

Wigan St Mary's and St John's Bicentenary

Introduction

These two articles from our journal, *North West Catholic History*, are normally only available on the members' section of this website, but to mark this bicentenary they are now made available here. As, however, they were first published some time ago, a couple of corrections are necessary:

'Wigan Catholics and the Policies of James II'

p. 100. The Jesuit school was not in Scholes (to the east of the River Douglas), but just off Standishgate near the present St John's church (the confusion arose from the incorrect folk etymology that derives 'Scholes' from 'schools').

p. 107. Note 17, I have since consulted the original in the Lancashire Record Office, Preston, and the date is correct.

'"The Case of Wigan": Catholic Congregationalism in the Age of Revolution'

p. 6. The two parishes have since been separated again, though they are still run by the secular clergy.

Wigan Catholics and the Policies of James II

J. A. Hilton.

The accession of the Catholic James II in 1685 presented the prospect of toleration to his persecuted co-religionists. However, given the opposition of any Parliament likely to be elected, toleration could only be achieved by the exercise of the Royal Prerogative, which, as a Stuart, the King was determined to exert. The new reign, therefore, brought the Catholics of Wigan first toleration, then political power but their advance so alienated the rest of the community, otherwise loyal and largely tolerant, that it turned almost entirely against the King and his fellow-Catholics.

The Borough of Wigan and the surrounding Parish contained a considerable Catholic community. Fifty-four people from Wigan were convicted of recusancy between 1674 and 1678 and in his brief for the August Assizes of 1681 at Lancaster, Sir Thomas Stringer stated that 'The number of Popish Recusants convict inhabiting in the Town of Wigan [is] now 91 persons.' They were led by at least four families of local gentry: the Leighs of Ackhurst Hall, the Gerards of Ince and Bryn, the Andertons of Winstanley and Orrell and the Langtons of Hindley.¹

In 1685, the local prospects of toleration seemed

¹ Blundell, *Old Catholic Lancashire*, pp. 48-50; V.C.H., Lancs, IV, 103-4, 145; *Transactions Lancs & Cheshire Historical Society*, 64, 315.

particularly favourable. Wigan possessed a tradition of intense loyalty to the Crown, nurtured by a vigorous Anglicanism, whose obedience to the King could be expected. It also contained a strong community of Dissenters and there was at least the hope that they would co-operate in seizing the opportunity of toleration. Moreover the Mayor, Sir Roger Bradshaigh, 2nd Bart., was notorious for his tolerance towards Catholics,² and the remodelling of the Borough Corporation in the royal interest had been already begun as part of a national policy by Charles II.³

Accordingly, although the attack on the boroughs coincided with a government campaign for the stricter enforcement of the laws against Catholics and Dissenters, it was not long before Catholics were once more being admitted as burgesses of the legally non-existent Borough of Wigan. These included Dr John Worthington, positively identifiable as a Catholic, and William Gerard esq. and Richard Gerard gent., who, if not positively identifiable, bore the names of local Catholic families. They were sworn on 24 November 1684.⁴

The Charter of James II, issued on 25 February 1684/5 did little more than restore the Borough, and place on a legal footing procedures not explicitly mentioned in previous charters but, while laying down that the Recorder, Aldermen and Capital Burgesses should

2 He had denied the accusation that he had assisted in making four Catholic burgesses (cf. Hawkes: *Sir Roger Bradshaigh of Haigh Knt. and Bart.*, 1648-84, p. 41), but at least two - Thomas Gerard Esq. and Philip Langton Esq. - had been sworn before him on 7 May 1679 (Wigan Corporation Oaths Book, 1622-1723, f.55r).

hold office for life, it contained the important proviso ‘unless in the mean time by reason of their own malpractises in that office, or for any other reasonable cause they be amoved, or any one of them be amoved for the same.’ In other words, the King ‘did in and by his said Letters Pattents reserve a power to himselfe by any order in Councill and his sign Manual to remove or displau (sic) any officers elected or to be elected by vertue of his said Letter Pattents’, power which was to be used for the wholesale regulation of the Borough later in his reign.⁵

At first the King had contented himself with using his Prerogative to release prisoners of conscience and to permit indiviual Catholics to hold office but with the dispensing power confirmed by the Hales case, he issued the Declaration of Indulgence of 4 April 1667, suspending the religious penal laws, the application of the Test Acts and the offering of the Oaths of Supremacy and Allegiance to office-holders.

