

# Historical Notes

A reappraisal of the reliability of the 1676 'Compton Census' with respect to Leicester  
by David Wykes

The 'Compton Census' is important as the first comprehensive survey of the numerical strength of Catholic and Protestant Nonconformity that can be used on a comparative basis for the whole country. The return was made on the instructions of Sheldon, Archbishop of Canterbury, who was concerned for political reasons with the numerical strength of religious dissent from the Established Church. There are, however, serious doubts about its construction and even its veracity. The main dispute centres on the basis of the calculations used by the Clergy in their returns. In the estimates of the numbers of conformists in their parish, did the clergy include servants? And were their calculations based on the number of families, or adults over the age of sixteen years or only adult males? There is evidence to suggest that the bases of calculations differ throughout the country and even within individual dioceses.<sup>1</sup>

For most counties in the Province of Canterbury it is necessary to use an eighteenth-century copy of the return which survives in the William Salt Library<sup>2</sup> but fortunately for Leicestershire, the majority of the original returns survive amongst the Archdeaconry Records.<sup>3</sup> Surviving with them are the instructions from the Bishop of Lincoln to his Archdeacon at Leicester and copies of Archbishop Sheldon's letter to Compton, and the Bishop of London's letter to his fellow bishops as Dean Provincial.<sup>4</sup> Although the Bishop of Lincoln had originally thought that only adult men were to be included in the returns of conformists, his error was rectified in a second letter to the Archdeacon in which it was specifically stated that the Archbishop of Canterbury intended that 'women above 16 years of age are to be likewise returned',<sup>5</sup> and the return for All Saints' Parish, Leicester, makes it clear that all men and women over the age of sixteen years were included.<sup>6</sup> This was the normal basis for such diocesan returns and had been used in 1603 for the return of the number of conformists, popish recusants and dissenters. In addition, sixteen years and under was the legal limit for prosecutions under the penal laws. In the case of the Archdeaconry of Leicester, the Bishop was specific on this point and there are strong grounds for believing the clergy obeyed this instruction, but it is clear that not all Bishops were so particular, and the basis of the calculations for other dioceses must be examined independently.

The instructions issued to the clergy required three questions to be answered:—

- 1<sup>st</sup> What number of persons are there by common Account & estimation inhabiting within each parish subject to your jurisdiction?
- 2<sup>dly</sup> What number of Popish Recusants or persons suspected for such Recusancy are there resident amongst the Inhabitants aforesaid?
- 3<sup>dly</sup> What number of other Dissenters are there in each parish of what Sect soever which either obstinately refuse or wholly absent themselves from the Communion of the Church of England at such times as by Law they are required?<sup>7</sup>

There are two main opinions held relating to the reliability of the returns: historians who feel the number of dissenters was deliberately underestimated for political reasons,<sup>8</sup> and those who

believe that the returns are a reasonable enumeration of the number of *active* nonconformists.

Dr. Peyton, for Kesteven in Lincolnshire, made a comparison of the 1676 return with the number of individuals presented for not attending church in the civil courts during the years 1674 to 1679 and in the church courts for 1675-6. He concluded from this comparison that the Compton return, for Kesteven at least, 'gives a reasonably correct account of the prevalence of active dissent'.<sup>9</sup> Dr. Spufford for Cambridgeshire found that the Compton returns recorded far more dissenters in the Diocese of Ely than the visitation returns for 1679 and 1682. She therefore concluded that the return for parishes in the Ely Diocese gave 'a more complete record of the strength of dissent in the diocese than any other which is available'; but she doubted whether it could be used to estimate population as, compared with estimates derived from the 1664 Hearth Tax returns, the figures for the total population appeared too small.<sup>10</sup>

One of the problems of using presentments for identifying nonconformists is the inconsistency with which those presentments were made by churchwardens or constables. This is not very surprising since they were yearly or two-yearly appointments for an onerous and often unpopular parish office for which even nonconformists could be eligible. To obtain the most comprehensive picture possible of the number of individuals presented for nonconformity (and therefore the probable number of active nonconformists), it is necessary to take rather more than a couple of years of presentments in the courts. Even the most persistent and active Quaker or Baptist in Leicester was not consistently presented throughout the period 1662-1686, at every visitation and every quarter session.

In contrast to Peyton and Spufford, Dr. Judith Hurwich concluded in her study for Warwickshire, following a comparison of the percentage of identified Dissenters' households in the 1670 Hearth Tax Returns with the Compton Returns, that the latter were 'an underestimate even of the most visible Dissenters'.<sup>11</sup> Chalkin came to a similar conclusion in his study of the returns for the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester.<sup>12</sup> and he thought the main use of the return was as a guide to the extent and distribution of population in the late seventeenth century.<sup>13</sup>

TABLE I

Comparison of the original returns for Leicester with the William Salt MS.

