

the often scrappy accounts); and all corporation witnesses stressed the wide-ranging responsibilities of the borough: bridge repairs, maintenance of the market hall, gild hall and other public buildings; militia and armour expenses; taxation and so on.⁸²

Thus the bailiff and council were not simply arguing over the size of Wilson's stipend but over the right to spend their revenue as they wished. For several years they had in fact paid Wilson £60 rather than the meagre £20 enjoined by charter, but they did this freely, on condition Wilson behaved as they wished. The addition was 'a free and voluntary gift', ended when Wilson gave up the lecture.⁸³ If the vicar had a generous stipend of right, he would obviously become less dependent on the corporation, a vital matter in a town like Stratford where the urban authorities had no control over the patronage of the living except in exceptional circumstances like 1619.

Conflicts between vicar and prominent aldermen were complicated by the existence in Stratford of overlapping and competing jurisdictions and sources of authority. The rival authorities of manor, parish and corporation along with the various 'outside' secular and ecclesiastical bodies to which appeal could be made (Chancery, High Commission, archbishop, bishop and so on) meant that disputes could be exacerbated and extended almost indefinitely. One very sensitive area in which the authority of vicar and parish conflicted with that of the corporation concerned the allocation of pews within the church, the seating of the congregation being in all communities a visual and practical coding of social, occupational and gender hierarchies.⁸⁴ In 1635 Brent reported to Laud, 'Here are many contencons about Seates in the Church'; and in at least two cases these disputes were intimately related to the Wilson conflict.⁸⁵ In April 1633 Thornborough confirmed a grant by Wilson and three churchwardens (including John Eston) to Hall, his son-in-law Thomas Nash and their wives of a pew, in which it was later claimed to Brent the wives of aldermen and burgesses had sat, 'time out of mynde'. In December 1633 the same churchwardens presented a local joiner for pulling down Hall's pew, but it was confirmed to him by Brent after a hearing in June 1635. One witness in the Chancery case alleged that this insult to corporation propriety was a main motive for the hostility of Baker, especially, to Wilson.⁸⁶

It is not possible to determine whether different attitudes to church and vicar provoked the divisions on the council, or pre-existing hostilities amongst aldermen and burgesses rather found an outlet in contrasting stances in 1632-6. Nonetheless there are very consistent patterns in the attitudes of the pro-Wilson figures William Smith, the haberdasher, and John Eston. Smith was increasingly at odds with the corporation, and again seating in the church became a flashpoint. In September 1632 the election for bailiff was disputed with Richard Castle, a junior alderman preferred, after some hesitation, to Smith.⁸⁷ It is probably significant that John Hall was in trouble with the corporation about this time, for speeches, 'in disgrace' of Castle.⁸⁸ When Castle's year finished it was ordered that he was to take precedence on the council over the more senior Smith — because he had been bailiff; at the same meeting Hall was expelled from the corporation.⁸⁹ Four weeks later William Smith was presented by the churchwardens for disturbing the congregation

in time of divine service, while on 18 December the council ordered that Castle's precedence was to operate in the church as well as amongst the company itself. Smith, however, turned to his allies in the parish against the corporation. In a special session of the peculiar court, held at Hall's house and presided over by Wilson, he explained:⁹⁰

He never gave occasion of any disturbance there, but if any such thing were done it was occasioned by the intrusion of Mr Richard Castle of the old towne who went about lately upon the Sabbath day in the morning but before divine prayers by violence to thrust out the said Smith out of his usuall sitting place ... forasmuch as he is ancient to the said Richard Castle aswell in bearing the office of churchwarden and Alderman of the aforesaid Burrough and ... is above the said Castle in all Taxacons and payments and hath always had precedencey in the said parish church.

Having appealed to the parish as a source of status by referring to his office of churchwarden before that of alderman — a preference which had previously led to trouble when he sold the churchyard trees in 1623 — Smith now made his point overtly:

And lastly forasmuch as the said parish church is out of the limits of the corporacon in the foresaid Borough, he desireth that he may not be reputed by keeping of his accustomed place in the said Church to be a disturber, but that he may be settled ... in the quiet and peaceable possession thereof.