In Wigan the Roman Catholics whose existence was already tolerated were now allowed the public exercise of their religion. Indeed Catholicism not only emerged into the open but also began to flourish; the Jesuits especially, who were already established in the district, now made the town the public centre of their activities. A Jesuit had written from Liege to another at Friburg

3 Wigan Court Leet Records, Box 1, Roll 61; CSPD, Chas. II j. 1684-16851 194 and 232.

4 Wigan Oaths Book, 1662-1723, f.56v.

5 Wigan Court Leet Records, Box 1, Roll 61.

on 2 February 1686/7 that 'we are to buy some houses in the town of Wigan, Lancashire'. Apparently this purchase was not unworthy of the attention of the Fathers on the Continent, for the Jesuits were soon able to report 'a great and joyful harvest' in the county and especially in Wigan. So successful were they that Bishop Leyburn confirmed one thousand three hundred and thirty-one there on 14 and 15 September 1687 and as the old chapel was hardly able to contain half this growing congregation they planned to build a new church and use altar plate sent from Bryn. The Jesuits however were not merely concerned with spiritual ministrations as they had a special interest in education. There seems to have been some sort of Jesuit school in Wigan as early as 1625 but it now emerged and flourished with the entire Catholic community as a properly constituted college, one of ten established at this time in various parts of the country. The college was in the Scholes district under the mastership of Mr Occleshaigh and some assistants. It had several classes and had over a hundred pupils. It was evidently effective for it provided at least two vocations to the Society: Fr John Thorpe and Fr Nicholas Saunderson alias Thompson. Here too the existing accomodation was too small and the foundations of a new building were laid.⁶

6 J.G.Macleod. *History of the Mission of the Society of Jesus in Wigan*, p. 4; Foley, V:157, 319, 361, 405, 644 n.4. Dr Kuerdon, passing through Wigan about 1695, described the college as 'a fair built house lately styled a college with officers of learning belonging to it, but since violently pulled down, and the ruins thereof yet remaining, but neither Romanist masters nor scholars

The Catholics were now free to seek office but they were unlikely to be successful for however great the tolerance of the rest of the community the Anglican establishment was unlikely to vote an end to its own monopoly of power. When the Corporation of Wigan at the prompting of Thomas Cartwright, the Bishop of Chester and Rector of Wigan, responded to the Declaration with a loyal address they made no reference to Catholics and Dissenters but merely thanked the King for his promise that he would 'Protect and Maintain all Your Subjects of the *Church of England*, in the free Exercise of their Religion, as by Law Established'.⁷ The local Catholics however instead of seeking election were to obtain office at the hands of the King a process which totally alienated the rest of the community.

The King, trusting that the Anglicans would adhere to their principles of passive obedience and non-resistance at least and confident not only of the support of the Roman Catholics but also in his ability to win over the Dissenters now determined to bring his policies to completion. He intended to use the machinery of local government to ensure the election of a new Parliament sufficiently subservient to register the nation's acquiescence in his will. Moreover the measures necessary to produce such a Parliament would serve to perfect his control of local affairs. A committee

are left.' (*V.C.H. Lancs*, IV, 78 n. 127). The land remained the property of the Jesuits until it became the site of the present St John's Catholic Church.

⁷ Cartwright was a friend of the King and a zealous advocate of the Royal Prerogative. See *Diary of Thomas Cartwright* (Camden Society, O.S. Vol 22, p 58).

was accordingly appointed under Jeffreys to regulate the corporations on the advice of local bodies of regulators.

The regulation of Wigan began on 8 March 1668, when Christopher Sumpner, the Mayor, 'with the Recorder.....Aldermen Towne Clarke and Eight Comon Councill men were removed from their said places by his Matie by vertue of the herein before recited power and Thomas Gerard Esq with the Recorder Aldermen Towne Clarke and others to the number of who were Papists And had noe estate within the said Burrough nor paid any Scott or Lott therein were made and placed officers within the said Burrough Contrary to the Antiant Customes of the said Burrough and Contrary to the expresse Words in the same Chatter which was the occasion of a great many Heats and Divisions within the said Burrough.'⁸ The new officers were: Thomas Gerard of Ince Esq., - Mayor; the Honourable William Molyneux, third son of Viscount Molyneux the recently appointed Lord Lieutenant of Lancashire, - Recorder; Thomas Bottle gent., - Town Clerk; and John Thornton - Bailiff. At the same time fifteen of the local gentry, including the Gerards and Langtons, were admitted to the Corporation: four became Aldermen and Common Councillors, four became Common Councillors and burgesses; seven became burgesses.⁹ It was evidently this Mayor and his suite whom the Jesuits reported as attending their sermons.¹⁰