<i>Leicester Parishes</i>	LEICESTER RETURNS <sup>14</sup>						WILLIAM SALT MS <sup>15</sup>			
	<i>Popish</i>		<i>Schismatic</i>			<i>Conformists</i>	<i>Papists</i>	<i>Dissenters</i>	<i>Conformists</i>	
	<i>Recusants</i>	<i>Recusants</i>	<i>Recusants</i>	<i>Recusants</i>	<i>Recusants</i>					
	M	W	M	W	S	M	W			
All Saints	—	—	6	6	3	145	186	—	15	331
St. Leonards	—	1	1	1	—	39	63	1	2	102
St. Martins	2	1	6	6	2	382	528	3	14	910
St. Marys	—	—	—	3	—	160	235	—	3	395
Trinity Hospital	—	—	—	—	—	72	37	—	—	109
St. Nicholas	—	—	2	6	1	74	103	—	9	177
St. Margarets	NO RETURN FOUND									
	M: Man			W: Woman			S: Spinster			

An examination of the original returns for Leicester suggests that the clergy carried out their instructions conscientiously and that the results are reliable when the basis of the calculation used is recognised; which is not necessarily clear from the summary of the returns provided by the copy in the Staffordshire Record Office.<sup>16</sup> There are no suspicious roundings of final totals of conformists returned for Leicester parishes (unlike the return for Hinckley), but unfortunately no return for the independent Peculiar of the Prebend of St. Margarets has been found and it is doubtful whether one was ever returned despite the Bishop of Lincoln's efforts

to ensure that even the Peculiars responded.<sup>17</sup> The absence of the St. Margarets return makes an estimate of the town's population for 1676 difficult, as an increasing, but unknown proportion of the inhabitants was residing in the suburbs that made up the parish. The Leicester returns do provide an indication of the ratio between male and female in the general population, which has been submerged in the Salt MS.

TABLE II

Comparison of the number of independent nonconformist adults active in Leicester during the 1670s with the Compton returns (1676)

	<i>Independent Adults presented 1670s</i> <sup>18</sup>	<i>Adults over 16 years 1676*</i> <sup>19</sup>	<i>Nonconformists as a proportion of the estimated population of Leicester</i>	
			<i>1670s</i> %	<i>1676*</i> %
Quakers	14	—	1.4	—
Baptists	8	—	0.8	—
Roman Catholics	1	4	0.1	0.2
Unspecified	<u>93</u>	<u>43</u>	<u>9.3</u>	<u>2.1</u>
Total	<u>118</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>11.6</u>	<u>2.3</u>
Number of adults			<u>990-1020</u> <sup>§</sup>	<u>2,024</u> <sup>+</sup>

\* — Return for the Peculiar of St. Margarets, Leicester missing.

§ — Number of male adults estimated from 1670 Hearth Tax Returns.<sup>20</sup>

+ — Total number of adults over the age of sixteen years returned.

An examination of the 1676 Returns with the estimated number of independent adult nonconformists (they are not strictly comparable as the former is supposedly all adults over the age of 16 years and the latter only independent adults presented in the courts during the 1670s — not dependents, and only wives when separately presented from their husbands) shows some divergence of result between the two figures (see Table II). The 1676 returns although separating Popish Recusants from Dissenters do not differentiate between the Dissenting denominations, and the figure for the percentage of Dissenters only equals that for Baptists and Quakers in the estimate for the 1670s. The clergy, however, were instructed to count all Popish Recusants, but only those Dissenters who 'either obstinately refuse or wholly absent themselves from the Communion of the Church of England at such times as by Law they are required',<sup>21</sup> which should then not have included occasional conformists. The 1676 Return does, therefore, only include the most persistent 'schismatic' or non church-attender, and while it may be an indication of the strength of the more extreme nonconformist sects, the Quakers and perhaps the Baptists, it is clearly unsatisfactory in estimating the more discreet dissenters or the total number of nonconformists.