Wilson did indeed confirm Smith in his place although the council retaliated by reaffirming Castle's precedence and threatened Smith with the assizes for 'wrongs offered' to their town clerk at a previous meeting. Eston was fined for offensive words against Baker at the same time, and he too, but less elaborately, used the church seats as part of his disputes with members of the corporation. Expelled from the council in September 1634, he was still using the burgesses' pew in the following January. 'Who will keep me forth?' was his robust response to attempts to move him.⁹¹

The brawling of middle-aged men in their aldermen's gowns in Stratford's parish church reveals the extent to which personal antipathies and contrasting views on the place of the church in the town had fragmented corporate unity. The Chancery case and its ramifications reveal very clearly the problems in maintaining corporate identity. There were some signs that a desire to defend the corporation limited, or at least structured the nature of the accusations made. Smith, Walford and Eston, in giving evidence for Wilson and Hall, were very eager to denounce individuals for their animus against the vicar and their persecution of fellow aldermen. They were much more reticent, however, when prompted on the more general accusations against the corporation, claiming they were not aware that the office of bailiff was profitable or that unnecessary sums had been spent on feasting local gentry. Likewise most of the corporation could be brought into line against the vicar's suit, but they were much less happy about threatening a long-standing alderman like Smith with litigation. That vote carried by thirteen to twelve only, although the aldermen favoured the move (nine to five), while the more junior burgesses voted seven to four in favour of Smith.⁹²

Wilson's appeal to alternative sources of secular power was an important source of irritation to an insecure corporation, which had difficult relationships with some powerful local gentry, notably the lord of the manor. Throughout the early seventeenth century the leading aldermen were prepared to sanction, and even to lead, direct resistance to what they regarded as attempts by greedy gentlemen to damage the town; albeit they presented this resistance as an orderly defence of their rights, not as anything violent or subversive. The resistance to William Combe's enclosure at Welcombe, between 1615 and 1619 ranged from legal action at the assizes and lobbying of the privy council to destruction of Combe's ditches and fences. The corporation argued that the loss of winter grazing harmed the corporation's revenue as farmers of the tithes, and aldermen also acted as individual commoners: 'some haveinge Common there which came in lawfull and peaceable manner to fill the ditches for preservinge theire comon'. The familiar figure of Henry Smith was prominent in the resistance, denouncing Combe for his 'desier to make yor self riche by other mens losse', unaffected by his conscience, the charges of assize judges, 'the Minysters threatinyngs against enclosers, nor the many suits have bene in all respectfull and loveinge manner made unto yow ...'. Smith considered the Stratford protests to be 'lawfull meanes to defend theire auncient Rights', rather than the contention Combe alleged. Combe, wrote Smith, should look 'homewarde to confesse that the authors of stryfe are the begyners of newe things'.⁹³

During Edward Greville's decline, relationships with the lord of the manor were not a problem, but in the early 1620s Lionel Cranfield, earl of Middlesex, rather than Arthur Ingram as originally intended, somehow obtained Greville's Warwickshire estates, and increasingly attempted to assert his authority. At first the estates were run by a steward but in 1636 Cranfield and his family settled at nearby Milcote, just at the time that the Chancery case offered an opportunity for magnate mediation.⁹⁴ In 1622 a dispute over the appointment of an assistant minister and usher at the school came to Cranfield's attention, and prompted the Lord Treasurer to revive the lord of the manor's claims to ratify the bailiff's election, as well as to reiterate the less controversial rights of presentation to the vicarage, evaded in Wilson's appointment. In September 1623, the election of bailiff was referred to Middlesex, but soon after the Lord Treasurer's disgrace made him a less threatening rival.⁹⁵

Thomas Wilson sought Cranfield's help in his jurisdictional disputes with the bishop in 1624-5, emphasising that 'his Lordship is Lord and patron bothe of the vicaridge and jurisdiction'. Cranfield accordingly wrote to Thornborough asking him not to infringe 'my jurisdiction', much as the corporation regarded the peculiar court as 'our liberties'. Where lord of the manor and leaders of the borough were working together against the same 'outside' interference, their respective powers reinforced each other and conflicts of jurisdiction remained latent.⁹⁶ Once minister and corporation fell out, however, the earl of Middlesex offered Wilson a countervailing source of secular support. Ministers were social amphibians, able through their particular role to cross social barristers that aldermen of small towns could not breach; and it was much easier for Wilson to develop a relationship with a peer of the realm,

even one of humble social origins.⁹⁷ As we have seen, it was on Middlesex's intervention that Wilson's stipend was restored briefly to £60 p.a. in 1630 and although he was appointed by Lord Keeper Coventry as mediator in the Chancery suit, the corporation clearly regarded him as Wilson's champion. They bitterly opposed the £80 p.a. he had fixed as an adequate salary, stalling until Wilson's death in December 1638.⁹⁸ From Middlesex's point of view, of course, the bitter dispute offered him a chance to increase his prominence in his newly adopted neighbourhood.

