

# The Oxford Movement in Leicester in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries

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During the 1830s a small group of Oxford dons, who were also priests, believing that the Church of England had strayed from its Catholic roots, began a movement that was to affect the churches in Leicester. This article traces the development of the Oxford Movement, through its earlier manifestation in Tractarianism, to Ritualism, its later form, in a county town that was already a bastion of Nonconformity and where Anglican Evangelicalism had also become fairly strong.

## Introduction

Whether one regards the Oxford Movement as a colourful romantic reversion to the Church of England's past or as 'one of the fundamental *discontinuities* in the history of Anglicanism', or even, to use Diarmaid McCulloch's delightful terminology, as the facilitator of 'a remarkably successful piece of theological alchemy' to justify restoration of the primacy of the altar within Anglican worship, there can be no doubt that it changed the course of church history in England during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>1</sup> Nigel Yates notes that Trollope's 'Mr Oriel' (in *Dr Thorne* (1858)) was 'a man of family and fortune' who went up to Oxford, 'had become inoculated there with very High Church principles, and gone into orders influenced by a feeling of enthusiastic love for the priesthood'. Though the novelist's use of the term 'high church' is questionable, for it is not entirely synonymous with the Oxford Movement (or Tractarianism or Ritualism or Anglo-Catholicism) to which Mr. Oriel belonged, he had nevertheless clearly discerned that such clergymen were familiar figures in English towns and cities by that time.<sup>2</sup> The intention in this study is to examine the circumstances in which the Oxford Movement was initiated, and thereafter grew, in a significant and rapidly growing county town that was a bastion of Nonconformity.

<sup>1</sup> Adherents of the Oxford Movement were often known as 'Tractarians, because Newman and others produced ninety *Tracts for the Times*, through which their ideas were developed, between 1833 and 1841. Later the term 'Ritualist' was used as the Movement became more concerned with elaborate ritual and ceremony. G. Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement?* (London, 2002), 10, 25-6, 91. Professor McCulloch made his statement during the course of his Birkbeck Lectures in the University of Cambridge, 1998, now published as D. McCulloch, *Tudor Church Militant: Edward VI and the Protestant Reformation* (London: Penguin Books, 1999). See p.161.

<sup>2</sup> N. Yates, *The Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism* (London, 1983), 24.

Probably because of the strength of Dissent and of Anglican Evangelicalism Leicestershire was not a county where Tractarianism developed early. Whereas the dioceses of London, Oxford and Exeter each had more than fifty Tractarian incumbents between 1840 and 1870, the Peterborough diocese, within which the Archdeaconry of Leicester had been placed in 1839, had only twelve.<sup>3</sup> In general the rural areas of Leicestershire were hostile or indifferent to the Oxford Movement. Christopher Brooks notes that ‘the sharp upward movement of building activity [in connection with Tractarianism] in the Devon parishes [for instance] was not matched in the squires’ area of Leicestershire’.<sup>4</sup> Ninety per cent of the squires were absentees, and those who were resident tended to be ‘of the traditional Old Anglican persuasion that had little interest in ecclesiological and restoration work’ in their parish churches. Among the clergy Henry Alford (the future Dean of Canterbury) at Wymeswold was the sole incumbent to join the Cambridge Camden Society during the 1840s in order to study the kind of architecture and reordering of churches that accompanied Tractarianism. Some opposition was perhaps stirred up also by the development of the Roman Catholic monastery at Mount St. Bernard in 1835. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that ‘only in isolated pockets of the county was there any sign of enthusiasm for the new churchmanship’.<sup>5</sup> Nor is it surprising that even in the urban centre of Leicester there was no Tractarian incumbent until 1846, after J.H. Newman had already departed from the Anglican fold.

### *St. Margaret’s and the Revd. W.H. Anderdon*

There is a sense in which Leicester, and the parish of St. Margaret’s in particular, was ready for a change of incumbent style in the 1840s. The population of the town had increased rapidly from about 17,000 in 1801 to 48,167 in 1841. Most of the increase had been in St. Margaret’s. The 1828 map shows the church still surrounded by fields; houses stretched along Belgrave Gate only as far as the Public Wharf on the Leicester Navigation. Between Belgrave Gate and Humberstone Road there was still room for Harrison’s Nursery, the cricket ground and a bowling green. Contrastingly, by 1875 the street map shows the parish church surrounded by industry and housing, which stretched well beyond the Public Wharf, and had engulfed almost all of the open spaces between Belgrave Gate and Humberstone Road as far as the Willow Brook and the Midland Railway. In 1896 some of the houses were described as ‘the near relations to the slum’. These parts of the parish consisted of ‘considerable areas of wretched housing in long, dreary streets of the jerry-builders’.<sup>6</sup> Already two new ecclesiastical districts were being formed in parts of the old parish, St. George’s appearing in 1929 and Christ Church in 1843. The old parish church of St. Margaret’s and the two newer

<sup>3</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement*, 77.

<sup>4</sup> C. Brooks, ‘Building the rural church: money, power and the country parish’, in C. Brooks & A. Saint (eds.), *The Victorian Church: Architecture and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 2.

<sup>5</sup> M. Cherry, ‘Patronage, the Anglican Church and the local architect in Victorian England’ in *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>6</sup> Connie C. Crofts, *The Church of St. Mark, Leicester* (Leicester, 1950). This can be found in the Record Office for Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (hereafter LLRRO), DE3839/12/2. See also B. Buchanan & G. Hulme, *St. Mark’s, Leicester* (Leicester, 1996), 11ff.



The Revd. W.H. Anderdon,  
 from A Brief Memoir of The Revd. Fr  
 W.H. Anderdon, S.J.  
 (by permission of The Record Office for  
 Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland.)

churches ministered to some of the poorest people in Leicester.