8 Wigan Court Leet-Records, Box 1, Roll 61.

9 Wigan Corporation Qaths Book, 1662-1723, ff 91v-92r. (ID).

10 Foley, V:319.

After this first sweeping regulation the introduction of local men, largely gentry, acceptable to the regulators, and of royal officials continued in preparation for the issue of the Second Declaration of Indulgence and the legalization of this measure by the subservient Parliament the king intended to secure. On 9 March 1687/8 two more of the local gentry were sworn burgesses and Common Councillors. On 19 March Mr Richard Gerard was elected Common Councillor to make up the number of eighteen laid down in the Charter. On the same day the Mayor, Thomas Gerard, 'haveing Occasion to Waite his Maies Comands att Lancastr' was absent so Lawrence Anderton was 'swone by the Towne Clark by and with the Consent of the now Major before Seven all Aldermen to officiate as Deputy Major', a role which must have confirmed the suspicions he had previously aroused. (During his own term of office as Mayor Anderton had presided over the swearing in as burgesses of a large number of royal nominees). No evidence has survived as to whether Gerard conducted any business at Lancaster other than formal attendance at the Assizes, but on 26 March 1688 one of the Judges, Sir Edward Luttag, was sworn a burgess before him. At the same time, a number of local men, mainly gentry, were also admitted as burgesses - 13 in the next four weeks. James Anderton became a Common Councillor on 29 March 1688.¹¹

Even though the people of Wigan had shown themselves particularly tolerant of Roman Catholics such a sweeping change, brought about by the exercise of arbitrary power in direct contravention of Statute Law, could not but cause

11. Wigan Corporation Oat Book, 1662-1723, f.92 r&v; Wigan Borough Common Council Book, f.32r.

‘a great many Heats and Divisions’¹² and alienate those gentlemen and burgesses who had hitherto held office. Thus as William Bankes of Winstanley a local Whig, wrote to Roger Kenyon, Clerk of the Peace under Lord Derby, on 16 April 1688: ‘The Wiggoners have refused to gratify their Mayor and new aldermen, in not signigg an addresse that was prepared to have been sent up to his Majesty with their thanks in it for the regulation; and in it, promise to choose such members as would assist in so gratefull a work, as taking off those penal lawes would be’.¹³ Even the loyalty of Wigan apparently had its limits and it was this alienation of the hereditary ruling classes at the national level and in the locality which was to be the fundamental cause of the downfall of James II in 1688.

It was against this background of apparent triumph and underlying discontent that the King issued his Second Declaration of Indulgence on 27 April 1688, which expressed the hope that it would be approved by a Parliament in November ‘at farthest’. At the same time the King, probably on the advice of Cartwright, ordered the Declaration to be read in every cathedral and parish church on two successive Sundays. The toleration and indeed the dominance of Roman Catholics had already been

12 Wigan Court Leet Records, Box 1, Roll 61.

13 H.M.C., Kenyon Papers (Vol. XIV, App. IV, no.615).

achieved in practice, and the Anglican clergy and gentry had acquiesced, however grudgingly, because of their belief in the royal authority but they were not prepared to give public assent to this policy from the pulpit and at Westminster. Even the Dissenters, who benefitted by toleration, were because of their distrust of Roman Catholicism and their opposition to royal absolutism, lukewarm in their acceptance of this measure. The Lancashire Non-conformists presented an address of gratitude which was very cautious in its expressions.

There was accordingly considerable support in Wigan for the seven bishops who petitioned the King against his order to read the Declaration. William Bankes wrote sympathetically to Roger Kenyon of their arrest and when they were released the people of Wigan, like the royal army on Hounslow Heath, openly expressed their approval. Ralph Bancks, the Parish Clerk of Wigan, lit bonfires 'at ye Release of ye Bishops out of the Tower' and the ringers at the parish church were paid ten shillings, presumably for ringing, 'that day newse came the bishops were freed.'¹⁴ Moreover, opposition to the King's policies and the fears that they would be rendered permanent with the birth of a son to James manifested themselves in acceptance on the 'warming-pan' legend, for in June 1688 the Wigan Parish Church Council made a payment of eightpence 'for a Prayer