The troubles in early Stuart Stratford illustrate the complex impact of zealous Protestantism on a small town. It was of course the Reformation which created Stratford in formal terms as a corporation, for the reformation led to the dissolution of the Gild of the Holy Cross and the confiscation of its property. The gild was a religious body that had, *de facto*, administrative functions in the town; the corporation that took over the property was a secular, civic association, but one that had religious responsibilities. A zealous Protestant interpretation of those responsibilities, through the encouragement of preaching and godly reformation, could add to the status of the corporation while plausibly contributing, in some circumstances, to the social stability of the town. However, problems and contradictions arose because while the corporation, as a collectivity, had good reasons to be Protestant, even zealously Protestant in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, individual aldermen, burgesses and townspeople might well (in the sixteenth century) be Catholics, or more easy going Protestants. Hence the recourse to religious reformation was inevitably divisive; religious zeal created disorder and conflict that might come to outweigh any possible gains in discipline of the population.⁹⁹ Furthermore religious divisions might well complicate tensions that might in origin be personal, or economic. The cleavages on the council in the early 1630s seem to have had many complex origins, while complex financial transactions involving the Catholic Lanes, the Nashes and the Puritan lawyer Thomas Lucas led to legal disputes in the early 1620s, and may have intensified the religious divisions of 1619.¹⁰⁰ In general Stratford was a town very conscious of division. It was probably no more subject to fire, plague, poverty or conflict than any other early modern English community but it seems to have stressed anxiety and division more than other places. The meticulous, almost obsessive recording of votes and division in the corporation minute book is a notable contrast to many other corporations that sought to hide conflict and stress unity.¹⁰¹ It may be this was part of a corporate emphasis on the right to control their own affairs through the freely given votes of council members; a right that was in fact contested by successive lords of the manor. The election of the bailiff, for example, was no doubt in normal times a formulaic, contrived affair, but the insistence on nominating three men and holding an election meant that it could become an arena of conflict in the 1630s.

The existence of competing jurisdictions, and pre-existing conflicts, in Stratford reinforces a sense of the complex impact and meaning of Puritanism, and of its ambiguous relationship with any concept of order. In the 1619 Stratford Star Chamber case, as in other early seventeenth century attacks on

Puritans, a very clear cultural notion of Puritanism was demonstrated. Puritans were hypocritical dissemblers, self-interested busy-bodies, who exploited the poor and created division amongst neighbours in the name of reformation. Their pre-destinarian theology cut them off from a sociable belief in gaining merit through good works. But the events of the next twenty years in the town reveal the inadequacy of such a straightforward view. Puritanism was not a unified, coherent set of beliefs but a collection of potentially contradictory and divisive positions, or a set of codes to be used and manipulated in a variety of contexts. In 1619, a godly preaching minister promoting reformation won the support of a powerful group of laymen who could appreciate the value of such a minister working with them to control a troubled town. It must be stressed, however, that Stratford aldermen in the early seventeenth century did not exhibit an unambiguous commitment to restrained, Puritan concepts of order. When their own, and the town's interests, were threatened by the local gentry they were capable of dramatic, ritualised, even festive activities in their defence. Order, like Puritanism, was a complex concept, always needing contextualisation.

When Wilson's own ideas of the high calling of a zealous Puritan minister took him beyond corporation control, he lost the support of most of the aldermen, but there is no reason to suppose they had thereby changed their own religious affiliations. Stratford gives only brief support to the idea of Puritanism as a culture of discipline: reformation provoked much disorder, while by the 1630s many previous backers of the church court had become sceptical of its value. In the early 1620s Stratford does, perhaps, provide an example of a community divided between a culture of reformation and a contrasting vision of festivity and neighbourliness. This simple polarity, however, was shortlived and above all the conflicts in Stratford indicate the slipperiness of Puritan identities: the variety of ways in which Puritan positions could be deployed by laymen and clerics, or combined with different forms of authority, urban and rural, corporate, ecclesiastical or manorial.¹⁰² They illustrate also, even in the quarrelsome and often unattractive small-town personalities of Thomas Wilson, Daniel Baker, William Smith, John Hall, John Eston and Henry Smith, the sophistication of early-modern English people in deploying the various cultural codes and rival authorities available to them.

NOTES

¹ I first worked on this material over ten years ago and benefited greatly from comments at the Seventeenth Century Seminar at the Institute of Historical Research, and the History of Religion Seminar at the University of Manchester. My interest in Stratford has been revived by invitations to speak at a dayschool organised by the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust on Stratford and the civil war in 1992, and to the Modern History Seminar at the University of Birmingham in 1994; I thank participants for their comments. I am grateful to Mr Don Gilbert for assistance at Worcester and Dr Stephen Roberts for advice on Evesham. In particular I would like to thank Dr Robert Bearman and his staff at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust for help over many years.

² P. Lake, 'Defining Puritanism — again?', in F.J. Bremer (ed.), *Puritanism. Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston, Mass, 1993), 3-29, especially 11.