Between 1831 and 1846 the incumbent of St. Margaret's was Andrew Irvine, an urbane theological graduate of Evangelical convictions, whose ministry was faithful but unexceptional. His death led to the appointment of William Henry Anderdon as his successor. Anderdon, thirty-two years old and a former Bennett scholar at University College, Oxford, eschewed the gentlemanly life-style of most of his contemporaries. He lived in 'carpetless rooms, furnished with the plainest oak, and, even deal'. 'The flowerbeds were sown with beans and planted with cabbages' to distribute to the poor. He preached with eloquence and 'began at once with an increased staff of clergy to visit the poor and especially the sick'. It was soon noted that 'the regular Sunday congregation now filled the church, where benches had replaced the pews'. There was a daily service, the church was open at all times, and there was 'an increase of orderliness and reverence'. One of the churchwardens was 'greatly exercised by the 'Popish antics' of bowing to the altar and turning to the east at the creed', but was so impressed by other aspects of Anderdon's ministry that he

<sup>7</sup> Anon, *Brief Memoir of the Rev. Father W.H. Anderdon, S.J.* (Leicester, 1880), 1-4.

was soon mollified.<sup>7</sup> Anderdon was ably supported by several assistant curates. Among them was Charles Gutch (1848–51), who was to become the vicar of St. Cyprian's, Marylebone, editor of the popular church monthly *New and Old* and one of the best known Tractarian clergy in London.<sup>8</sup>

Anderdon, however, resigned in 1850 to follow Newman into the Roman Catholic Church. He was among those Tractarians who reached out to the apparent certainty of common viewpoints backed by papal authority. Writing to the parishioners from Rome he said:

I went ...to the Fathers of the Church..... And there, statement upon statement of irresistible clearness and force came out in a chain of evidence on points which we have regarded as "Roman corruptions". I would instance, the supreme authority of the See of Rome, and the necessity of union with her; the invocation of Saints; the adorable Sacrifice of the Mass for the living and the dead.

He had been troubled by differences within Anglicanism, 'the shifting chaos of opinions' that 'admit and tolerate schools essentially differing in their exposition of the faith', and believed that 'the Roman unity was the standing miracle of all times'.<sup>9</sup>

Roman Catholicism, however, was not favoured by all Tractarians. They agreed that there was much to admire about it. They were certainly influenced by it. In post-emancipation Leicester the Roman Catholic priests lived in great poverty in order to establish new parishes. It was noted that their influence and prestige had a remarkable effect on people living around the new Holy Cross and St. Patrick's Churches, in which they were able 'to penetrate into the dark courts and alleys where no policeman dare show himself'.<sup>10</sup> Tractarians also recognised 'a common sacramental understanding', appreciated the value of a 'semi-monastic community life' for the development of mission in urban parishes, and stressed the importance of the apostolic succession.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless most of them criticised adversely the ultramontane tendencies that brought papal infallibility.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, not all of them supported the idea of disestablishment. Some Tractarians agreed with many Dissenters about disestablishment, but from a different viewpoint. Dissenters were very much part of the political and social reform movement, supporting without reserve the Great Reform Act of 1832, the subsequent changes in municipal government and the poor law system, and the proposals to reduce the number of bishoprics in Ireland. Tractarians, however, had viewed the intended reforms with alarm, particularly when the new Parliament no longer had a majority of Church of England members.<sup>13</sup> Keble's famous Assize sermon of 1833 underlined concern that he and others had about Parliament with a non-Anglican majority making decisions for and about the Church.

<sup>8</sup> J.E. Hextall & A.L. Brightman, *Fifty Years of Church, Men and Things at St. Paul's, Leicester* (Leicester, 1921), 19.

<sup>9</sup> W.H. Anderdon, *A letter to the parishioners of St. Margaret's, Leicester* (1851).

<sup>10</sup> A.H. Kimberlin, *The Return of Catholicism to Leicester, 1746-1946* (Leicester, 1946), 23.

<sup>11</sup> G. Rowell, *The Vision Glorious: Themes and Personalities of the Catholic Revival in Anglicanism* (Oxford, 1983), 121–3; Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement*, 29.

<sup>12</sup> Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 194.

<sup>13</sup> The general election of 1832 resulted in a large Whig majority, the Tories (who tended to support the Church) being reduced to 150 M.P.s. Dissenters outside Parliament confidently predicted the impending demise of the Church of England. See G. Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England 1832–1885* (London, 1973), 59.

Anderdon had been a worthy representative of this viewpoint.

### *Tractarians and the High Church Party*

It has often been assumed too that Oxford Movement supporters were the logical successors of the pre-1833 High Church Party, that there was a lineal relationship between them, for like them they had upheld apostolic succession and stressed the Church's catholicity. They believed in the supremacy of the scriptures, but treated them more liberally than the early 'fundamentalist' Tractarians. They valued the writings of the early Fathers as expositors of biblical truth. Yet they also had a high view of monarchical authority, stressing the importance of the state as a divinely-ordained entity, and therefore supported the maintenance of the establishment.<sup>14</sup>

In Leicester all the clerical members of the Vaughan family would have described themselves as high churchmen. Edward Thomas Vaughan, vicar of St. Martin's from 1802 to 1929, was chaplain to the unreformed pre-1836 corporation. An ultra-High Church Tory, he declared that 'government is neither of the people nor for the people.... Supremacy in a single person is God's law, and there are no rights but such as he chooses'.<sup>15</sup> His sons, Charles John (1841–44), Edward Thomas (1844–60) and David James (1860–93), were all vicars of St. Martin's, and notably liberal in theology and interpretation of the scriptures. David Vaughan, who was the founder of the Leicester Working Men's College, an idea which had been stirred up by his association with F.D. Maurice, accepted some aspects of Tractarianism, like the apostolic succession and the Church's catholicity.

