LEICESTERSHIRE LOLLARDS

by

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Henry Crumpe,2 an Irish Cistercian, in 1382 wanted a word to describe the Oxford associates of John Wyclif. He chose to call them Lollards, and was as a consequence suspended from all academic exercises and from preaching in the university, on the grounds that he had, thereby, caused a disturbance of the peace.3 Lollard had the force of a dirty word, but it stuck, and was extended in scope and meaning to cover all English heretics. Five years later, in 1387, the bishop of Worcester called the heretics in his diocese Lollards4, disciples of anti-Christ, and followers of Mohamet. The poet John Gower5 used the word in 1390. About the same time, or not much later, heretics in Leicester were also so described by Knighton, but he went further, and said that they were the disciples of Wyclif: “sicque a vulgo Wycliff discipuli et Wyclyviani sive Lollardi vocati sunt”.6

It is interesting that the word Lollard should have been known at all in England, for it originated in the Low Countries, in a Middle-Dutch word lollaerd, first meaning a mumbler or babbler of prayers. It had, therefore, some of the connotations of the later word Ranter. In its Latin form, Lollardi, it was applied as a term of abuse in the early-fourteenth century to the Béguines and Beghards, and this must have been the association aroused when Henry Crumpe first used it in Oxford. The word soon acquired further symbolism. By analogy with the word lolium (tares), Lollards came to be looked upon as those who sowed tares in the Lord’s wheatfield.7 This was the emphasis in Chaucer’s lines “I smelle a loller in the wynde . . . who wolde sprengen kokel in our clene corn”;8 the same notion is implicated in the title of that well-known collection of anti-Lollard works known as Fasciculi Zizaniorum (Bundles of Tares). What began as a term of abuse from opponents was, as happened in other religious groups, eventually accepted by those to whom it was applied. English Lollards extended and deepened the symbolism of the word by analogy with the Middle-English word loll (to hang or sprawl). Hence in a Lollard tract, ascribed to John Purvey, we read: “the most blessed Loller that ever was or ever shall be, was our Lord Jesus Christ, for our sins lolling on the rood tree”.9 Lollard10 became an English word, and in the fifteenth century local heretics were almost exclusively referred to as Lollards and not Wyclifites. But were the Lollards Wyclifites? That is the question.

I

In a recent paper in Transactions, I had occasion to speak of the myth of John Wyclif,11 of the contrast between the paucity of what we really know about him, and the enormous mountain of posthumous idolatry and vilification. It was there suggested that amongst many doubtful points about Wyclif and his work was the problem of his relationship to the Lollard
movement usually considered to be his brainchild. The Lollards were, so to speak, the close followers and interpreters of Wyclif. The connection between these two, the leader and the led, goes back to the chronicles and to official hand-outs of Wyclif’s own day. It made good sense to account for the spread of heresy in various parts of England in the 1370s and the 1380s by laying everything at the feet of one master heresiarch, John Wyclif: he was to blame. He was the scapegoat who could indeed be held responsible for even more, for the subversion that showed itself in the Peasants’ Revolt in 1381, which contemporaries were not slow to point out. Significantly the first large-scale action against Wyclif’s Oxford adherents and against popular Lollardy comes in the year after the Peasants’ Revolt, and coincides with the advent of the new energetic archbishop, William Courtenay, who had succeeded the murdered Simon Sudbury. The execution on Tower Hill of an archbishop of Canterbury by a mob in London cold hardly pass unnoticed by the hierarchy of the Church. Once episcopal nerves had been restored, extensive investigations were set in motion to find out what was wrong, and to take action appropriate to the discoveries made. Those who seek usually find. Much was wrong.