³ For the stress on discipline and order: W. Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983); K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (1982), especially chapter 7. M. Ingram, 'Religion, communities and moral discipline in late sixteenth and early seventeenth century England', in K. von Greyerz (ed.), *Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe* (1984); P. Collinson, 'The Godly: Aspects of Popular Protestantism' and *idem*, 'Cranbrook and the Fletchers: Popular and Unpopular Religion in the Kentish Weald', both in his *Godly People. Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (1983) focus on cultural conflict and the potential for division. D. Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion* (Oxford, 1982) offers a broad analysis that attempts to integrate a Puritan drive for order into an overall argument that brings together social, cultural and regional factors.

⁴ P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), 160-172; *idem*, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1988), 28-59 ('The Protestant Town'); J.S. Craig, 'The "Godly" and the "Forward": Protestant Polemics in the Town of Thetford, 1560-1590', *Norfolk Arch.*, LXI, Pt. III (1992); D. Underdown, *Fire from Heaven. Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (1992).

⁵ J.M. Martin, 'A Warwickshire Market Town in Adversity: Stratford-upon-Avon in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries', *Midl. Hist.*, VII (1982). The account of Stratford's economic fortunes is based also on A. Dyer, 'Warwickshire Towns under the Tudors and Stuarts', *Warwicks. Hist.* III (4) (1976-7); and P. Styles, *The Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon and the Parish of Alveston* (reprinted from the *V.C.H. Warwicks.*, III).

⁶ Styles, *Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 7.

⁷ E.R.C. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court of Stratford* (1972), 21; *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon, V, 1593-1598*, edited L. Fox (Dugdale Society, XXXV, 1990), xix; Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, 3-5.

⁸ E.M. Carus Wilson, 'The first half-century of the borough of Stratford-upon-Avon', in R. Holt and G. Rosser (eds.), *The English Medieval Town: A Reader in English Urban History 1200-1540* (1990).

⁹ Styles, *Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 23-4, 31-4. In this period the bailiff was always an alderman; in 1610 the number of aldermen was reduced to thirteen.

¹⁰ *Minutes and Accounts of the Corporation of Stratford-upon-Avon, IV, 1586-1592*, edited E.I. Fripp and R. Savage (Dugdale Society, X, 1929), 163; E.I. Fripp, *Shakespeare. Man and Artist*, (Oxford, 1938, reprinted 1964; 2 vols, one pagination), 545-6, 577-8.

¹¹ The description is from the evidence of Wilson's supporters in the Star Chamber case: Public Record Office [hereafter P.R.O.], STAC 8/26/10. Unless otherwise noted, the account of Wilson's admission is taken from this source.

¹² R. O'Day, 'The Ecclesiastical Patronage of the Lord Keeper, 1558-1642', *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., 23 (1973); Shakespeare Birthplace Trust [hereafter S.B.T.], ER1/115/9, for the church court.

¹³ M. Prestwich, *Cranfield: politics and profits under the early Stuarts* (Oxford, 1966), 70, 402-11. Three or four years' later, the corporation claimed to Cranfield, Greville's ultimate successor as lord of the manor, that they 'had no hand' in Wilson's appointment; Cranfield wrote rather of 'a pretence of a lapse', through which the 'townsmen' had interfered with the rights of the patron: S.B.T., BRU15/11/3, corporation to Cranfield; ER1/1/88, Cranfield's account.

¹⁴ Kent County Archives Office [hereafter K.A.O.], Sackville Manuscripts, (Cranfield papers), U269/Q27; S.B.T., BRU2/2, (Council Minute Book), p. 372; the accounts of William Smith, chamberlain in 1619, record extensive expenditure on journeys to London and Worcester on corporation business, besides generous gifts of wine to Ingram: S.B.T., BRU4/1.

¹⁵ S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 262-3, 349, 358, 279. The corporation claimed ownership of the churchyard although Rogers was allowed a lease at a low rent.

¹⁶ Evidence was given in the Chancery case in 1635, that the corporation sent many times to Mr Wilson to procure him as minister: S.B.T., BRU14/1, fos. 86-7. Wilson is usually described as the son of a vicar of Evesham; in G. May, *The History of Evesham* (Evesham, 1834), 147, a Henry Wilson is named as vicar of Bengeworth, Evesham, from 1599, but there are no later references. I am grateful to Dr Stephen Roberts for this information. It is not possible to identify Wilson certainly from university records.

¹⁷ S.B.T., BRU/2, p. 220 for the 1612 ban, which confirmed an order made in 1602 while the Puritan Daniel Baker was bailiff. The fine then was 10s. BRU4/1, accounts of Richard Hathaway, chamberlain 1618-9, include two sums for visiting players.

¹⁸ P.R.O., STAC 8/26/10.

¹⁹ S.B.T., ER1/115/14, churchwardens' presentments, 29 July 1619.

²⁰ S.B.T., ER1/115/13, 15.

²¹ All this is taken from P.R.O., STAC 8/26/10.

²² Underdown, *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, 66.

²³ Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, 27-8; C.J. Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge, 1936), 201-3. Lake, 'Defining Puritanism', 15, comments that Puritans' self-righteousness frequently made them the object of 'a good deal of ill-feeling and satirical humour'.