David Vaughan, however, also came under other influences. He had been a pupil at Dr. Arnold's Rugby, and had noted his headmaster's views about church unity between Establishment and Dissent. He also came under the influence of Edward Atkins, a University of London science graduate, second master at the Wyggeston School, and himself later a clergyman and Leicester incumbent. The result was that, while Vaughan stressed the catholicity of Anglicanism, he also stressed that 'in the beginning the Church was multitudinist in character, permitting a wide variety of belief and practice, and combining elements of congregationalism with those of episcopacy'. Whereas the Tractarians looked to a mythical 'golden' past when the Church was united, he looked to the future, arguing the case for greater freedom for the individual in an age when textual scholarship and higher criticism were yielding new knowledge. He was adamant that 'the Bible, *soundly interpreted*, is very seldom in conflict with the established conclusions of physical science'. As the initial chairman of the Leicester School Board, he disagreed with the Nonconformist advocacy of reading the Bible in school without note or comment, because 'the foundation of our faith as Christians is *not* in an infallible book, but in the living Christ himself'. He was afraid that reading the Bible without guidance would expose children to 'the danger of falling an easy prey to the Romanist on the one side' and 'to the infidel on the other'.<sup>16</sup>

Since Vaughan was the acknowledged clerical leader in Leicester – for some years he

<sup>14</sup> P.B. Nockles, *The Oxford Movement in Context: Anglican High Churchmanship, 1760–1857* (Cambridge, 1994), 25, 86ff.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in A Temple Patterson, *Radical Leicester: A History of Leicester 1780–1850* (Leicester, 1953), 161.

<sup>16</sup> A.J. Allaway, 'David James Vaughan: Liberal Churchman and Educationist', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, XXXIII (1957), 46, 50, 53.

organised a Leicester Clerical Society, and was later rural dean – he was a consistent influence within the area. He remained independent of the Tractarians, yet continued to be friendly with them, and tried to steer them in the direction of ‘reason and conscience’.

Tractarianism made headway in Leicester after Anderdon’s defection, partly because of David Vaughan’s liberalism and the general acceptance of biblical criticism within the movement. Pusey at Oxford had adopted a systematic theology that was ‘based rigidly on the early Fathers, the medieval philosophers and the high church Anglican divines of the seventeenth century, despite his sympathy in the 1820s for German biblical criticism’. Most Tractarians had remained ‘rigidly fundamentalist’ until the 1860s. For many of the next generation, however, there was the influence of men like Vaughan, alongside the publication of *Essays and Reviews* (1860) and *Lux Mundi* (1889), as well as Darwin’s *Origin of Species* (1859), which influenced both Tractarians and High Churchmen and brought them closer together.<sup>17</sup>

### *Tractarianism and Evangelicalism*

There were other factors too which underlined the fact that Anderdon’s short ministry was not to be the beginning and end of the Oxford Movement in Leicester. Important among them were problems within Evangelicalism. There were some strong Evangelical churches in the town. St. Mary de Castro, for instance, where the remarkable Thomas Robinson had ministered from 1778 to 1813, not only maintained its Evangelicalism throughout the nineteenth century, but exported it successfully to the new daughter church of Holy Trinity in 1838.<sup>18</sup> It was indeed a vicar of Holy Trinity, E. Davys, who was instrumental in the formation of a branch of the aggressively Evangelical Church Association in 1867, after a lecture by Dr. M’Neillie in the Temperance Hall on ‘Christian Worship versus Ritualism’. At the same meeting the vicar of Christ Church, A. Isaacs, organised a petition to the House of Lords for the initiation of an anti-ritualist bill.<sup>19</sup> Evangelicalism also continued to thrive in some of the newer Victorian churches in the expanding suburbs of Leicester at St. Peter’s (1874), the Martyrs (1890) and Holy Apostles (1890). On the national scene also, during the early and middle nineteenth century the Evangelicals were still increasing in numbers. In 1853, as D. W. Bebbington notes, they had 6,500 clergymen in England and Wales, more than one-third of the total.<sup>20</sup>

By the 1870s, however, the Evangelical tide was ebbing. The seeds of decline were in evidence as early as the 1820s. At that time its great leaders, men like Simeon and Wilberforce, had grown old. As Elizabeth Jay notes, ‘a new leadership of comparable weight seemed slow to emerge, and was soon to be sapped by the Oxford Movement’. She stated too that ‘the dangers of a religion which regarded the Bible as its supreme

<sup>17</sup> Yates, *Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism*, 36–7.

<sup>18</sup> Anon., *Holy Trinity and its surroundings, 1838–1966* (Leicester, 1966). For information on Thomas Robinson see G.T. Rimmington, ‘Thomas Robinson: Evangelical Clergyman in Leicester, 1774–1813’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 75 (2001), 105–117.

<sup>19</sup> D.M. Thompson, ‘The Churches and Society in Leicester, 1851–1881’, unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Cambridge, 1969, 246.

<sup>20</sup> D.W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989), 106, 152

source and paid scant regard to doctrinal interpretation as offered in the traditional development of church dogma, were increasingly visible'. She concluded that Evangelicalism had 'rendered it [religion] popular, prosperous, and, therefore, worldly'.<sup>21</sup> In Leicester Charles Gutch, in one of his sermons at St. Margaret's in 1850, just after Anderdon had resigned, stated that he was (unlike Anderdon) opposed to 'Romish encroachments'. He insisted that the Anglican course of action 'must be consistent with the Principles of the Reformation', and declared that:

The successors of Venn and Cecil and Newton and Scott and Milner, while in the main, holding their doctrines and adapting their view of truth, failed miserably in exhibiting that holy unction and deep spirituality of mind which characterised these eminent servants of God....Their pulpit discourses partook of the same decline, more suited in many cases, to catch the popular ear than to reach the conscience and affect the heart.

He went on to blame the multiplication of secular duties clergy were expected to perform, and the vast increase in the size of urban parishes, which were 'unfavourable to prayer, devotion, separation from the world, private meditation, a close walk with God'.<sup>22</sup> The inference was that Tractarianism had taken over the dynamic role that Evangelicalism had previously enjoyed.