However unsatisfactory the results may be for historians the returns made by the Leicester clergy in 1676 do appear to have been reasonably accurate in their replies to Archbishop Sheldon's three questions. It is unfortunate that Sheldon, apparently for political reasons, was concerned with the return of all Catholics, but only the most obstinate Dissenters. The suggestion has been made that many Dissenters conformed at the time of the Return under the threat of persecution which was believed would follow.<sup>22</sup> Besides ignoring the point that Sheldon's third inquiry was limited in scope by not including all shades of Dissenters, this argument also disregards the fact that many Presbyterians were occasional conformists with the Established Church from conscience rather than necessity, a feature of nonconformist life, in Leicestershire at least, certainly as late as 1721.<sup>23</sup>

Paradoxically, the returns of Papists may be too high. The return was made at a time of intense popular fear of a Catholic threat, however unlikely, resulting from the Duke of York's second marriage and the widespread belief in his conversion to catholicism. These events led up to the Popish Plot and the associated panic which swept even Leicester in November 1678. Sheldon asked for the 'number of Popish Recusants or persons *suspected* for such Recusancy'.<sup>24</sup> Only one individual, John Hewitt, a cooper living in St. Martins parish, was presented for being a Popish Recusant in the Archdeaconry Courts.<sup>25</sup> A number of other individuals were presented for being recusants, but they were Quakers. Four individuals, a woman in St. Leonards and two men and a woman in St. Martins (probably John Hewitt, his wife and his eldest son, Edward) were returned as Papists. The woman in St. Leonards parish was not presented in the courts as a Papist. The apparent discrepancy for Leicester is minor, but evidence suggests that for some other parts of the country many individuals were wrongly 'suspected for such Recusancy'.<sup>26</sup> The return did provide one important contemporary service for the government and those individuals rational enough to see the evidence. It demonstrated that the Catholics were too weak to provide an alternative base of political support or to provide any widespread armed threat to a Protestant country and its succession.<sup>27</sup>

The evidence for Leicester suggests that the main use of the Compton Returns is in providing a contemporary estimate of population, but unfortunately the missing return for the Peculiar of St. Margarets prevents any reliable figure for Leicester from being made. To produce an estimate of the total population for each parish it is necessary to make an allowance for the unrecorded section of the population, mainly children under the age of sixteen years, but also possibly servants (though in the case of Leicester it would appear from Sheldon's instructions that clergy should have included servants over the age of sixteen years in the return). The figure for the number of adults is usually increased by a further 40% to provide an estimate of the total population. The Compton Returns are, unfortunately, less helpful to the historian in providing an estimate of the number of Dissenters in the general population, largely because of the limited terms of reference given in Sheldon's third question. A comparison with the number of independent nonconformist adults presented in the civil and ecclesiastical courts during the 1670s suggests the returns only included the more extreme separatists, the Quakers and Baptists. The evidence would suggest, though, that the Papists may be over-estimated in some dioceses, because of fears of a Catholic threat, but in the case of Leicester this is not serious.

#### APPENDIX: County list of Compton returns already published.

Dr Anne Whiteman of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, has been involved for a number of years in editing the Salt MS for publication, which is expected to be published shortly.

The following list cannot be considered exhaustive.

Returns published from the Salt MS 33:—

DERBYSHIRE: J.C. Cox 'A Religious Census of Derbyshire, 1676' *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society* (1885) VII, 31-36

DIOCESE OF EXETER: R. Stanes, 'The Compton Census for the Diocese of Exeter. 1676'. Part I & II, *Devon Historian*, (1974) No.9, 14-27; (1975) No.10, 4-16

KENT: C.W. Chalkin, 'The Compton Census of 1676: The Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester', *A Seventeenth Century Miscellany, Kent Records* (1960) XVII

LEICESTERSHIRE: W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Religious Census in Leicestershire in 1676', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (1887) VI, 296-303; Population totals only for each parish published in *Victoria History of the County of Leicester* (London, 1955) III, 173-4

LINCOLNSHIRE: A.S. Langley, 'A Religious Census of 1676, A.D.' *Lincolnshire Notes & Queries* (April 1920) XVI, No.2, 33-51

**SHROPSHIRE:** W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Religious Census of Shropshire in 1676', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological & Natural History Society* (1889), 2nd ser. I, 75-92

**SUSSEX:** J.H. Cooper, 'A Religious Census of Sussex in 1676', *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (1902) XLV, 142-8

**WARWICKSHIRE:** S.C. Ratcliff & H.C. Johnson (eds.), Quarter Session Records Easter, 1674, to Easter, 1682, *Warwick County Records*, VII (Warwick, 1949) lxxviii-cii

**DIOCESE OF WORCESTER:** Anon., 'Diocese of Worcester, A.D.1676 (Extracted from the Census of the Province of Canterbury, Anno 1676, in the Salt Library, Stafford. (W. Salt, MS 33)', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports & Papers*, (1885-6) XVIII, pt.1, 69-75

Lambeth Palace Library, MS 639:—

**DIOCESES OF CANTERBURY, SALISBURY & WINCHESTER:** G.L. Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence* (London, 1911) I, 20-27 [Canterbury], 127-36 [Salisbury], 147-8 [Winchester — summary of the returns only]