To put the blame on to one person, John Wyclif, was easier than to look at the general state of the Church of the time and the low standard of education of the clergy, or to analyse the deeper causes of social and economic discontent and distress which had resulted in the events of 1381. Spokesmen for the Government and for the Church thus fixed the pattern of explanation which was copied by the chroniclers, and continued, but for different reasons, by John Foxe who was the real creator of the Wyclif mythology. He saw Wyclif as the “morning star”, who stimulated his Lollard followers, and who by sending out his “Poor Preachers” in russet gowns, began an evangelical tradition that reached down to Foxe’s own day. Foxe worked hard, as few others have done, on the sources for Lollard history, many of which have since perished, but by the time he had finished his monumental Book of Martyrs there was no doubt in his mind, nor would there be in those of his readers, that Wyclif was the founder and fountainhead of a vast religious movement. This picture, of John Wyclif as a fourteenth-century St. Francis of Assisi or John Wesley, has passed into the lore of English history and has been accepted by later historians. Some, like James Gairdner12, were not sympathetic to what Lollardy stood for, and were doubtful of its continuity into the sixteenth century, but they accepted the close connection with Wyclif. Others were sympathetic to Wyclif and to Lollards: H. B. Workman, in his two-volume biography of Wyclif,13 wrote a lengthy chapter on Wyclif’s “Poor Priests”, and regarded their work as crucial to the legacy of the master.

As to so much else a mortal blow was dealt to this over-simple view by K. B. McFarlane, in one incisive chapter of his John Wycliffe and the Beginnings of English Nonconformity.14 A research student of his, Margaret Aston, later wrote a crucial paper on the convergence in Lollardy of heresy and sedition from 1381 to 1431.15 Another research student, J. A. F. Thompson, followed with a study of the later Lollards,16 in which he
examined much new evidence over a wide area. Professor A. G. Dickens and also Margaret Aston have made notable contributions to our understanding of the problem of Lollard survival and revival. The most recent discussion of Lollardy, by Doctor Gordon Leff, sees Wyclif and English Lollardy in the wider context of European heretical sects, but though he makes some shrewd and penetrating observations, with such a wide sweep he is inclined to simplify, and on the question of the origin of English Lollardy he is somewhat superficial.

"Lollardy", he writes, "is the outstanding example in the later middle ages of popular heresy as the direct outcome [italics mine] of learned heresy. Wyclif had already travelled the path from heterodoxy to dissent; and what he transmitted to his followers was dissent made. Its subsequent evolution as Lollardy made it more extreme and violent. It moved farther and farther away from Wyclif's outlook so that he would have certainly disowned it by the time of Oldcastle's rising in 1414, if not before, as he had denounced the violence of the Peasants' Revolt in 1381. Nevertheless he was its progenitor, and its inception, though not its subsequent development, was from him."

"This is not to say that Wyclif founded the Lollards as a movement; only a social revolutionary, which Wyclif was not, would have done that".20

The crux of the problem is to relate an intellectual movement to a popular movement. What is desperately needed is a fuller treatment of the early Lollards than is to be found in McFarlane or Aston or Leff, on the lines followed for the later Lollards by Thompson, area by area, but with much greater attention paid to the underlying religious ideas that motivated Lollards. Lollardy after all was a religious movement, and it is too easy to forget this when handling records that are primarily from hostile sources, usually in the form of proceedings against those suspected. There is sense in commencing such a study of Lollardy with Leicestershire, because it has an important place in Lollard history, as the scene for Wyclif's last three or so years' work at Lutterworth.21 We ought, therefore, to be able to say something about the relationship of academic to popular Lollardy from such a study. We can also see something of the emergence of Lollardy as a phenomenon in town and country, and, most particularly, see what it all means in the context of a local community. It should be possible to establish what degree of strength and continuity there was over the period of years, during which Lollardy moved slowly to the radical phase which over-reached itself in the Oldcastle Rebellion. The degree of continuity and affinity between Lollardy and later movements of dissent can only be hinted at when something has been said about the nature of Lollardy as an expression of religious life and thought in England.