On the Leicester scene Gutch was perhaps overstating his case, for Evangelical Nonconformity remained strong, and was not wanting in champions. The 1851 religious census indicated that attendance at the nine parish churches was less than at twenty-six non-Anglican places of worship.<sup>23</sup> Moreover there was still much strength in the Evangelical parishes, as we have seen.<sup>24</sup> However, by the 1880s, as Bill Lancaster has observed, the Anglicans, with Tractarians to the fore, were outperforming Nonconformity, building proportionately more churches and filling them with people. St. Mark's, St. Andrew's and St. Paul's', he noted, 'had Tractarian ministers who proved highly successful in attracting large working-class congregations'.<sup>25</sup>

### *Ritualism*

Accompanying the Anglican revival was the growth of a later form of the Oxford Movement known as Ritualism, which included the taking on of architectural forms, styles of church furniture, modes of clerical dress and use of ceremony that hitherto had been especially associated with Roman Catholicism. By the 1860s, Yates noted, churches associated with the Oxford Movement tended to have priests who adopted

<sup>21</sup> E. Jay (ed.), *The Evangelical and Oxford Movements* (Cambridge, 1983), 2–3, 9.

<sup>22</sup> Charles Gutch, M.A., *The Old Paths or Principles of the English Reformation* (Sermon preached in St. Margaret's Church, Leicester, 1850).

<sup>23</sup> G.T. Rimmington, 'Bishop W.C. Magee and the Town of Leicester 1868–1891', *Midland History*, XXIII (1998), 119–135.

<sup>24</sup> Holy Trinity, for instance, had 1,050 sittings and was well attended. Its late Victorian vicar, J.A. Faithfull, relieved St. Mary's and St. Andrew's of about 2,000 of their poorest parishioners through a boundary change. He organised his extended parish into twelve sub-districts, and had no difficulty in finding visitors to work in each of them. See *Holy Trinity* (1966).

<sup>25</sup> Bill Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism: Leicester Working-class Politics 1860–1906* (Leicester, 1987), 67.

the eastward position at the Holy Communion (or the Mass, as some began to call it), wore eucharistic vestments, mixed water with wine, had lighted candles on the altar, used unleavened bread, and incense. The *Directorum Anglicanum*, published in 1858, gave directions for supplementing the 1662 liturgy with Catholic ceremonial.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, because of the strength of Evangelicalism in Leicester, as has been observed above, Ritualism was slower to develop there than elsewhere. There were no local equivalents of St. Barnabas, Pimlico (1850–1) or St. George’s-in-the-East (1859–60) in the midland town. There was, however, as with the Cambridge Camden Society of church restorers, decorators and designers, a ‘desire to turn the churches into houses of prayer and devotion, where men would let their hearts go outward and upward in worship’.<sup>27</sup> James Mason, who, as the first vicar of St. Paul’s (from 1871 to 1911), was to guide a new church and parish into Tractarianism, was especially wary of overt displays of ritual and ceremony. No doubt he had been influenced by William Barber at St. John’s, to whom he had been an assistant curate for five and a half years. Although Barber had definite Tractarian sympathies and firm views about the organisation of visiting in the parish, he ensured that there were never more than two eucharistic celebrations each month – most Ritualists insisted on a eucharist at least every week – and that he and Mason preached in black gowns, just like the Evangelicals.<sup>28</sup> Mason did not wear a chasuble until he had been in office for thirteen years. Daily masses were not introduced until 1863. He did not wear a cope until 1896. No incense was ever used in his time; he was adamant that ‘we don’t want it for the sake of making a nice smell in the Church’.<sup>29</sup> A visitor reporting in the normally hostile *Midland Free Press* in 1886 described church and service as ‘less ornate than I had been led to expect’.<sup>30</sup> However, by 1901, when Mason felt very secure, the *Leicester Guardian* was reporting that ‘the service at St. Paul’s gets about as near to Roman Catholic standards as the Anglican Church could possibly permit’. The reporter noted that ‘the imposing service was gone through with a wealth of choral effect and ceremony’.<sup>31</sup>

There were several factors responsible for the growth of Ritualism in what Bishop Magee had regarded as ‘the capital of Nonconformity’. Firstly, there was a movement throughout the churches for improvements in the spiritual setting of worship. Kitson Clark notes that in the writings of Carlyle, Pugin and Kenelm Digby there was a nostalgia for the middle ages, a period in which it was believed (a little fancifully) that ‘the dominant motives had been supplied by a vivid sense of the Spiritual realities of the Christian faith’.<sup>32</sup> The establishment in 1839 of the Camden Society, with its ‘study of Gothic Architecture and Ritual Acts’, expressed the feeling ‘that medieval churches possessed inner mystical meaning’. Its members represented a swing against the Reason of John Locke toward Romanticism, from the ‘spirit of lawlessness’ that came in with the Reformation to ‘Antiquity, Ancient Religion, the Fathers, the Creeds, Apostolic Tradition, the witness of the Primitive Church’.<sup>33</sup> The Camden Society was reflected in

<sup>26</sup> Yates, *Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism*, 26.

<sup>27</sup> W.O. Chadwick (ed.), *The Mind of the Oxford Movement* (London, 1960), 55

<sup>28</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul’s, Leicester*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>30</sup> *Midland Free Press*, 20 February, 1886.

<sup>31</sup> *Leicester Guardian*, 2 November, 1901.

<sup>32</sup> Kitson Clark, *Churchmen and the Condition of England*, 328.

<sup>33</sup> J. Carrick, *Evangelicals and the Oxford Movement* (Bridgend, 1984), 10, 14, 35–6.

Leicester by the formation in 1855 of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society, inaugurated mainly to promote the ‘study of ecclesiastical architecture’, and in particular ‘the study of Gothic architecture that is associated with the Oxford Movement’. The interest of the clergy, even those who were not Tractarians, can be measured by the chairmanship of Archdeacon T.K. Bonney, and the *ex-officio* appointment to the committee of all the rural deans in the Archdeaconry of Leicester. Between them they attempted to dominate and inspire most of the early work that the Society undertook.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless Ritualism developed slowly at first. Chadwick notes that ‘the new ceremonial began modestly about 1837 and 1838, with little signs like the wearing of a scarf embroidered at the end with crosses’.<sup>35</sup> Pusey, for instance, remained uneasy about overt expressions of Ritualism, and was careful to keep his own leadership within the bounds of prayer book rubric.<sup>36</sup> Mason represented this view in Leicester.