²⁴ P.R.O., STAC 8/26/10; S.B.T., ER1/115/14.

²⁵ S.B.T., BRU2/2, p. 387.

²⁶ S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 430, 509; BRU15/13/81, for Wilson's stipend; for repairs to the chapel: BRU2/2, pp. 467, 493; BRU4/2, Accounts of William Shaw, chamberlain, 1625-6.

²⁷ P.R.O., Prob/11/145/52.

²⁸ *The Vestry Minute-Book of the Parish of Stratford-on-Avon from 1617 to 1699 AD*, edited G. Arbuthnot, (1899), *passim*. Levies ranged from £20 to £50 p.a. on the whole parish, from 1619 until 1628. Almost £43 was collected of the heaviest levy, of £50, in 1624 (p.26).

²⁹ Brinkworth, *Bawdy Court*, provides a Calendar of the Act Books to 1624; the originals are in K.A.O.: U269/Q24. The later Act Book is S.B.T., BRU15/13/103. Presentments are in S.B.T., ER1/115; BRU15/7/78; BRU15/13/97; BRU15/17/26; ER1/1/95; BRU15/11/4.

³⁰ K.A.O., U269, Warwickshire estate correspondence, miscellaneous box, bishop of Worcester folder, Thornborough to Cranfield, 28 January 1625; P.R.O., SP16/319/71.

³¹ S.B.T., ER1/115/31, cf. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 148-52.

³² S.B.T., ER1/115/31; Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 150, 152, 153.

³³ Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 151, 172; S.B.T., ER1/115/35, 40, 47 for examples of penance performed by pre-marital offenders.

³⁴ S.B.T., ER1/115/46, cf. Brinkworth, *Shakespeare and the Bawdy Court*, 168-9. One defamation case reported by the churchwardens was not proceeded with.

³⁵ S.B.T., BRU2/2, p. 204; BRU3/2, 'A Booke of orders'.

³⁶ *ibid.*; BRU2/2, pp. 235, 251, 256, 259; BRU2/3, p.9, for proceedings against those harbouring inmates, 1612-30. The 1612 orders imposed an initial fine of 40s on harbourers, followed by 10s each day until security was offered to prevent charges on the poor rate. For earlier concerns with inmates, beggars and vagabonds see, *Minutes and Accounts*, V, 1593-8, 101. Stratford's quarter sessions records are S.B.T., BRT4; BRT4/1, contains a few miscellaneous papers for the early seventeenth century. The manorial court also exhibited some concern with alehouses and with rogues and beggars: K.A.O., U269/M.76, court rolls from the 1620s.

³⁷ S.B.T., BRU2/2, p. 262; *Quarter Sessions Order Book, 1625-1637* (Warwickshire County Records, vol. I), edited S.C. Ratcliff and H.C. Johnson (Warwick, 1935), 11. The opposition of the hamlets outside the borough delayed the money raising for the house of correction, but a £100 levy was ordered by the parish in February 1628: *Vestry Minute Book*, 32-3.

³⁸ For plays see n. 17 above; for the companies, *Minutes and Accounts*, V, 103; Styles, *Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 24.

³⁹ Martin, 'A Warwickshire market town in adversity'.

⁴⁰ For the dispute over poor relief between 1625 and 1648 see *Quarter Sessions Order Book, 1625-1637*, 11, 54-5, 57-8; *Quarter Sessions Order Book, 1637-1650*, (Warwick County Records, vol. II), edited Ratcliff and Johnson (Warwick, 1936), 58, 189.

⁴¹ S.B.T., ER1/115/16, 28, 48.

⁴² K.A.O., U269, Q27/2, 3, for these phrases, from corporation petitions to Lord Brooke.

⁴³ The scrappy survival of records of the Worcester Consistory Court records makes it impossible to substantiate these points fully. They are taken from Wilson's letter to Cranfield's steward Thomas Catchmay, 29 December 1624; and the corporation's account in their petition to Lord Brooke, c. October 1625: K.A.O., U269/ Q27/4, 2. S.B.T., ER1/115/24, 9 August 1621, William Warmstry, registrar of the Consistory Court to Wilson, asking him to stop proceedings against a couple already

tried for adultery at Worcester and absolved; 115/42, is Warmstry's letter to Wilson, 14 April 1624, asking him to admit to communion a woman whose excommunication had been lifted at Worcester. Proceedings concerning Stratford people are included in the records of the consistory: Hereford and Worcester County Record Office, Worcester branch (hereafter H.W.R.O.), BA2513/12 (Act Book); BA2102/6 (Deposition Book); BA2302 (loose papers). I am extremely grateful to Mr Don Gilbert for research done at Worcester.