14 Churchwardens' Account Book.

booke for the supposed P: of Wales.’¹⁵

Meanwhile the packing of the burgess roll continued in preparation for the general election with the swearing as burgesses of numbers of the gentry: a total of thirteen in the period from the end of May to the beginning of September 1688.¹⁶

This continued provocation to a powerful and growing opposition, together with rumours of even more general regulation, appears to have led to an attempt to overthrow the ruling Catholic clique, perhaps one of the ‘great many Heats and Divisions’ referred to above. According to Henry Rowe writing to Kenyon the same day the Common Council had on 6 September 1688 assembled to elect a new Mayor. A majority were in favour of Alderman Scott but Gerard adjourned the election till 24th and he and his supporters left the Court. In their absence ‘the honest burgesses’ elected Alderman Scott who was sworn in ‘with the greatest joy that ever was at the election of a Mayor of Wigan’ and conducted to his house by Sir Edward Chisenhall and William Bankes, both opponents of the King, and several other gentlemen. If such an attempted coup did take place it was unsuccessful for no entry of the election of James Scott as Mayor at this time appears in the Records of Wigan Corporation and Gerard continued to

¹⁵ Kenyon Papers, No. 622; Bridgeman, ‘History of the church and manor of Wigan’, III, 573 n.1 (in *Chetham Society*, N.S. Vol. 17)

¹⁶ Wigan Corporation Oaths Book, 1662-1723, 92v-93r.

act as Mayor.¹⁷

Probably in response to this open opposition on the part of the Common Council further measures were taken to reduce the Corporation to the absolute control of the Catholic royal nominees. An order of the Common Council dated 11 September 1688, ‘That what money is in the handes of Mr Christopher Sumpner the late Major shall bee paid unto Thomas Gerrard Esqr the now present Major’ is the last entry in the *Common Council Book* and the Common Council appears to have been merged once again with the Court Leet. This was followed by the admission of two hundred and forty new burgesses in the next five weeks. The new burgesses were, with very few exceptions, gentry and in some places there occurs in the Oaths Book the marginal note ‘Layland parish’, this being known as an especially strong Catholic district even for Lancashire.¹⁸

Opposition to these measures was considerable. Lord Derby, the leader of the ejected Tory gentry of Lancashire, gave orders to his adherents for the observation of the Catholic Justices of the Peace and

17 Kenyon Papers, no. 631: the date of this letter may be incorrect and the events described may have taken place in October 1688. Although I have been unable to consult the original I am assured by the Historic Manuscripts Commission that the Inspector who made the report was regarded as extremely reliable in matters of detail.

18 Wigan Borough Common Council Book, f.32v; Wigan Corporation Oaths Book, 1662-1723, ff. 96r-99r.

went up to London, taking with him a memorandum protesting against the regulation of the county and particularizing Wigan, and he presented this to the king on 7 October 1688.¹⁹

The king at last became alarmed at the extent of the opposition and yielding to more moderate counsel made considerable concessions. Thus on 15 October 1683 he handed back the control of the boroughs to their traditional rulers by a proclamation which restored the charters of the corporations destroyed in his own and his brother's reign.

In Wigan, despite the strength of Catholicism, the reversal was complete. On 23 October 1688 Bankes wrote to Kenyon that 'The Corporation here is going about this afternoon to place their old aldermen and officers.' Those who had held office under the Charter of 1662, acting in accordance with the proclamation summoned the burgesses who elected as Mayor James Scott Esqr., Alderman, who had the backing of the Common Council together with Bankes and Chisenhall. This remarkable unanimity of sometime royal nominees, bugesses and Whig gentlemen is the measure of the extent to which James had alienated almost every shade of opinion except those completely

19 V.C.H., Lancs II: 242 would seem to be incorrect in stating that this memorandum refers to the illegal returns of M.P.s for Wigan, Liverpool and Preston. The 'retornes' called for in the memorandum (Kenyon Papers no. 635) are intended to be accounts of the regulated corporations not of the election of 1685, which was managed in Lancashire by Derby himself.

committed to his aims. The restored Corporation then recorded its proceedings in the roll of the Michaelmas Leet of 1688 and proceeded to strengthen its position by swearing In new burgesses totalling 15 in the next six weeks.²⁰