By the final decade of the Victorian era, however, Ritualism became a tide that was impossible to stem. It frequently went well beyond prayer book rubric, flourishing all the more when attempts were made to control it, frequently with public opinion in its favour. For even anti-Ritualists admired certain features of the Oxford Movement. Shaftesbury, for instance, completely lost his long-held faith in Evangelicalism and admitted that the Ritualists seemed to be more zealous in winning people for Christ. Nor was this view entirely absent from Nonconformity. R.W. Dale for instance (the nationally-famous minister of Carr’s Lane Congregational Chapel in Birmingham) although rejecting the ritualistic aspects of worship, noted that, ‘in the lives and devotion of these men a new endowment of the Holy Spirit came into the life of England’.<sup>37</sup> Gladstone noted that, even outside the Church of England there were expressions akin to those of the Oxford Movement. He saw ‘Crosses on the outside of chapels, organs within them, rich painted architecture,....the steeple, windows filled with subjects in stained glass, elaborate chanting’.<sup>38</sup>

There were plenty of evidences of aesthetic enrichment in Leicester’s chapels. As early as 1856 the minister of Gallowtree Gate Congregational Chapel, Dr. George Legge, told his church meeting that ‘he should like to be at liberty to modify the initial services of the sanctuary.....to have one long prayer or two shorter ones.....to have a chant or a sanctus...’ With only one dissident the meeting approved of the ‘introduction of the chant with the service of song’ and agreed to ‘accept any other modification of the

<sup>34</sup> Anon., *The Leicestershire Archaeological Society 1855–1955* (Leicester, 1955), 1–5; see also G.T. Rimmington, ‘The Reverend John Harwood Hill, F.S.A.’, *Leicestershire Historian*, 38 (2000), 20. There is no evidence that all of these clergymen were Tractarians. Indeed, T.K. Bonney, the archdeacon of Leicester, was opposed, as was his successor, Henry Fearon, who in his Charges of 1874 and 1880 acknowledged the Tractarian contribution to the life of the Church, but deplored the tendency to Ritualism, which militated against the hope of reconciliation with Nonconformity, especially Methodism. See Thompson, ‘Churches and Society in Leicester’, 245, and G.T. Rimmington, ‘Methodism and Society in Leicester 1881–1914’, *The Local Historian*, 30 (2) (May 2000), 84.

<sup>35</sup> Chadwick, *The Mind of the Oxford Movement*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> P.T. Marsh, *The Victorian Church in Decline: Archbishop Tait and the Church of England 1868–1882* (London, 1969), 167.

<sup>37</sup> D. Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church: A Study of the Church of England 1833–1889* (Montreal, 1968), 382–4.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted in *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>39</sup> G.T. Rimmington & A. McWhirr, *Gallowtree Gate Congregational Church, Leicester, 1823–1921: a history of the chapel and a list of interments in the graveyard* (Leicester, 1999),

order or method...which the minister may deem proper'.<sup>39</sup> By 1867 London Road was dominated by the neo-gothic structure of Victoria Road Nonconformist Church, with its slender spire. Dr Nathaniel Haycroft, the first (Particular Baptist) minister, who wore academic robes in the pulpit, secured an agreement that the traditional long prayer should be divided and that the chanting of psalms would be introduced.<sup>40</sup> Even the Wesleyans at Bishop Street, conscious of an increasingly sophisticated middle-class membership, introduced more ordered services, including the chanting of psalms and the *Te Deum*, in 1881.<sup>41</sup> The development of Ritualism in some of the Leicester churches needs to be seen, therefore, within this context.

### *The Bishops*

There was also the attitude of bishops, who, aware of the good pastoral work performed by Ritualist priests in poverty-stricken urban parishes, often disliked attempts to curb Tractarianism. They were in any case prevented by the system of private patronage and clerical security of tenure from doing much to counter its inroads. Yates has noted that 'some of the moderate high church bishops were totally ambivalent in their attitudes. What they might say publicly to reassure the critics was not followed by any real action'. Understandably they tended to sympathise with the Ritualist exaltation of the episcopal office. Many of them believed that they had been 'forced to exercise authority which the State could not [since the Great Reform Act of 1832] in the direction of ecclesiastical affairs'.<sup>42</sup> Bishops like Samuel Wilberforce also favoured Tractarianism because it helped to initiate a pastoral revolution in the Church. As the social influence of the bishops waned, so the new emphasis on the apostolic succession gave them an alternative source of authority.<sup>43</sup> Attempts at control, like the Public Worship Regulation Act 1874 and various legal actions brought both before and after that legislation were doomed to failure. Archbishop Davidson, giving evidence before the Royal Commission on Ecclesiastical Discipline in 1904, was convinced that it was the imprisonment of four clerics, popular in their parishes, which was highly influential in changing public opinion. This was echoed by the report of the Commission in 1906, which, while it deplored certain aspects of Ritualism, nevertheless concluded that 'the law of public worship in the Church of England is too narrow for the religious life of the present generation'.<sup>44</sup>

In Leicester, between 1868 and 1891 episcopal control was exercised by Dr. W.C. Magee, the Bishop of Peterborough. Magee was soon alienated from his Evangelical roots by a meeting with the Church Extension Society in Northampton, where he was faced, as he expressed it, by a 'royal exhibition of the narrowness and suspiciousness and bitterness of Evangelicalism on the vexed question of the patronage of the new churches'. By 1876 he had to admit that he no longer belonged to any one Church

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<sup>40</sup> G.T. Rimmington, 'Victoria Road Church, Leicester: A Victorian Experiment in Ecumenism', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 71 (1999), 76.

<sup>41</sup> Rimmington, 'Methodism and Society in Leicester', 83; Yates, *The Oxford Movement and Anglican Ritualism*, 33.

<sup>43</sup> Bowen, *The Idea of the Victorian Church*, 29; S.C. Carpenter, *Church and People 1789-1889: A History of the Church of England from William Wilberforce to 'Lux Mundi'*, (London, 1953), 261ff, 399.