⁴⁴ For proceedings against Wilson: H.W.R.O., BA2512/12, pp. 131, 160; BA2302/488a, 459-460. Wilson was prepared to meet the bishop but not to appear in court and his excommunication was again pronounced on 11 February 1625. The autumn excommunication is in K.A.O., U269/Q27/2. U269/Warwickshire estate correspondence, miscellaneous box, bishop of Worcester folder, Thomborough to Cranfield 28 January 1625 describes Wilson's attitude. U269/Q27/5, is Cranfield's defence of the vicar, 17 February 1625; Q27/6 is an extract from proceedings of the Court of Arches.

⁴⁵ S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 378, 386, 467-8, 472, orders October 1619 - May 1625. The initial vote was for the costs of defending the jurisdiction to be met by the parish, but in the meantime, and in practice, the borough paid. BRU4/1, the accounts of William Smith, chamberlain 1619-20, noted trips to Worcester twice a month in the autumn, and wrote of defending 'our jurisdiction'; BRU4/2, accounts of William Shaw, chamberlain 1625-6.

⁴⁶ K.A.O., U269/Q27; S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 479, 481.

⁴⁷ S.B.T., BRU2/2, p. 475; ER1/115/48, 50, 51 for the presentments of Smith. Opposition to Smith's appeal to Worcester led to Wilson's third excommunication: K.A.O., U269/Q27/2, corporation's appeal to Brooke.

⁴⁸ S.B.T., BRU15/16/54, 11 January 1622. There is nothing in the council minutes to indicate what prompted this testimonial. The second certificate was in March 1625 and was presumably connected to the Worcester troubles: BRU2/2, p. 468. Even in October 1632 when relations had soured, the corporation issued a certificate of conformity: BRU2/3, p. 67. This was apparently a response to renewed hostility from the bishop who presented articles to the Court of High Commission, but did not proceed with them: P.R.O., SP16/319/71;/320/59, testimony from 1636. Wilson reported on his difficulties to Cranfield in December 1632: K.A.O. U269/ Warwickshire estate correspondence, miscellaneous box, Stratford folder.

⁴⁹ In 1627 an order of 1621 that the bailiff and Wilson were to share the profits of the churchyard was 'utterly repealed': S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 403, 521. In 1623 Nathaniel Duppa and William Smith, haberdasher, chief burgesses, were fined for 'contempt and Trespasse' on corporation property because, as churchwardens, they had sanctioned selling trees from the churchyard to raise money for repair of the church. Smith was discharged from the corporation, for divers 'misdemeaners' against the company in June 1623; he was restored in September following a 'generall submission', and after threatening legal action: BRU2/2, pp. 430, 432-4, 439; *Vestry Minute Book*, 19-22. The corporation seem to have relented sometime after 1627 because in March 1634 they had again to order that Wilson have no profits from the churchyard because of his 'injurious bill': BRU2/3, p. 90.

⁵⁰ S.B.T., BRU2/3, pp. 14, 34, 56, 67, 81. BRU15/13/91, is a copy of the October 1630 order produced as evidence in the Chancery case. BRU4/2, accounts of Nathaniel Duppa, chamberlain 1630-1631; accounts of Richard Tyler, chamberlain 1631-2, for payments to Harris and Wilson. The town clerk, Job Dighton, was appointed to manage the Chancery suit on 29 January 1634: BRU2/3, p. 88.

⁵¹ Hall was chosen as a burgess in February 1623 but excused in April; elected again in May 1632 but refused to attend. He took his oath in July 1632, but was charged with 'abusive speeches' against bailiff Richard Castle in January 1633 and only paid a fine to enter the corporation in March 1633. He did not attend regularly: S.B.T., BRU2/2, p. 429; /3, pp. 58-60, 69-70, 72-4, 82. The three supporting Hall in October 1633 were alderman Richard Tyler, and chief burgesses John Eston and Francis Walford.

⁵² S.B.T., ER1/1/94, Sidney Davenport to Hall, 5 July 1632.

⁵³ For examples of support for Wilson, see S.B.T., BRU2/3, pp. 88, 93, 100 (expulsion of Eston, September 1634); BRU14/1, depositions of witnesses in the Chancery case, fos. 68-9 (Walford), fos. 121-131 (William Smith), fo. 142 (Eston). Eston and Walford also opposed Hall's expulsion: see n. 50. By 1636 Smith like Eston, was regarded as 'none of the company' although no record

survives of his expulsion: BRU2/3, p. 134.

⁵⁴ S.B.T., BRU2/3, p. 96.