II

The first question to be asked is what sources are available for an enquiry of this sort; how complete, how reliable are they, what are their limitations? The sources are of three kinds: official records; ecclesiastical and governmental; local records; and narrative sources. Of the official
records, the ecclesiastical ones are the prime source, and they are mainly the relevant bishops' registers at Lincoln, together with the happy, unique survival of a visitation of the archdeaconry of Leicester by Bishop Philip Repyngdon in 1413.\textsuperscript{32} For the metropolitical visitation of Archbishop Courtenay in 1389 the Canterbury registers must be used, the relevant parts which were printed long ago by the indefatigable David Wilkins.\textsuperscript{33} More recently, the entire visitation has been made the subject of a monograph by an American professor.\textsuperscript{34} It is primarily in the field of ecclesiastical records, and particularly below the level of bishops' registers that the possibility still remains of discovering new material about Lollards. There may well be Court Books or other Miscellanea, not yet examined, in which cases of Lollards can still be found. The absence of Lollard material in bishops' registers may only mean that Lollards were being dealt with by archdeacons or by other officials.

Absolute silence in ecclesiastical records may simply mean that, as long as Lollards were not too vociferous, they were left in peace. From governmental records we may learn of the efforts of the central authority, at the instigation of the Church, to get to grips with the spread of Lollardy, and when it had become a challenge to the security of the realm in the Oldcastle Rebellion, the commissioners of enquiry in Leicestershire, as in other counties, left behind considerable materials that can be found in the collection of Ancient Indicments\textsuperscript{35} in the Public Record Office, together with the subsequent proceedings before the king's bench (Coram Rege rolls).\textsuperscript{36} Local records open the field to a wider variety, the sort collected in the Leicester Borough Records,\textsuperscript{37} or in Hamilton Thompson's Records of the Wyggeston Hospital,\textsuperscript{38} or in that rich mine of information, George Farnham's Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes.\textsuperscript{39} All these give a good deal of local colour and coherence to the story. Lastly, there are the narrative sources, mostly chronicles.

Whatever the sources, they still have to be weighed and evaluated, and even when error has been removed, and bias taken into account, there are still too many tantalising gaps and inadequacies for the ground to be as firm as we should like. Most of the sources at our disposal are, of course, hostile to Lollards; the chroniclers make no bones about their dislike of heresy; the official records, whether lay or ecclesiastical, are of enquiries or of trials, where there is a great deal of common form, official and impersonal, behind which it is difficult to penetrate and to see Lollards as people, allowed to speak for themselves or able to pour out their hearts and minds without the inhibiting medium of officials or of clerks. Much of Lollard activity was, in the nature of things, secret and clandestine and thus a ready prey to misrepresentation, and Lollards were often simple unsophisticated folk who could be easily confused and overawed under interrogation. There were, of course, some significant exceptions to this, e.g. Master William Thorpe in his exchange with Archbishop Arundel.\textsuperscript{40} We have little, and from Leicestershire as far as I know, nothing that comes with certainty straight from the pen of a Lollard. The corpus of surviving Lollard literature is regrettably small, and it is to be found in the volumes
of Wyclif’s so-called English writings and a few other printed and manuscript works. Even so these writings have been unduly neglected. The fuller picture of Lollard beliefs and activities has to be extracted from these and from those writers who wrote to refute Lollard beliefs, men like the Carmelite, Thomas Netter or Bishop Reginald Peacock, who are more reliable guides than might, at first sight, be thought. Their refutations tell us much of the nature and variety of Lollard doctrines and beliefs.