Party. On the one hand he was disturbed by Ritualism, seeing ‘the great historical High Church...more and more identifying itself with men who are utterly untrue to its best traditions’. On the other hand he shrank even more, with unconcealed dislike, from the ‘vulgar, bitter, ignorant Puritanism’, with its ‘incredibly foolish attacks on things perfectly harmless and clear to many a loyal Churchman (i.e. the eastward position)’. He accused the Evangelicals of forcing an ‘alliance between the High Churchmen and the extremest Ritualism’.<sup>45</sup>

Despite his annoyance with the Evangelicals Magee tried to be even-handed in making or recommending appointments. When he was handed a memorial signed by 208 laymen about his supposed preference for Tractarian appointments, he responded by saying that he had also had a memorial from 888 communicants expressing confidence in his impartiality. He was able to show that by March 1873, ‘out of 21 benefices to which he had then appointed, seven, totalling in value £3,200 a year, had been given to Evangelical clergymen, the other two Church Parties combined having had fourteen livings, total value £3,900’.<sup>46</sup>

When Mandell Creighton succeeded Magee as Bishop of Peterborough in 1891 he continued the even-handed approach of his predecessor. He fell in with the wishes of the Chapter and adopted the eastward position at the Cathedral altar, but would not have wished to impose it. He regarded the Church of England ‘as a distinct branch of the Catholic Church’. In answer to the question of how much the Oxford Movement would be permanently incorporated into Anglicanism he answered diplomatically that it would be ‘as much as is compatible with the maintenance of that system as founded on a view of the Church which safeguards liberty’.<sup>47</sup> He stated in correspondence, after his translation to London, that:

My sympathies are genuinely with every form of opinion, and that my object is to bring them all into close union, without asking them to compromise, but only to be large-hearted. Differences do not matter, but the way in which we express them.<sup>48</sup>

At times he was made to seem more biased toward the Ritualists than in fact was the case. He vetoed the prosecution of two of his Ritualistic clergy, and was brusque in replying to a letter from the extreme Evangelical J. Kensit, stating with considerable force:

Christian charity prescribes tenderness and patience in dealing with conscientious convictions. I regret that the tone of your letter implies that neither wisdom nor charity has any place in your considerations.<sup>49</sup>

On the other hand, his opposition to ‘Roman ways’ (he was very critical of Roman Catholicism as a priest-dominated Church), his insistence that ‘the Church of England rests on an appeal to sound learning’ and was ‘the Church of free men’, and his friendly relations with Nonconformists, brought about a quiescence within his diocese that was not matched elsewhere. As Fellows notes: ‘The Peterborough years were the

<sup>44</sup> Rowell, *The Vision Glorious*, 132–3.

<sup>45</sup> J.C. MacDonnell, *Life and Correspondence of William Connor Magee*. 2 vols. (London, 1896), II, 13–4, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul’s, Leicester*, 44.

<sup>47</sup> W.G. Fellows, *Mandell Creighton and the English Church* (London, 1964), 87.

<sup>48</sup> L. Creighton, *Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*. 2 vols. (London, 1904), II, 55, 261.

<sup>49</sup> Fellows, *Mandell Creighton and the English Church*, 102–3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

calm before the storm'.<sup>50</sup> Creighton himself stated in 1896 that: 'The diocese is in great peace and nothing of importance awaits me'.<sup>51</sup>

Bishop Edward Carr Glyn, who followed Creighton, continued in the same even-handed way. He declared at the twentieth diocesan conference in 1899:

A Church that has a place...for a John Keble, and Edward Pusey, for Henry Venn, and Hugh McNeill, for Frederick Maurice and Arthur Stanley, will have representatives today whose view of Christian truth must be respected so long as they are faithful to the Church of our reformed Anglican Communion... what we want to reach is that more comprehensive toleration of each other's minds – that real desire to understand the true position of our antagonists.<sup>52</sup>

There can be no doubt that the even-handedness of the bishops had an effect on the clergy. Magee apparently 'earned the right to be regarded not only as a spiritual father but as an undoubted, if occasionally candid, friend'. Creighton struck up a 'warm friendship' with James Mason at St. Paul's that led to an honorary canonry for the Tractarian vicar in 1906.<sup>53</sup>

### *Ritualism and the poor*

The Oxford Movement was fortunate also in the development of a relationship with people who were poverty-stricken. Charles Booth, in investigating the attitudes of the poor in Wapping toward organised religion, noted that 'the saintly self-sacrificing life [of the Ritualists] is that which strikes the imagination of the poor as nothing else does'.<sup>54</sup> For some of the Ritualists this necessarily meant also an alliance with Labour politics. During the later nineteenth century there were three Anglican Socialist organisations in England, the Guild of St. Matthew, the Church Socialist Union and the Church Socialist League, all with overlapping membership; Lewis Donaldson, who became noted for his work in Leicester as a Ritualist vicar was a leading member of each of them. The most important and enduring of these organisations was the GSM, founded by Stewart Headlam in 1877. In 1885 a new branch was founded at Oxford by Henry Carey Shuttleworth, described as 'a jolly, back-slapping, high-living, broad-minded, liberal athletic Anglican parson', with the support of his assistant curate, Frederick Lewis Donaldson. This new branch was a 'tiny, clerical-minded and exclusive pressure group', but through people like Donaldson it wielded far more influence than its membership might suggest.<sup>55</sup> Alongside it the Church Social Union was primarily a church society, dedicated to spreading the word of socialism within

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>52</sup> *Peterborough Diocesan Calendar* (1900), 373.

<sup>53</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul's, Leicester*, 41–3.

<sup>54</sup> Bowen, *Idea of the Victorian Church*, 297.