**BERKSHIRE:** W. Money, 'A Religious Census of the County of Berkshire in 1676', *Berks., Bucks. & Oxon. Archaeological Journal* (1889) IV, 112-5 & (1900) V, 55-9

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Tanner 144:—

**DIOCESE OF CARLISLE:** F.G. James, 'The Population of the Diocese of Carlisle in 1676', *Transactions of the Cumberland & Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society* (1952) LI, 137-41

Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS Tanner 150:—

**NOTTINGHAMSHIRE:** E.L. Guilford, 'Nottinghamshire in 1676', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society* (1924) XXVIII, 106-13

#### Notes

1. M. Spufford, 'The Dissenting Churches in Cambridgeshire from 1660 to 1700', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society* (1968) LXI, 94-5; T. Richards, 'The Religious Census of 1676. An Inquiry into its Historical Value, Mainly in Reference to Wales', *Supplement to the Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* (1927) 14-30. A now rather dated account of the historical background to the return is provided by Dr. Richards in *Ibid.*, 1-11
2. *Staffordshire Record Office* Salt MS 33, Province of Canterbury; *Bodleian Library*, Oxford Tanner MS 144 & 150, Province of York
3. *[Leicestershire] R[ecord] O[ffice]* 1D 41/43/2-164. Returns for the deaneries of Akely, Christinity, Framland, Gartree, Goscote, Guthlaxton (Foxton Parish only) and Sparkenhoe. Returns also survive for a few parishes in the rest of the Diocese of Lincoln, K. Major, *A Handlist of the Records of the Bishop of Lincoln* (London, 1953), 35
4. 1D 41/43/164; Printed by A.P. Moore as an Appendix to his 'Leicestershire Livings in the Reign of James I', *Associated Architectural Societies Reports & Papers* (1907) XXIX, pt.1, 158-60; A copy of Sheldon's original letter to Compton was published by D. Wilkins, *Concilia Magnae Britanniae et Hiberniae* (London, 1731) IV, 598 and reprinted by A. Browning (ed.) *English Historical Documents, 1660-1714* (London, 1953), 411-2. In instructing his fellow bishops, Compton only sent a copy of the questions and the first part of Sheldon's letter, and although in substance the same as the original, the letter circulated by Compton was markedly different in phraseology. It is possible that Wilkins's transcript was inaccurate. The copy sent to the Bishop of Peterborough was identical to that sent to his colleague at Lincoln and circulated to the Archdeacons, 'Miscellany: The Compton Census — Peterborough', *Local Population Studies* (1973) No.10, 71-2
5. 1D 41/43/164, Henry Symmons (on behalf of the Bishop of Lincoln) to the Revd. Dr. Outram, Archdeacon of Leicester. The notebook of the Revd. John Palmer, Archdeacon of Northampton, recording the original returns for the Diocese of Peterborough together with copies of Sheldon's and Compton's letters and the original questions survive, *Northamptonshire Record Office*, Fermor Hesketh, Baker MS 708 (I should like to thank the Chief Archivist, Mr. P.I. King, for his assistance in describing Palmer's Notebook). It is clear from a note made by Palmer that some incumbents returned the total number of inhabitants, some the number of communicants and others the number of families. Memorandum published in *Local Population Studies*, 1973, 74
6. 1D 41/43/26