The Catholics made no resistance, although there was a report that the royal troops in Wigan intended to seize Lord Derby. Their departure and the entry of the militia into Wigan ‘in the night with light(ed) matches’, according to Kenyon, caused ‘a great consternation’ in the town but the Revolution proceeded without armed conflict. On the other hand a mob destroyed the Catholic church and college, although the Catholic community managed to secure the return of its altar plate to the safety of Bryn.²¹

However the Catholics, although they did not actively resist, either absconded or were openly defiant, to the alarm of the authorities especially when James landed in Ireland. Accordingly on 26 Septmber the government ordered the enforcement of the Act for the better securing of the Government by disarming Papists and on 11 January 1689/90 the bailiff of Wigan was ordered to marshal the loyal Protestants in arms to search for absconded Catholics, Catholics who had held office under James, Catholic,

20 Kenyon Papers, No.640; Wigan Court Leet Records, Box 1, Roll 61; Oaths Book ff 14r, 20v, 100r, 147r.

21 Kenyon Papers, Nos. 635 & 647; Foley, V:319 & 361.

Irish and Scots soldiers, those who had harboured Catholics or James's emissaries and those who concealed arms, and to bring them before the Justices of the Peace. Despite these repressive measures Catholicism survived with the support of the local gentry, many of whom continued to be militant Jacobites.²²

James II had failed to achieve his aims, because he underestimated the Protestant fear of Popery and because, in attempting to overcome that fear, he entered his Prerogative to an extent unacceptable to even the most devoted Tories. The failure of his policies in a district where, because of its customary tolerance, its strong Catholicism and its traditional loyalty, they were most likely to succeed is the measure of their failure in the country as a whole.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: I wish to thank the Borough Librarian of Wigan for permission to consult the Corporation Archives, and his staff for their kind co-operation.

22 Kenyon Papers, Nos. 662, 676, 678, 679, 682, 683, 686, 699, 701, 717; Foley V:405; 'Jacobite Trials at Manchester 1694' (*Chetham Society O.S.* Vol 28); T.C. Porteus, 'New Light on the Lancashire Plot' (*Trans. Lanes & Chesh. Anti., Soc.* Vol. 50).

THE CASE OF WIGAN: CATHOLIC CONGREGATIONALISM IN THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

J.A. Hilton

In 1818—19, two rival Catholic chapels were erected simultaneously and almost side by side in Wigan. The building was accompanied by a controversy, which involved not only local interests and personalities but also issues of practice and principle which divided the entire English Church. The Industrial Revolution increased the strength of the urban Catholic middle- and working-classes, whilst the French Revolution permitted the development of papal and episcopal absolutism. A series of pamphlets¹ stated the case for each side in a dispute between the two congregations, between the secular clergy and the Jesuits, between episcopal and lay patronage, between clerical and congregational control, and between Ultramontanism and Cisalpinism.

Congregational disputes, involving struggles for power between clergy and lay trustees, were not unique to Wigan. Divisions in Liverpool in 1778 had resulted in the withdrawal of the ex-Jesuits in favour of the Benedictines and in the overthrow of lay control. In Birmingham, the Franciscans had been faced with an opposition chapel approved by Bishop Milner in 1807. In Preston, the Rev. Joseph Dunn, who thought he could have solved the dispute in Wigan, feared the establishment of an opposition chapel, and failed to wrest control from the lay trustees. In America, similar disputes led the clergy of Maryland to petition Rome for a bishop in 1788, a request which resulted in the appointment of John Carroll as Bishop of Baltimore. In New York, the trustees forced their priest to retire. In Albany, the Rev. William Hogan led his congregation into schism. In Philadelphia, trouble with the trustees, which led to schism, was complicated by the claims of immigrant German Catholics, who were placed under interdict. Bishop Conwell of Philadelphia's attempted compromise of 1829, allowing trustees a veto over clerical appointments, resulted in its repudiation and his removal by Rome. This decision was confirmed in 1841 by Pope Gregory XVI, who ruled that

trustees were entirely dependent on episcopal authority.²

The controversy over Wigan was occasioned by the need to build a new chapel. The existing chapel, built in 1785, was no longer large enough to house the congregation. In 1783, there had been some 900 Catholics in Wigan, but by 1800–01, when the population of the town totalled 11,000, they had grown to 1,200.³ In 1800, they were described by the Rev. John Barrow of Claughton, as ‘ragamuffins’ who should ‘mind their tin pans, brass kettles, their looms and their bobbins’ and not interfere with ecclesiastical authority.⁴ By 1819 they had grown to 3,000. The need to build was increased by the closure of the chapel in the neighbouring township of Ince, caused by the move from Ince Hall to Euxton of the Ince-Andertons, who took with them their chaplain, Rev. Joseph Higginson.⁵