It is fortunate that of the great contemporary chronicle sources one, that of Henry Knighton, is as local as the man himself, and his account makes lively and good reading. Henry Knighton was an Austin Canon at the abbey of St. Mary-in-the-Meadows in Leicester, and his account must be scrutinised with care and attention. He disliked Lollards intensely. Of the other sources much can be learnt from Thomas Walsingham, the Benedictine monk of St. Albans, who is the greatest historian of that period, and a little from the anonymous Franciscan who compiled the Continuation of the Eulogium Historiarum. Outside these the most important narrative source, which is not a chronicle, is the Carmelite collection known as Fasciculi Zizaniorum. This invaluable source book provides material not found in Knighton. It need hardly occasion surprise, that the chronicler in Leicester Abbey, writing in the thirteen-nineties, should fail to mention the rôle played by Philip Repyngdon in early Lollard history. He too was a local man, probably from Repton on the boundary of Derbyshire and Leicestershire, who, in his youth, had become an Austin Canon in Leicester Abbey. By the time Knighton was writing his chronicle, Philip Repyngdon, had outlived his Wyclifite phase, and returned to his abbey, where he was thought of sufficiently highly to succeed as abbot in 1393. It would hardly have been proper or wise for an Austin canon, even one who was an historian, to tell in his chronicle the full story of the early chequered career of his own abbot. Later on, after a successful period as abbot of Leicester and, indeed, chancellor of Oxford University, Repyngdon was to become bishop of Lincoln. We shall have much to say of him later in his dealings with the archdeaconry of Leicester which fell within his diocese. Let it suffice here to say that as a bishop he was exemplary, one who had so overcome any suspicion of his orthodoxy as to be made — a rare distinction for England — a cardinal, by Pope Gregory XII in 1408, although he never used the title. Leicestershire Lollards were, as we shall see, not above reminding their diocesan of his earlier religious sympathies, but Repyngdon was to the end a just and holy man, whose scorn of worldly pomp and desire for simplicity in his own funeral arrangements would have come up to the expectations of even the most exacting Lollard.

Leaving aside Knighton’s difficulties in dealing with the history of his own abbott, it is necessary to look closely at what he writes, in order to see some of the assumptions that lay behind his work. He was writing as an old man, whose memory (particularly for dates) sometimes failed him, but as one who had, at least, been an eye-witness in Leicester of many of the events he describes, and who must have known most of the people involved. We do not know if he had ever seen Wyclif, but he knew of him
as a distinguished doctor of theology, and he could have learnt much from Philip Repynddon of the academic merit of the man whom he described as “in philosophy second to none, without peer in the discipline of the schools”. Knighton considered that Wyclif had gone off the rails and introduced ideas long condemned by learned men, ideas attacking the very roots of civil and ecclesiastical order. He repeats twice that John Ball, the Kentish hedge priest, who played such an important rôle in 1381, was the precursor of Wyclif, in the same way as John the Baptist, was of Christ. The emphasis is clear and important.

Knighton qualifies much of what he says about Wyclif with phrases like ut dicitur, but he was accepting causal connections, already widely assumed when he was writing up these events, and which were designed to show the ill-effects of the religious agitation of his day. Neither he nor his contemporaries were careful in their attributions of authorship. He does not, for example, exactly say that Wyclif translated the whole scriptures, but he does say that Wyclif “translated into the English, not an angelic tongue, the gospel that Christ committed to the clergy and doctors of the Church, that they might administer it gently to laymen and infirm persons according to the requirements of the time and their individual wants and mental hunger”. Knighton was more concerned to speak of results than of origins. For him, it was enough that lay men and women were now reading and expounding the scriptures in a way that formerly had been the prerogative of clerks of understanding and learning. The Gospel, he said, was “now like pearls cast forth and trodden by swine”. And for this he held Wyclif responsible. He went on to say that the Gospel had been twisted by Wyclif and these new innovators in the same way that Spiritual Franciscans had taken up the Gospel and turned it into the Eternal Gospel of Joachim of Fiora. This idea Knighton had acquired from a reading of William of St. Amour.