⁵⁵ The main sources for the Chancery suit, besides the Council Minute Book S.B.T., BRU2/3, are S.B.T., BRU15/8/303, Wilson and Hall's bill; BRU14/1, a volume containing the corporations' answer, the replication of Wilson and Hall, and interrogatories and depositions for both sides; BRU15/8/1, further depositions; BRU15/11/30 a memorandum by the plaintiffs Wilson and Hall; ER1/1/101, a note of the corporation's revenues and responsibilities. K.A.O., U269/Q28 is a file of proceedings from 1637-8, presumably connected with Middlesex's mediation. Hall died suddenly in November 1635, making a last-minute will: Fripp, *Shakespeare Man and Artist*, 891.

⁵⁶ S.B.T., BRU14/1, fos. 209-10. The corporation claimed defence of the jurisdiction cost £100.

⁵⁷ S.B.T., BRU14/1, fo. 210.

⁵⁸ P.R.O., S.P. 16/293/128, Brent to Laud, 5 June 1635. A longer version of the charges with Wilson's reply is in S.B.T., ER1/1/97.

⁵⁹ P.R.O., SP16/320/59, Wilson's petition (an annex to Smith's complaint). For the general proceedings against Wilson: SP16/261, fos. 295v, 314r, 320r (November 1635-February 1636); SP16/314/21, SP16/324, fos. 8r, 12v, 19r-v (February-May 1636).

⁶⁰ P.R.O., SP16/319/71, Thomborough to Laud, 29 April 1636 (this letter is also quoted above); SP16/324, fos. 19r-v.

⁶¹ S.B.T., BRU14/1, fo. 121r; cf. the evidence of Walford and Eston, fos. 69r, 142r.

⁶² P.R.O., Prob 11/186/99 (1638). Henry Smith was one of Baker's overseers, Castle one of his executors. See also Fripp, *Shakespeare Man and Artist*, 788-9.

⁶³ S.B.T., BRU4/2, accounts of Nathaniel Duppa, chamberlain, for payments to Harris and Whately. For attempts to obtain Harris for the living: BRU2/3, p. 166, December 1638; K.A.O., U269/Warwickshire Estate Correspondence, Miscellaneous box, Stratford folder, corporation to Middlesex, 6 December 1638, asking him to appoint Harris.

⁶⁴ S.B.T., BRU15/5/153.

⁶⁵ *The Registers of Stratford on Avon. Baptisms 1558-1652*, transcribed by R. Savage (Parish Register Society, 1897), 115.

⁶⁶ Lake, 'Defining Puritanism', 9-10, 12, 14, 18.

⁶⁷ P. Lake, 'Richard Kilby: A Study in Personal and Professional Failure', in W.J. Sheils and D. Wood (eds.), *Studies in Church History*, 26 (The Ecclesiastical History Society, Oxford, 1989), 221-235.

⁶⁸ S.B.T., BRU14/1, fo. 210r.

⁶⁹ S.B.T., ER1/1/97; P.R.O., SP16/319/71.

⁷⁰ S.B.T., BRU15/7/78; *Vestry Minutes*, 35-6, for Boyce's employment by the parish.

⁷¹ S.B.T., ER1/1/95, BRU15/13/97 for the presentments; BRU15/13/103 for proceedings in the 1633 Act Book.

⁷² See n.27 above. Francis' widow Alice Smith, whose will was proved in 1632, also left a bequest to Wilson (and also to Robert Harris, and her kinsmen the Stratford curate Simon Trapp and schoolmaster John Trapp): P.R.O., Prob 11/163/56.

⁷³ S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 329, 337; *Vestry Minutes*, 38.

⁷⁴ P.R.O., SP16/320/59; S.B.T., ER1/1/97.

⁷⁵ Styles, *Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon*, 32; S.B.T., BRU15/8/303, Chancery bill of Wilson and Hall.

⁷⁶ S.B.T., BRU2/2, pp. 329, 455. Greene was paid £480 for his lease and his house; the other half of the tithes were purchased from John Hall for £400. Leases of the tithes are recorded in the Council Minute Book: BRU2/3, p. 72 gives the arrangements for March 1633. Almost as much was raised from the 1624 onwards: BRU2/2, pp. 472, 499; BRU2/3, pp. 11, 22, 26. The more contentious estimates of corporation income are from K.A.O., U269/Q28/8, notes made by Wilson's counsel.

⁷⁷ S.B.T., BRU15/8/303; BRU15/11/30 (an additional memorandum by the plaintiffs). For a general discussion of anxieties about corporation corruption, see D. Hirst, *The Representative of the people?* (Cambridge, 1975), 44-64.

⁷⁸ S.B.T., BRU15/8/303; cf. K.A.O., U269/Q28/1, 'Mr Wilson's argument', 1636.

⁷⁹ S.B.T., BRU3/2, the 1612 'Book of Orders', lays down procedures for corporate behaviour;

BRU2/3, p. 61 for the maces; BRU4/1, 2, chamberlains' accounts for feasts and wine, especially in 1617 (Thomas Rutter's account) for Greene, and 1630 (Nathaniel Duppa's), for Lucy and Verney. For similar obsessions with order and ceremony in a small, recently incorporated town, see S.K. Roberts, *Evesham Borough Records of the Seventeenth Century, 1605-1687*, (Worcs. Hist. Soc., new ser., XIV, 1994).