The need to build involved a challenge to the position of the ex-Jesuits, for a minority of the congregation applied to the vicar apostolic for a secular clergyman. Wigan had been a Jesuit mission since 1688, and, despite the suppression of the Society in 1773, the ex-Jesuits had continued to serve the mission, two of them acting with three laymen as its trustees. Despite the establishment of the ex-Jesuit college at Stonyhurst in 1794, the restoration of the Jesuits in 1814 was not effected in England, partly because the vicars apostolic and the secular clergy regarded it as inopportune, if not reprehensible. Gradwell, the rector of the English College in Rome and the agent of the vicars apostolic, writing to Thompson, vicar general of Lancashire, in 1821, linked together the case of Wigan with the restoration of the Jesuits, the Gandophy affair, Plunkett’s Emancipation Bill, attempts to influence the appointment of Irish bishops and the disputed property of the diocese of Baltimore.⁶

The need to build also brought to a head the social divisions within the congregation, the middle-class making a bid for working-class support against the leadership of the gentry and the ex-Jesuits. On 7 October 1817, a public meeting resolved to build a new chapel, applied to the vicar apostolic for the appointment of a priest, and authorised a committee to raise money by subscription amongst the congregation, including ‘the poor classes’.⁷ The committee included Peter Greenough, a cotton manufacturer, John Bimson, a canal agent, and Henry Livesey,

a land surveyor. John Tate, who with his Jesuit brother Thomas, was one of the Stonyhurst priests at Wigan, decided to re-build the existing chapel. He was supported by Charles Walmesley Esquire of Westwood House, Ince, who subsequently signed the address to the Pope in favour of the Stonyhurst Fathers. On 11 November, Walmesley presided over a public meeting which resolved to support their existing pastors and to build a new chapel.⁸ The foundation stone of this, the ex-Jesuits' and trustees' chapel of St John, was laid on 27 January 1818. The foundation stone of the other, secular clergy and episcopal chapel of St Mary was laid on 2 February 1818. At the dinner which followed, the vicar general, Richard Thompson, declared that the vicar apostolic 'was necessitated to withhold his approbation' from St John's and that support for it was 'an *opposition* to the Authority of the Bishop'.⁹

The controversy which developed concentrated on this issue of episcopal authority. The case for the secular clergy was stated by Richard Thompson. A native of Wigan, Thompson was the secular priest in charge of Weld Bank in nearby Chorley and the vicar general for Lancashire under the Vicar Apostolic of the North, William Gibson.¹⁰

Thompson began by pointing out that,

However interesting the subject is to the particular Neighbourhood of Wigan, yet it is not devoid of interest to the public generally, [for it] instructs the Laity, in general, with the Clergy, what is due from them to their Ecclesiastical Superiors in these matters.¹¹

The principle involved was clear: as the Douay Catechism taught, 'To oppose the government of Bishops is a sin of rebellion against the peace and safety of God's Church . . .' ¹² Moreover, he cited a declaration by Charles Plowden, rector of Stonyhurst, that, 'Whatsoever plausible pretext may be alleged by a subject in opposition to his Superior's orders, a simple forbidding . . . is strictly binding in conscience'. ¹³ 'But', Thompson went on, 'have not, then, private persons a *Right to build a Chapel for themselves?* Not, certainly, without the approbation — not, against the disapprobation of the Bishop'. ¹⁴ He concluded by denying that the ex-Jesuits were exempt from episcopal jurisdiction or that the vicar apostolic lacked full episcopal authority. ¹⁵

Walmesley replied to Thompson by printing their correspondence in which he declared that

. . . to tell us that the Bishop considers every support to the New Chapel on the *old situation* as a *resistance* to his authority is as much as if you wished to make us all believe our venerable Prelate had lost his mental faculties', [and insisted that] we have a *right* to build ourselves a better Chapel. ¹⁶

Thompson's challenge was also taken up by the rector of Stonyhurst, Charles Plowden, taking as his title his ancestor's proverbial remark, 'The case is altered'. ¹⁷ Plowden began by denying the charge of disobedience to episcopal authority, for, although Thompson had banned the Jesuit chapel in Wigan, 'I have not yet learned that any spiritual mandate whatever has been issued by the prudent Prelate: of course none has been resisted'. ¹⁸ He also defended the ecclesiastical status of Stonyhurst against Thompson's strictures. ¹⁹