Knighton summarises the opinions of Wyclif which were condemned in 1382; supplies two mysterious English versions of the Confession of Wyclif on his view of the Eucharist; tells the story of the conversion of a Lollard knight, Cornelius Clowne, and gives in full the bishop of Lincoln’s injunctions issued in 1382 at the request of the archbishop, to search out heretics and heretical books in the archdeaconry and religious houses of Leicester. It is all somewhat of a hotch-pot. Then follows his account of the leading followers of Wyclif: Nicholas Hereford and John Aston, then John Purvey, whom he called the fourth of the heresiarchs. Silence is maintained over Repynddon. He treats his subject topically, and does not bother even to tell his readers when Wyclif died. There is much that we would like to know of Wyclif’s three years at Lutterworth, but at that point Knighton fails us, and we can only piece it together imperfectly from other sources. The important point is the significance for Leicestershire Lollardy of the sojourn of Wyclif in the rectory at Lutterworth.

Wyclif worked at Lutterworth during those years with an incredible frenzy, in spite of a stroke which partly paralysed him sometime in 1382. A large amount of his Latin works must be dated to these years; some
were new, others were revisions of older works; he also set about giving some
sort of order to his earlier philosophical and to his later theological writings.
He could have had little time left for anything else, neither to have
produced all the English works that have (with little evidence) been
attributed to him, nor to have organised and sent out a band of missionary
preachers, for which the evidence is flimsy. His rôle as a populariser must
certainly be revised if he did not use the vernacular, and his literary frenzy
must also minimise his work as a parochial pastor. The fact that he con-
tinued as rector, though an acknowledged heretic, should not be passed over
without comment. It is an unacknowledged tribute to the very legalism
of the ecclesiastical system that he upbraided so heavily. He held the
freehold of a benefice, and no one made any attempt, as far as we know,
to deprive him of it. The soul's salvation of the people of Lutterworth was
left to his care until the end. By canon law the parishioners of Lutterworth
were to confess to him once a year, and to receive at his hands their Easter
communion. For the rest of the time they could be looked after by a curate.

We know that he had at Lutterworth the assistance of a curate, John
Horne, and the description of John Purvey as his inseparable companion
and Achates, justifies us in thinking that he too lived there. Of Horne
we know little. After Wyclif's death he never drew any attention to himself,
and lived to a ripe old age. As an octogenarian in 1441, he swore on oath
to Thomas Gascoigne the truth of his account of Wyclif's final stroke when
hearing mass on Holy Innocents' Day 1384 (28 December), and of his death
on 31 December.\(^\text{41}\) To judge from the emphasis he placed upon the advent
of Wyclif's stroke coinciding with the elevation of the Host,\(^\text{42}\) it sounds as
if Horne had not picked up very much of Wyclif's Eucharistic teaching,
or if he had done so, he had abandoned it. Altogether there is little
justification for considering Horne as a Lollard. Of Purvey's Lollardy there
is no doubt.\(^\text{43}\)

Purvey had drunk deep draughts of Wyclif's teaching, and though
there is no evidence that he was a graduate, he is an example of the literate,
intelligent, highly fluent, non-beneficed chaplain, the sort from whom
Lollardy derived its force, its propagation and continuity. According to
the record of his ordination in 1377 he hailed from Lathbury, near Newport
Pagnell in Buckinghamshire, where he may have belonged to the Purefoy
family, and might perhaps have lain claim to kinship with a Leicestershire
family of the same name at Fenny Drayton. Where and how he met Wyclif
is not known, but he, more than anyone else, popularised Wyclif's works
in those adaptations and part-translations into English which were in
general circulation by the year 1400, and which have for the most part
been ascribed to Wyclif's own pen. There is no reason to doubt seriously
Miss Deanesly's ascription to him, nearly fifty years ago,\(^\text{44}\) of the second
version of the Lollard Bible and also the General Prologue, though it
cannot be proved absolutely. This amounts to a great deal for Purvey and
justifies his nickname of "the Lollards' Library". How much of this work
was done in Leicestershire we cannot say. It seems probable that he
left Lutterworth when Wyclif died, perhaps taking with him Wyclif's
library (of which we know nothing) and betook himself to the Bristol area where he had a considerable following and exerted much influence.