7. 1D 41/43/164 [contractions extended]. The questions listed by Sheldon in his original letter differ in one important respect from those issued by Compton. The Archbishop's first question asked 'What number of persons, or at least families, are by common account . . .' [my italics], A. Browning, 1953, 411
8. Originally suggested by Dr. Richards, *op. cit.*, 4-5, 47
9. S.A. Peyton, 'The Religious Census of 1676', *English Historical Review* (1933) XLVIII, 101. Sir George Clark doubted the relevance of Peyton's findings and supported Richards's opinion that the returns underestimated the number of dissenters, G.N. Clark, *The Later Stuarts 1660-1714* (Oxford, 1934) 26. Peyton's conclusions, however, were corroborated in a similar study of Warwickshire, where the returns were also compared with Quarter Session presentments for the years 1674 to 1682. S.C. Ratcliffe & H.C. Johnson (eds.), *Warwick County Records*, VII (Warwick, 1949), lxxviii-lxxix, lxxxiii-cii
10. M. Spufford, 1968, 94
11. J. Hurwich, 'Nonconformists in Warwickshire, 1660-1720', unpublished Ph.D. Princeton (1970) 183. She feels the evidence from denominational records shows that many individuals, even Quakers, were never presented in the courts for nonconformity, and suggests the figure may be as high as two-thirds of all Dissenters.  
This appears not to be entirely the case for Leicester. An examination of Quaker records (the best documented of the principal nonconformist denominations), as part of a wider study I am making of nonconformity in Leicester, suggests the presentment of Quakers in the archdeaconry and civil courts was remarkably comprehensive. Analysis of the wills of individuals making bequests to nonconformist meetings, their ministers or their poor reveals that Presbyterians and Independents were presented far less widely during the same period
12. C.W. Chalkin, 'The Compton Census of 1676', *Kent Records* (1960) XVII, 185
13. *Ibid.*, 174
14. 1D 41/43/26-30
15. W.G.D. Fletcher, 'Religious Census in Leicestershire in 1676' *Transactions of the Leicestershire Architectural and Archaeological Society* (1887), 298
16. Chalkin believed the figure of conformists was calculated by subtracting the number of papists and nonconformists from the inhabitants, but this seems incorrect for Leicester at least, C.W. Chalkin, 1960, 154
17. 1D 41/43/163, 6 February 1675/6, Bishop of Lincoln to the Archdeacon of Leicester. The Bishop stated that he had instructed the Dean of Lincoln to obtain returns from the peculiars within his jurisdiction, but no returns for St Margaret's parish have been found amongst the Lincoln Diocesan Records, (correspondence with the *Lincolnshire Archives Office*)
18. Calculated from the number of individuals presented at the Borough Quarter Sessions (*LRO*; BR/IV/1/7-17) and in the Archdeaconry Correction Courts (*LRO*; 1D 41/13/68-82) for nonconformist offences, such as not attending church or refusing the sacraments. It is important to use both types of court presentments, when available, as many individuals were only presented in the one court. This in part invalidates the evidence used by Peyton and the Warwickshire study.  
Individual Baptists and Quakers identified from denominational records and occasional references in the court presentments
19. 1D 41/43/26-30
20. *PRO*: E 179/240/279
21. 1D 41/43/164
22. C.W. Chalkin, 1960, 157-8; W.B. Stevens, 'A Seventeenth Century Census', *Devon & Cornwall Notes & Queries* (1956-8) XXVII, 228; R. Stanes, 1974, 14. This was also the opinion of contemporaries
23. St. Paul's Cathedral Library MS 17.D.20 & 17.C.2 (1718 & 1721) Returns to Bishop Gibson's visitation articles (copy at *LRO*: Microfilm V/5), *vide*: Bowden Magna, Foxton, Glooston and Packington (1718) and Narborough and Hinckley (1721)
24. 1D 41/43/164 [my italics]
25. 1D 41/13/81 f7 [Sept. 1674]
26. C.W. Chalkin, 1960, 159
27. J. Miller, *Popery and Politics in England 1660-1688* (Cambridge, 1973) 87-8, 143

### Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle 1809-1878

by Bernard Elliott

The most important event in the history of Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century was the establishment of the hierarchy in 1850. This completed a process that had been gradually developing for many years, the replacement of lay by clerical control. In the eighteenth century, the Catholic aristocracy and gentry had to a great extent directed the affairs of the Catholic Church in England and it was as much lay dominated, as was the Anglican Church after 1660.<sup>1</sup> But with the decline of aristocratic power in the nineteenth century, the influence of the clergy increased correspondingly and in 1850 the establishment of the hierarchy led to the eclipse of lay influence and the Catholic Church in England became completely dominated by the clergy.

One layman in England who felt this changing atmosphere was a Leicestershire aristocrat, Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle, squire of Garendon and Gracedieu, near Loughborough. The establishment of the hierarchy in 1850 was as much a turning point in de Lisle's career as it was in the life of the Catholic Church in England at large. Up to that point de Lisle had worked for the revival and promotion of Roman Catholicism in complete sympathy with its leaders, such as Bishop Walsh and Bishop Wiseman. But from 1850 onwards, especially after the ideas and principles of the Ultramontanes, such as Manning, Talbot and W.G. Ward came to dominate the Church, de Lisle found himself at odds with the hierarchy on several important issues.

de Lisle had been born an Anglican, but while still only a boy of fifteen had been received into the Catholic Church.<sup>2</sup> His conversion to Catholicism, though made when young, was to prove the most important action of his life, for after that, like most of his Victorian contemporaries, his main interest lay in the sphere of religion, especially in the revival and growth of Roman Catholicism. Although he married in 1833,<sup>3</sup> Laura Clifford, a member of one of the oldest Catholic families in England, de Lisle in many ways opposed the ideas and methods of the old conservative Catholics.