<sup>55</sup> P.d'A Jones, *The Christian Socialist Revival 1877–1914: Religion, Class and Social Conscience in Late Victorian England* (New Jersey, 1968), 116–120. Shuttleworth became rector of St. Nicholas Cole Abbey in the City and Lecturer in Pastoral and Liturgical Theology, King's College, University of London, in 1883. Donaldson graduated from Merton College, Oxford, in 1884. He was Shuttleworth's assistant curate during 1884–6. Thereafter he held three other curacies in London, before becoming rector of Nailstone with Barton-in-the-Beans in 1895–6. He became vicar of St. Mark's, Leicester, in 1896. See *Crockford's Clerical Directory* for relevant years.

the churches.<sup>56</sup> The CSL was much more radical, proposing that the Church should contribute funds to make old age pensions possible, and even suggesting that the Church should subscribe to the Independent Labour Party in order to abolish the existing socio-economic system.<sup>57</sup>

In Leicester Donaldson, who declared that ‘Christianity is the religion of which socialism is the practice’, and insisted in his *Socialism and the Christian Faith* that socialism was a ‘glorious principle of organic growth’ showing ‘development from lower to higher conditions of life and organisation’, opted for direct action.<sup>58</sup> He was, ‘with Amos Sherriff, G. Bibbings and George White (all three of them newly-elected members of the Leicester Board of Guardians) instrumental in the leadership and organisation of the local unemployed demonstrations and processions that began in the winter of 1904–5’ and ‘culminated in the June 1905 march of 470 unemployed shoemakers to London’. Donaldson not only encouraged the shoe operatives in this ill-fated venture – for all the authorities they went to see in London were not there, except for the Archbishop of Canterbury, who refused to see them – but appointed himself their chaplain. He accompanied them all the way, frequently addressing them and organising hymn-singing to keep up their spirits.<sup>59</sup>

Donaldson was not alone in his identification with the poor, though he was more explicit than most. James Mason, a tall, bearded man with an athletic figure, the vicar of St. Paul’s, for instance, at the request of all the parties concerned, acted as an arbitrator during a serious dispute in the shoe trade in 1895, averting a strike in the process. It was noted too that he ministered with compassion to the sick and dying during a smallpox epidemic, and that he was known to give ‘the hospitality of his vicarage from time to time to poor chaps “down on their luck”’.<sup>60</sup>

Because of the ministries of men like Mason and Donaldson it was said that ‘wherever there was a strike to be settled, a dispute arbitrated, the unemployed ministered to, it was invariably an Anglican incumbent who was first on the scene’.<sup>61</sup> More than any other branch of Anglicanism it was the Ritualists who did most to ensure that there was a revival of the Church of England, and, for the first time in the nineteenth century, to measure up to the strength of Nonconformity in Leicester.

What the Ritualists achieved was a relationship with the community that rivalled that of the Methodists. The Wesleyans at the time had regular open-air meetings in Welford Place, which attracted many people, while the Primitives were founding chapels by initially preaching out-of-doors.<sup>62</sup> Yet there was much competition for the hearts and minds of the poor at Donaldson’s St. Mark’s. The culmination of the march of the unemployed to London was a service to celebrate ‘the combination of spiritual power’. Before the service began ‘people streamed into the building.....filled the capacious aisles, crowded the little chapel near the chancel, climbed into the organ and choir loft, and hung upon the west-end in such numbers that sitting accommodation was all but out of the question’. The unemployed men, with ‘the music of the bands...heard playing them down Belgrave Gate’, marched ‘at full-strength to meet their “chaplain”, who had invited them to a solemn celebration of the Holy Eucharist

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 218.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 258

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

<sup>59</sup> Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, 175.

<sup>60</sup> Obituary of the Revd. James Mason in *Church Times*, 12 July 1912.

<sup>61</sup> Lancaster, *Radicalism, Cooperation and Socialism*, 74.

<sup>62</sup> Rimmington, ‘Methodism and Society in Leicester’, 79.



The Revd. F. L. Donaldson, with Amos Sheriff and George White, leaders of the Leicester Unemployed March to Work (by permission of Mr. P.A. Morton.)

as a thanksgiving for their safe return'. It was noted that 'fully a thousand must have been present' to hear Donaldson preach on 'Dives and Lazarus'.<sup>63</sup>

There were, however, dangers in Donaldson's close relationship with a particular political stance. If Ritualism had developed a formal link with Labour politics it would have lost the appeal it had also for middle-class people (even more than working-class people), and been limited, therefore, to churches in predominantly working-class areas. Despite Donaldson's popularity the fact was that both nationally and locally all churches, including those of the Ritualists, had become by 1914, as Bowen says,

‘identified almost completely with the middle class in the public mind’. After World War I ‘the working class, which began to assume political power, was never directly identified with the Church or its mission to society’.<sup>64</sup> More and more the ideals of working-class people were directed toward seeking salvation through good works rather than through worship, even the colourful worship of the Ritualists. In Leicester there were several ‘Labour churches’, whose members rented public halls for socialist lectures that were entirely lacking in a worship element. A contributor to the *Primitive Methodist Magazine* noted the ‘increasing materialism of the Labour movement’ and ‘the purely material interpretation of life [that] so far dominated the Labour churches as to unfit them for any great spiritual leadership’.<sup>65</sup> Most incumbents, therefore, tended to concentrate on building up the Eucharistic community, by introducing Ritualism gradually into the services and by developing the pastoral aspects of ministry.

### Conclusion

At St. Margaret’s, after the departure of Anderdon for the Jesuits in 1850, Timothy Jones, who was the incumbent for a quarter of a century, ‘had to walk with exceeding wariness for many a year’, though he worked faithfully to follow in Anderdon’s footsteps.<sup>66</sup> But at the new church of St. Andrew, almost in the shadow of the Leicester Infirmary, the first vicar, Andrew Spital (1862–74), began immediately to follow Tractarian lines, though it was not until the arrival of Leonard Matthew in 1914 that St. Andrew’s acquired the accoutrements of Ritualism. The eucharist became ‘the principal act of worship’ and there were ‘such accompaniments of vesture, ceremonial and music as befitted the service of Almighty God’.<sup>67</sup> In 1876 Hugh John Fortescue arrived ‘to shake up the excessively dry bones of the Church and Parish of St. George’.<sup>68</sup> When the new church of All Souls’ was established in 1906, it was built by G.F. Bodley, R.A. in modern gothic, with a high altar and two side altars, which reflected ‘the architect’s own strong Catholic opinions and his faith and that of the donors in the sacramental teachings of the Church’. It was a Ritualist church from the very beginning, established and developed as such by Cornelius Carleton, the vicar from 1906 to 1926.<sup>69</sup> By 1925 J.R. Collins had even turned St. Mary de Castro, the parish church of the great Evangelical Thomas Robinson, into a Ritualist stronghold. Despite the protestations of Bishop Bardsley, Collins insisted on using Roman Catholic liturgy for the eucharists.<sup>70</sup>