Lutterworth settled down after its rector's death to an undistinguished existence. We shall never know what the men and women of this quiet market town of Lutterworth made of their fire-brand rector and the fiendish activity which went on around him. As he never lost the garb of an academic, they must have found him as difficult to understand as would a country parish today which suddenly received for its rector a controversial bishop of Woolwich. There is little to suggest in Wyclif any warm, pastoral zeal, and it must be significant that in all the countless enquiries into Lollardy in Leicestershire there was never a single Lollard unearthed in Lutterworth. When, in 1428, forty-four years after his death, his reputed bones were dug up and burnt, there were probably few then who could even recall his ministry.

III

Having said all this we are still left with the necessity of explaining the existence of Lollardy in Leicester and Leicestershire. If Lollardy seems to owe little to Wyclif's presence at Lutterworth, to what can it be attributed? First, we must consider the rôle of Philip Repyngdon, who had just emerged as a fully-fledged D.D. in the summer of 1382, when he would have been in his early-thirties — those tempestuous years during which many conversions have taken place. He had proclaimed himself a zealous follower of Wyclif's teaching on the sacrament in a sermon which he preached at Brackley in Northamptonshire, a church appropriated to Leicester Abbey, and we are entitled also to assume that he would preach in the same vein in and around Leicester. He was captivated by what he had heard from Wyclif in the Oxford schools, and took it up with a zest that required much curbing before he was forced to recant by the end of October in 1382. He never went back on this. That he was a zealous spiritually-minded canon is a fair tribute to the good state of Leicester Abbey under the administration of the wise and able Abbot William Clown, who had died early in 1378 after more than thirty years as abbot, and for whom Knighton has provided one of the finest monastic obituaries. It may have been Abbot Clown and young canons like Repyngdon who, impressed by his sincerity, first took under the wing of Leicester Abbey a young eccentric, peripatetic, unbenefted priest, called William Swinderby who was to emerge as a Lollard through and through, and one who, though not a local man, left a deep mark on the country.

Knighton discusses Swinderby from intimate personal knowledge, and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he wished to father Swinderby's Lollard aberrations on to the "sect of Wyclif", as he called it, thereby exonerating his own abbey from any blame or responsibility. Repyngdon he must omit from his account, Swinderby he need not, and if we read between the lines of his chronicle we can learn much about the genesis of Leicester Lollardy, in which Swinderby is a key figure, together with a layman named William Smith. There is no evidence of contact between either of these men with Wyclif or his group, unless it be through
Reynolds before 1382, and in both cases their Lollard views were some years old by then. These only came to light, as so much else did, because the authorities, shaken by the events of 1381, began to look around, and in so doing found a great deal to alarm them. The easiest explanation, as already suggested, was to father it all upon Wyclif, but in fact what these Lollards were saying could have been said just as well if Wyclif had not lived. There was no deep intellectual content behind it that required the work of a penetrating scholar like Wyclif to bring into existence. Much of what Swinderby popularised brings to light the rich religious undergrowth of medieval England. Who could know what went on in the length and breadth of one county, let alone a whole province, what was preached Sunday by Sunday, or what people really thought about their religion, their Church and its clergy. The searchlight of enquiry after 1381 reveals a variety of habit and belief that can only surprise those who have an over-rigid and over-simple picture of medieval religion and of the possible control that could be exercised by the medieval Church. If medieval ecclesiastics and chroniclers tried to simplify it all by laying it at Wyclif’s feet there is no reason for us to follow them.