One way in particular in which he differed from the old Catholics was that he wished to make Catholicism known to the English public. To the old conservative Catholics, this was unwise. They feared that any outward display of their religion would revive the ill-feeling and prejudice of Protestants.<sup>4</sup> Some of them could still remember the Gordon riots of 1780 and were afraid of a repetition. So, they kept themselves to themselves in what Faber felt was a chronic and unreasonable timidity.<sup>5</sup> Such was de Lisle's opinion also of the old-established Catholics and in three ways he worked to make his countrymen aware of Catholic practices. First of all, in 1835 he established the Cistercian monks at Mount St. Bernard's Abbey near Whitwick. The monastery was to be an appeal to the people of England,<sup>6</sup> but when de Lisle first told his bishop that he was planning to erect a monastery near his home, Bishop Walsh did not fall into raptures of joy. He was a cautious cleric of the old type and advised de Lisle not to call the building a monastery nor his community monks, but 'in order to avoid public hostility to call them an agricultural and philanthropic Community and above all things to avoid the wearing in public of the monastic habit and cowl.'<sup>7</sup>

The second way in which de Lisle hoped to spread a knowledge of Catholicism in England was by inviting missionary priests of the new Italian orders, such as the Rosminians and Passionists to England. Once more this development ran counter to the wishes of the born Catholics who distrusted these foreigners. Some of the old priests especially disliked the idea of foreign priests being brought into England to convert their countrymen. The most eminent of English priests, Dr. Lingard, felt that 'Wiseman should send away those swarms of Italian congregationists who introduce their own customs here and by making religion ridiculous in the eyes of Protestants prevent it from spreading here.'<sup>8</sup> What Lingard especially disliked was the carrying of the Cross or Crucifix in procession and the practice of sprinkling congregations with holy water.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the opposition of Lingard and the born Catholics, de Lisle invited the Rosminians to England in the person of Dr. Gentili, who from de Lisle's home at Gracedieu, where he was chaplain, proceeded to preach to the people of North Leicestershire and as a result many people in that area became Roman Catholics.<sup>10</sup> de Lisle worked hand in glove with Dr. Gentili to achieve this object, but he saw to it that the priest obeyed his instructions. On one occasion, when Dr. Gentili opposed de Lisle's wishes, the latter did not hesitate to put his chaplain in his place. Dr. Gentili usually said two Masses on a Sunday at Gracedieu chapel, but to save Shepshed people the trouble of having to walk all the way to Gracedieu for Mass, he arranged that after saying the first Mass, he would go to a house in Shepshed and say the second Mass there. Unfortunately, he did not consult de Lisle about the change of routine. So, on his return from Shepshed, he was confronted by a very angry and excited person who shouted at him: 'From now on I forbid you to say Mass at Shepshed.' When Dr. Gentili replied that he would continue to say Mass at Shepshed, the irate de Lisle retorted: 'Very well! From this day you cease to be my chaplain.'<sup>11</sup>

On another occasion, de Lisle quarrelled with members of the Rosminian order. They proposed to withdraw several of their priests from North Leicestershire so that they could establish a house in Birmingham. When de Lisle heard of this proposal, he vetoed it at once and threatened to withhold the money that he provided annually to Bishop Walsh for the upkeep of various parishes in the Midlands. Even though the Rosminians had already found accommodation in Birmingham and had even bought the linen for their house, Bishop Walsh ordered them not to proceed with their plans, for he simply could not afford to lose de Lisle's financial contributions. The thought that a layman should dictate to a priest his line of action infuriated the Rosminian superior, Fr. Pagani, who wrote to Bishop Walsh as follows:

'How sad it is to see lay people boldly enter the sanctuary and with abominable audacity make decisions, pass judgements and condemn the Lord's anointed masters in Israel and claim to direct those from whom they should seek direction and to make laws for those from whom they should think themselves lucky to receive them. If Mr de Lisle had been given the duty of directing the Institute of Charity and the Bishop of the District I do not think that he could use stronger language than the way he speaks every now and again in these matters. . . This makes me all the more anxious to be independent of this gentleman, who has indeed a great zeal for religion, but it is not always according to knowledge.'<sup>12</sup>

The third way in which de Lisle differed from the old Catholics was in regard to the Oxford Movement. They took little interest in what was happening in the Church of England and though the Oxford Movement stressed the Catholic aspect of the Anglican Church, the old Catholics, such as the Earl of Shrewsbury, they paid little attention or showed little sympathy to it. Not so, de Lisle — for his Anglican background helped him to understand the significance of the movement for Roman Catholicism in England. Thus, almost alone of all the Roman Catholics in England, he took an active interest in the Oxford Movement and deeply sympathised with its members over their religious difficulties.<sup>13</sup> In particular, he displayed the utmost charity and kindness towards Newman, whom he visited on 19 October 1842, along with Dr. Gentili, his wife Laura and their two eldest sons, Charles Ambrose and Everard.<sup>14</sup> Thus, de Lisle struck up a friendship with Newman which continued to the end of his life, in the course of which Newman visited Gracedieu several times.