However, Plowden's main argument was that even the bishop had no authority to issue such a ban, which would overthrow the customary right of private property. Thompson

has thought proper to teach us a new ecclesiastical polity . . . , [but] It will be difficult to convince British Catholics that their private expenditure in the cause of piety and charity are instantly to fall under the control of the spiritual power, under the direct patronage of their Bishop, and to remain at his disposal. ²⁰ [He pointed out that,] Every Catholic Gentleman has justly conceived it to be his right to build a chapel [and that] every body of regular Missioners have used the same right. ²¹ [Accordingly,] The general and just idea, then, which transcends, pervades, rules and comprises the whole matter, is the idea, the principle of *private property*, on which tenure alone every Catholic chapel, every mite of Catholic ecclesiastical property is and must be held. ²²

Just as in Catholic countries the founders of churches had a *jus patronatus*, a right of lay patronage, ²³ so 'there results from the very notion of *private property* a *quasi patronatus* . . . of presenting a Pastor to the Bishop'. ²⁴ Episcopal authority could not extend over private property, for, 'The venerable power of Bishops, at least in this country, is entirely spiritual, as is the power of the Sovereign Pontiff from which it emanates.' ²⁵

Plowden's case was answered in an anonymous pamphlet,

which has been attributed to the Cisalpine John Lingard.²⁶ However, according to Lingard, Thompson showed him a draft, and Lingard sketched a new version, which Thompson amended and published, 'so that I cannot say it is mine'.²⁷

This pamphlet began by recapitulating the facts and by insisting that Thompson's ruling was made on behalf of the bishop. It then got down to answering Plowden.

Now what is the real state of the case? Is it whether there exist in England any such thing as *jus patronatus* or *quasi patronatus*? . . . Certainly not . . . The real question is, whether . . . the beginning, and afterwards persisting to build the second new chapel at Wigan, . . . was not done in contempt of episcopal authority?²⁸ It is to the bishop that the care of souls in this district is primarily committed: all missionaries receive their powers from him . . .²⁹ [Since] the bishop is the general superior of the mission . . . it is his duty and right to decide whether one or more chapels are necessary in populous places; and . . . when he has decided, to oppose this decision . . . is to oppose episcopal authority. Now that these principles apply to the Wigan controversy is evident.³⁰ [It points out that] Mr Plowden was once celebrated for his ultra-montane opinions, but now the case is altered, and for his own interest he becomes a cisalpine divine.³¹

It concluded that the restrictions imposed by Plowden rendered episcopal authority null and void.

Does he mean to assert that the exercise of spiritual authority must be so restricted as to affect no act connected with things of a temporal nature? Why then it can only regard mere acts of mind, which have never been followed by temporal effects.³² [If Plowden's] *jus quasi* be received and sanctioned by the Catholic community, the authority of our bishops would be rendered inefficient and in some cases absolutely null . . .³³

The final shot was fired by the anonymous 'Friend to Truth' and to the Jesuits, who nicely summed up the point at issue.

Indeed the grand mistatement of the whole performance is, that our chapel was undertaken in opposition to the Bishop. It is the legitimate and necessary exercise of a just right, opposed, not by the Bishop, but by a small party and the Vicar.³⁴

Meanwhile, both Thompson and Plowden appealed to Rome which eventually ordered Gibson to enforce a compromise independently suggested by John Milner, Vicar Apostolic of the Midlands. Thompson had refused permission for Stonyhurst to send a priest to serve the mission at Oxford in Milner's

district. Having visited Stonyhurst, Milner passed through Wigan, called on Thompson, and wrote to Gibson, urging him not to oppose the Jesuits. Having received a deputation from Wigan, Gibson allowed both chapels to proceed, reserving to himself the right to nominate the clergy to both. At Milner's suggestion, in 1818 Rome issue the Somaglian decree, allowing Stonyhurst to send priests to the former Jesuit missions, which included both Oxford and Wigan.³⁵

Accordingly, in 1819, John and Thomas Tate continued to serve the new St John's, whilst two hundred yards away, a secular clergyman, Charles Middlehurst, took over the new St Mary's. Although the two congregations long remained hostile, the two parishes are now run jointly by the secular clergy.³⁶