⁸⁰ A note on all accounts in S.B.T., BRU4/1, 2 indicates they were produced in evidence; BRU14/1, fos. 55-92.

⁸¹ K.A.O., U269/Q28/8.

⁸² S.B.T., BRU14/1, evidence for the corporation; ER1/1/107, note of the corporation's revenue and expenses August 1637.

⁸³ S.B.T., BRU14/1, the defendants' answer.

⁸⁴ S.D. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), 137-44; R. Tittler, 'Seats of Honour, Seats of Power; the symbolism of public seating in the English urban community, c. 1560-1620', *Albion* 24 (1992), 205-223.

⁸⁵ P.R.O., SP16/293/128.

⁸⁶ S.B.T., ER78/7, for the bishop's grant; ER1/1/95, BRU15/13/103, fo. 7v for proceedings on the seat's destruction; ER1/1/96, for the hearing before Brent; BRU14/1, fos. 137-8, evidence of John Eston.

⁸⁷ Castle had only become an alderman in October 1631 in succession to William Chandler, a close associate of Wilson's and Cranfield's, lately expelled: S.B.T., BRU2/3, p. 52. Castle was elected bailiff on 5 September 1632, 'by a generall and full consent', but on 25th it was declared that Smith had in fact been chosen, according to the letter of the charter. He was persuaded to decline the office, without fine, and Castle was again chosen (*ibid.*, pp. 62-5). Three men were always nominated for election for bailiff, but it was usually clear who was to be chosen, and the two not picked were often put in the following year (BRU2/2, 3, *passim*).

⁸⁸ BRU2/3, p. 69; see n. 51 above.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p. 72.

⁹⁰ S.B.T., BRU15/13/97; BRU2/3, p. 84; BRU15/13/103, fos. 8v-9r. See n. 49 for earlier trouble over Smith's support for the church rather than the corporation.

⁹¹ BRU2/3, pp. 85, 100, 127, 134.

⁹² S.B.T., BRU14/1, fos. 68-9, 128-9, 141-2; BRU2/3, p. 85.

⁹³ S.B.T. BRU2/2, pp. 367-9, for council lobbying; BRU15/7/7 for a 1618 petition to the assizes; ER1/1/74, for Smith's letter to Combe, December 1616.

⁹⁴ Prestwich, *Cranfield*, 411, 517, 525-7.

⁹⁵ S.B.T., ER1/1/88, Cranfield's claims; ER1/1/87, BRU15/11/3 for corporation responses; BRU2/2, pp. 422, 426, 436-7, 443, 445, for disputes with the assistant minister and negotiations with Middlesex over the bailiff's election and other claims, September 1622-January 1624. See also n. 13.

⁹⁶ K.A.O., U269/Q27/4, 5. It is significant that the Act Books of the Peculiar Court from the 1590s to 1624 are preserved with Cranfield's papers. S.B.T. BRU2/2, p. 468, March 1625, the corporation agreed to petition Middlesex on Wilson's behalf.

⁹⁷ K.A.O., U269/Warwickshire Estate Correspondence, Miscellaneous box, Stratford folder, Wilson to Cranfield December 1632; cf. the ministerial circle around the second Lord Brooke at the neighbouring small town of Warwick: A.L. Hughes, 'Thomas Dugard and his circle in the 1630s: A 'parliamentary-puritan' connection', *Hist. Jnl.*, 29, (1986).

⁹⁸ K.A.O., U269/Q28/3-6; S.B.T. BRU2/3, pp. 143-4, 146, 149-50, 153, 156, 160, 164-5, give details of negotiations with Middlesex from April 1637-October 1638.

⁹⁹ The account of sixteenth century Stratford is derived from Styles, *The Borough of Stratford-upon-Avon*; Fripp, *Shakespeare Man and Artist*; and the printed *Minutes and Accounts of Stratford-upon-Avon Corporation, 1553-1598*, (Dugdale Society, I, III, V, X, XXXV, 1921-1990).

¹⁰⁰ P.R.O., C3/364/23-4, Chancery proceedings involving Lucas, the Lanes and the Nashes. Lucas himself was clearly a difficult man: in 1617 the corporation issued a testimonial to the Benchers of Grays' Inn, defending him against accusations of 'misdemeanors in the generall carridge of his Lyfe': S.B.T., BRU15/13/38.

¹⁰¹ C.f. M.A. Kishlansky, *Parliamentary Selection: Social and Political Choice in Early Modern*

England (Cambridge, 1986), 226-7.

¹⁰²Cf. again, Lake, 'Defining Puritanism'.