In these aspects of his work for Roman Catholicism — publicity, invitation to Italian missionaries and concern for the Oxford Movement — de Lisle had the full support of Dr. Wiseman, who, like de Lisle, was free from the prejudices of born Catholics. Wiseman, too, wished to draw the hereditary English Catholics out of the seclusion and insularity into which they had been driven by three centuries of penal laws;<sup>15</sup> he, too, alone among the bishops welcomed the Italian missionaries with the same vision that had made him welcome the

converts of the Oxford Movement.<sup>16</sup> Thus, in the first part of his public career, de Lisle found himself completely in harmony with the ideas and policy of the leading members of the Catholic Church in England.

When Pope Pius IX decided to establish the Roman hierarchy in 1850, it did not meet with the entire agreement of the Catholic laity in England. In fact, the old Catholic families were against it and several important noblemen voiced their opposition in no uncertain terms. Lord Beaumont called it an ill-advised measure and the Duke of Norfolk went so far as to leave the Catholic Church altogether.<sup>17</sup> But de Lisle welcomed the restoration of the hierarchy and wrote with enthusiasm to Wiseman, offering his most dutiful homage of respect and congratulations. Nevertheless, he felt that the restoration might have been done in a more conciliatory and prudent manner, without necessarily offending 'the prejudices of stupid John Bull, who is of so mad a disposition that the mere sight of a Cardinal's Hat sets him beside himself.'<sup>18</sup>

For the next few years after the restoration of the hierarchy, especially as Wiseman's health declined and Manning's influence increased, de Lisle found himself at cross purposes with the leaders of the Roman Catholic Church in England; and it was over three issues in particular that this unfortunate situation arose: the reunion of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches, the attendance of Catholics at the universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the Bulgarian atrocities.

Almost from the moment of his conversion to Roman Catholicism, de Lisle worked for the reunion of the Anglican and Roman Churches. Thus, in 1838, along with another convert, George Spencer,<sup>19</sup> he inaugurated the Crusade of Prayer for the conversion of England, in which Anglicans, as well as Roman Catholics, were asked to pray for the restoration of Christian unity.<sup>20</sup> This movement continued for several years and in 1844 de Lisle with his wife and two sons toured the continent so that many continental Catholics became involved in the Crusade.<sup>21</sup> Then interest in it flagged for several years, but suddenly in 1857 it sprang once more into life and this time it was called the Association for the Promotion of the Unity of Christendom. As might be expected, de Lisle was the most influential Catholic in the movement.<sup>22</sup> The changing character of English Roman Catholic opinion towards the Anglican Church under the influence of the Ultramontanes is well illustrated by Wiseman's attitude to the new movement. To the Crusade of Prayer he was most sympathetic and interested, but to the A.P.U.C. he was completely opposed. In fact, he sent the Congregation of Propaganda a long memorandum in which he expressed his whole-hearted disapproval of the Association; and in due course Rome condemned the A.P.U.C. in September 1864 when Propaganda informed Wiseman that Roman Catholics were no longer to be allowed to be members of it.<sup>23</sup> So, de Lisle withdrew from it, realising that the papal order was the death blow to his hopes for the reunion of Christendom in his own day and for years to come.

One reason why de Lisle was anxious to promote the reunion of the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches was to enable Catholics to have greater influence in the universities. But the Ultramontane leaders of the Catholic Church in England were opposed to the attendance of Catholics at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>24</sup> Hence the strange situation arose that while Roman Catholics were no longer banned by the Government from attendance at the universities, since they no longer had to subscribe to the Thirty Nine Articles, their own bishops now sought to stop them from studying there. de Lisle, like many more Catholic laymen, was definitely opposed to the ban and felt that at least they should have a voice in the education of their sons. Indeed, several of them met at Lord Castlerosse's house and signed a memorial, which was sent to Rome, asking for permission for a Catholic College to be established at Oxford.<sup>25</sup> But Pope Pius IX, influenced by the Ultramontanes, such as Manning and Ward, turned a deaf ear to the request of the laity and so the idea of establishing a Catholic College at Oxford came to nought. In a letter to Newman, written on 22 February 1865, de Lisle made known his feelings about