Herring charts the progress of Ritualistic development nationally. He notes that in 1882 ‘there were 581 churches where candles were lit and 336 in which vestments were worn’; by 1904 there were more than 2,000 Ritualistic churches.<sup>71</sup> Quantitative

<sup>63</sup> *Leicester Daily Post*, 26 June 1905.

<sup>64</sup> Bowen, *Idea of the Victorian Church*, 398.

<sup>65</sup> R.F. Wearmouth, *Methodism and the struggle of the working classes 1850–1900* (Leicester, 1954), 102–5; Rimmington, ‘Methodism and Society in Leicester’, 83.

<sup>66</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul’s, Leicester*, 20.

<sup>67</sup> Anon., *100 Years of Service 1862–1962: St. Andrew’s, Leicester*.

<sup>68</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul’s, Leicester*, 37.

<sup>69</sup> LLRRO/DE3386/23/1. *A Story of the Church of All Souls’, Leicester* (1949).

<sup>70</sup> LLRRO/DE1683/62/1. Newspaper cutting relating to disciplining of St. Mary de Castro Parish by Bishop Cyril Bardsley, n.d.

information on the Leicester churches is lacking, but it is known that in 1919, according to the *Church Times*, there were:

at least eleven Churches in the City of Leicester, out of thirty-eight, with a sung Mass on Sundays as the main service, with the Eucharistic vestments in common use; St. Paul's, St. George's, St. Stephen's, St. Andrew's, St. Mark's, All Souls', St. Anne's, St. Hilda's, St. Leonard's, St. Saviour's and St. Luke's; whilst in the first four the use of incense will be found.<sup>72</sup>

The religious climate within which the Ritualist churches existed in the early twentieth century was certainly different from that of the 1870s and 1880s. In 1874 and in 1882 there were public meetings in Leicester to condemn the formal use of confessions.<sup>73</sup> By Edwardian times these protests had faded. There had been many efforts to bring about reconciliation between the parties in the Church. As early as 1851 George Finch, a Leicester layman, who had been dismayed by the Anderdon defection, noted that 'thousands of the clergy.....and hundreds of thousands of the laity in the Church of England, essentially agree in all the fundamental articles of Christianity'.<sup>74</sup> On Trinity Sunday in 1881 the Evangelical first vicar of St. Peter's, Francis Robinson, following an idea expressed by Bishop J.B. Lightfoot at the Leicester Church Congress (1880), argued in a sermon that parties 'have always existed in the Christian Church' and that each 'contributes an important element of truth'. They were not 'exponents of rival theories of Christianity', but were designed to teach 'different sides of one great truth'.<sup>75</sup> In 1888 William Romanis, the Ritualist vicar of Wigston Magna, read a paper to his deanery chapter, in which he stated that:

The right attitudes of Christians...towards change in matters of religious life, is neither one of blind hostility, nor of equally blind and capricious welcome, but of calm and careful examination of its character... It should be growth, or reform... The Church which cannot reform itself...has ceased to grow.<sup>76</sup>

These and other similarly expressed sentiments did much to quieten the opposition and to introduce a new spirit of tolerance in Anglicanism which valued the biblicism of the Evangelicals, the spirituality of the Tractarians, and the liberalism of those who were at neither extreme. One Methodist historian in Leicestershire referred to 'the changed form of worship and spirit in the Established Church', which he hoped would lead to large-scale defections to Wesleyanism.<sup>77</sup> Instead, however, the result was that aspects of the Oxford Movement, instead of remaining distinct from Anglicanism as a whole, became part of the practice and spiritual stock of the Church of England. By the 1930s most priests had adopted the eastward position at the altar, used unleavened

<sup>71</sup> Herring, *What was the Oxford Movement*, 92.

<sup>72</sup> *Church Times*, 10 October, 1919.

<sup>73</sup> Hextall & Brightman, *St. Paul's, Leicester*, 44.

<sup>74</sup> George Finch Esq., *Second Letter to one of the Parishioners of St. Margaret's, Leicester* (London, 1851).

<sup>75</sup> G.T. Rimmington, 'Bishop W.C. Magee, the Reverend F.W. Robinson and a new late Victorian Parish in Leicester', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, 73 (1999), 63.

<sup>76</sup> William Romanis, M.A., 'Change and Continuity in Church Life', Paper read to the Deanery Chapter of Guthlaxton I, 18 December, 1888. Leicester Pamphlets, 5, at LLRRO.

<sup>77</sup> J. Gill, *History of Wesleyan Methodism in Melton Mowbray and the Vicinity, 1769-1909*

bread, mixed water with wine and wore seasonal stoles (even if they avoided chasubles) during Eucharistic services. Moreover there was a much more general appreciation of the need for contemplation, for periods of silence and retreats. Even Ernest Payne, a Baptist Union general secretary, conceded that the 'Oxford Movement entirely changed the ecclesiastical situation in England'.<sup>78</sup> This was certainly true in Leicester.

### **Personal details**

Dr. Gerald T. Rimmington was Professor of Education, Mount Allison University, Canada, until 1981, when he resigned to enter the full-time Anglican ministry. He retired as Rector of Barwell in 1995. Since 2000 he has been an Honorary Visiting Fellow in the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism at the University of Leicester. He is Chairman of the Committee of this Society.

(Melton Mowbray, 1909), 17.

<sup>78</sup> E.A. Payne, *The Free Church Tradition in the Life of England* (London, 1944), 112.