Neo-Classical St John's and Neo-Gothic St Mary's stand together, monuments to the congregational dispute, which divided the English Catholic Church in the Age of Revolution and which found expression in the case of Wigan.³⁷

NOTES

1. I am grateful to Wigan Central Library, for permission to consult its collection of the literature, and to Mr T. Standish, for the loan of Charles Walmesley's bound collection of the literature.
2. J.C.H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe* (London, 1976), 336-37; J. Bossy, *The English Catholic Community* (London, 1975), 341-44; J. Bossy's, 'Catholic Lancashire in the Eighteenth Century' in J. Bossy and P. Jupp, *Essays Presented to Michael Roberts* (Belfast, 1976), 63-64; L. Warren, *A Short History of St Wilfrid's Church, Preston* (Preston, 1972), 13-15; *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (15 vols, London, 1907-12), III, 383; IV, 349; XI 794; XV, 71.
3. Bossy, *Catholic Community*, 339; F.O. Blundell, *Old Catholic Lancashire* (3 vols, London, 1925-41), II, 72-76; N. Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: South Lancashire* (Harmondsworth, 1969), 423.
4. Bossy, *Essays*, 62.
5. Bossy, *Catholic Community*, 424; Blundell, II, 81.
6. Blundell, II, 70-72; *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XIV, 309; B. Ward, *The Eve of Catholic Emancipation*, (3 vols, London, 1911-12), I, 207-12; Bossy, *Catholic Community*, 339; M.E. Williams, *The Venerable English College, Rome* (London, 1979), 77-83; G. Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests*, (4 vols, Great Wakering, 1968-77), IV, 115-16; J.D. Holmes, 'A Note on "Gandolphism" and "the Jesuitical plot"', *North West Catholic History*, VI (1979), 21-30.
7. *To their Brethren the Catholics of Wigan and to the Public at Large the following Statement of Facts is humbly submitted* (Wigan, 1818), 1-3.
8. R. Thompson, *The Case Stated of the Wigan Catholic Chapels in Two Letters* (Wigan, 1818), 3; *Wigan Directory, 1816; Wigan Directory, 1824-25*; A Friend to Truth, *A True Statement of Facts, &c.* (Wigan, no date), 3-5; H. Foley, *Records of the English Province of the Society of Jesus* (7 vols, London, 1875-83), VII, 763; *Burke's Landed Gentry* (London, 1952), 263; Ward, III, 294-98.

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9. *New Catholic Chapel in Wigan under the Patronage of the Bishop of the District* (Wigan, 1818).
10. Anstruther, IV, 111–12, 277.
11. Thompson, 1.
12. *ibid.*, 11–12.
13. *ibid.*, 13.
14. *ibid.*, 15.
15. *ibid.*, 20–21.
16. C. Walmesley, *A Short Address to the Catholics of Wigan &c.* (Wigan, no date), 13–14.
17. *Catholic Encyclopedia*, XII, 167–68.
18. C. Plowden, *The Case is Altered, in a Letter addressed to the Roman Catholics of Wigan* (London, 1818), 3–5.
19. *ibid.*, 19.
20. *ibid.*, 6.
21. *ibid.*, 7.
22. *ibid.*, 9–10.
23. *ibid.*, 6–7.
24. *ibid.*, 10.
25. *ibid.*, 13.
26. Plowden's 'Case is Altered', *Corrected, in a Re-Statement of Thompson's 'Case Stated'* (Liverpool, 1818); Ward, III, 33, n.1; J. Gillow, *A Literary and Biographical or Bibliographical Dictionary of English Catholics* 5 vols, London, 1895), IV, 270.
27. M. Haile and E. Bonney, *Life and Letters of John Lingard* (London, 1911), 159–60.
28. *Re-Statement*, 15–16.
29. *ibid.*, 17–18.
30. *ibid.*, 37.
31. *ibid.*, 39.
32. *ibid.*, 39.
33. *ibid.*, 40, n.
34. A Friend to Truth, *Remarks on the Late Anonymous Publication, entitled A Re-Statement, &c.* (Wigan, 1818), 18.
35. Bossy, *Catholic Community*, 346; Ward, III, 34–37, 286–310.
36. Foley, VII, 763; Blundell, II, 77; *St Mary and St John: Magazine* (Summer, 1982), 1.
37. Pevsner, 425; B. Little, *Catholic Churches* (London, 1966), 56.