Manning and the Ultramontanes. He called them a petty, narrow-minded clique and went on to say: 'You will have seen how bitterly we, who signed Lord Castlerosse's memorial, have been assailed, as if we were Traitors to the Faith and some men have in consequence drawn back, like Edmund Coffin,<sup>26</sup> recanting in such abject terms that one might almost fancy he was shrinking from an auto da Fé. . . But what insane idiots these fellows must be.'<sup>27</sup> But despite the efforts of de Lisle and other laymen to have the ban removed, it remained in operation during de Lisle's life-time and indeed almost to the end of the century. In 1896, however, this ill-judged measure was repealed by Pope Leo XIII, so that henceforward Roman Catholics could attend the national universities.<sup>28</sup>

Towards the end of his life de Lisle again found himself in conflict with Manning. In 1876 occurred the Turkish massacre of the Bulgarian people and as a result there was in England a widespread agitation, led by Gladstone, to protest against the Turkish atrocities. Manning, however, taking his lead from the Pope, was absolutely opposed to the agitation and supported Disraeli's policy of favouring the Turks.<sup>29</sup> Once again de Lisle found himself at variance with Manning, for de Lisle now became the leading Roman Catholic to support Gladstone in the agitation campaign. So, at Gladstone's request, de Lisle wrote to Manning asking him to change his attitude to the Eastern Question so that he would agree with the agitation in favour of the Bulgars.<sup>30</sup> But de Lisle's appeal made not the slightest impression upon Manning, who continued his policy of complete opposition to the agitation. In fact, Manning bluntly told de Lisle that Gladstone's agitation was a disaster, whereupon de Lisle retorted with a letter to him, expressing both disappointment and regret.<sup>31</sup> That a layman should have the audacity to question his policy was anathema to Manning, who again refused to change his attitude to the Eastern Question and once more insisted that Gladstone's agitation was misplaced. This brought from de Lisle a spirited defence of Gladstone, in which he informed Manning: 'I have never shrunk from expressing my convictions, and if I continue to serve the Church as I have served her for 50 years, I must do so as a free and outspoken Englishman.'<sup>32</sup>

Thus, in the later part of his career, de Lisle's ideas ran counter to those of the Ultramontane leaders of the Catholic Church in England, particularly Manning. Hence, his contribution to the growth of Roman Catholicism in the nineteenth century has been to some extent ignored; but that he played a decisive and important role in this development is beyond doubt. As Newman wrote to Laura de Lisle on hearing of her husband's death: 'He has a place in our history, and a place altogether special.'<sup>33</sup>

#### Notes

1. *History*, vol.63, no.207, 124: J.P. Kenyon's review of J.H. Aveling, *The Handle and the Axe*, (London 1976)
2. E.S. Purcell, *Life and Letters of Ambrose Phillipps de Lisle* vol I (1900), 14
3. *Ibid.*, 53
4. Owen Chadwick, *The Victorian Church*, Pt.I (1971), 271
5. *Ibid.*, 282
6. Purcell, *op. cit.*, 74
7. *Ibid.*
8. Chadwick, *op. cit.*, 277
9. M. Haile and E. Bonney, *Life and Letters of John Lingard* (1912), 306. Quoted in B. and M. Pawley, *Rome and Canterbury through four Centuries* (1974), 149
10. C. Leatham, *Luigi Gentili*, (1965), 135-6
11. *Ibid.*, 142
12. *Ibid.*, 194-6
13. Purcell, *op. cit.*, 196

14. *Diary of Ambrose's wife, Laura de Lisle* (Ms in the possession of Squire de Lisle), *sub. anno* 1842
15. Cuthbert Butler, *Life and Times of Bishop Ullathorne* (1926) vol.I, 190
16. Brian Fothergill, *Nicholas Wiseman*, (1963), 133
17. B. and M. Pawley, *op. cit.*, 167-8
18. Purcell, *op. cit.*, 329
19. Son of Lord Spencer of Althorp House, Northamptonshire — joined the Passionists in 1836
20. Purcell, *op. cit.*, 172
21. *Ibid.*, 117
22. *Ibid.*, 373
23. *Ibid.*
24. V. A. McClelland, *English Roman Catholics and Higher Education, 1830-1903* (Oxford, 1963), 189-190
25. *Ibid.*, 215
26. At one time tutor to de Lisle's children and later Bishop of Southwark
27. Westminster Cathedral Archives, 22 February 1865
28. McClelland, *op. cit.*, 400
29. R. Shannon, *Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation, 1876* (Hassocks, 1975), 191
30. *Ibid.*, 197
31. *Ibid.*
32. Purcell, *op. cit.*, vol II, 159-60
33. *Ibid.*, 370