Knighton says he knew not from whence Swinderby came. Had he had the advantage of knowing of later surname studies, he would have surmised that, as he was not a native of Leicester, he came from the small village of Swinderby on the borders of Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, between Newark and Lincoln. Coming to Leicester, where he was known as “William the hermit”, he began as a sort of a Savonarola, preaching against women, their pride, their adornments and their loose living. When they reacted by threatening to stone him, he deftly turned his attention to the merchants of the town, to money-making and to the impossibility of gaining heaven thereby. Then he became a familiar type, a hermit in a wood on the outskirts of the town: the sort of thing Richard Rolle had done in Yorkshire. Swinderby enjoyed the patronage of the duke of Lancaster who took an interest in him, and from whom he was prepared to accept food, even when he refused it from local men and women. Gaunt seemed to enjoy contact with such religious enthusiasts though his way of life seems to have shown little change therefrom. Swinderby was much visited in his wood and gained a great reputation for holiness, so that when he returned to Leicester he was set up by the canons in a small room adjoining the abbey church. From there he went out into the countryside on preaching tours, to Market Harborough, to Hallaton, to Loughborough and Melton Mowbray. By 1382, when he preached sermons on Psalm Sunday and on Good Friday, he seems to have broken his connection with the abbey and to have joined a group who met at the chapel of St. John the Baptist near the leper hospital outside the town walls, where conventicles were held and where Lollard notions were expounded. This is, in fact, one of the first references we have to Lollard schools.

The school, it would appear, had been started by William Smith who was a layman, following the trade his name suggests. Knighton pictured Swinderby as inconstant, unreliable and volatile, he again went out
of his way to make Smith sound as unstable and as unlikeable as possible. He was, in fact, a common enough type of religious eccentric. He was said to be deformed and ugly, that he took to his odd religious way of life as a result of being turned down by a young woman. He renounced love, and the wearing of shoes, became a vegetarian and teetotaller and, this certainly to his credit, taught himself the alphabet and how to write. There is no indication of how long all this had taken. By the time we hear of him, in 1382, he was already installed in his conventicle, and associated with him was another unbeneﬁced chaplain, Richard Waytestathe. Knighton tells us of the goings-on in their chapel only a colourful story, to which verisimilitude is given some years later in a penance imposed upon Smith. Being hungry one day, Smith and Waytestathe had a supply of cabbages but no fuel to cook with. Catching sight of an old image of St. Catherine in one corner of their chapel, they proceeded to use this as fuel, commenting so it was said, that St. Catherine might thereby suffer a new martyrdom. The incident, as might be expected, caused a stir and was sufﬁciently notorious to be commemorated in a set of popularly recited verses of which Knighton provides a Latin translation. All that can be learnt on the surface from this episode suggests a critical attitude to one common aspect of popular religion, the cult of the saints and their images. There were to be many more examples later, but behind the unfavourable and sensational lines of Knighton we can see in William Smith the dim outline of an interesting type of layman, critical and censorious, but also eager by self-education to lead his own spiritual life and to help others to ﬁnd theirs. He is in marked contrast to other pious types who like Margery Kempe, found their religious lives much assisted and stimulated by images and their cult.

Bishop Buckingham of Lincoln, long before Courtenay took action against Wyclif and his Oxford followers, had heard enough of the affairs of these Leicester Lollards in 1382 to inhibit Swinderby from preaching. This was as early as 5 March, before his Palm Sunday (30 March) and Good Friday (4 April) sermons, which he preached in a mill on the highway leading out of the town, improvising a pulpit from the millstones. These sermons, and there would seem to have been others, show Swinderby’s determination to ﬂout his bishop. His congregation was also undeterred since it included the mayor and some local clergy. That he had much local support is further attested later, when, in June, he did eventually appear at Lincoln before the bishop. He had with him a letter from the mayor and some burgesses of Leicester supporting his denial of the doctrines he was accused of holding. He was, by his own account, further strengthened by the presence in Lincoln and at his examination on that day of John of Gaunt and his ﬁfteen-year-old-son, Bolingbroke, as well as by other magnates. Even with this impressive array he was still not allowed to proceed to purgation. This Swinderby attributed to the machinations of “three lecherous priests”, a signiﬁcant point of attack on his part, but probably quite wide of the mark, for there is little doubt that he did, in fact, hold and popularise most of the views attributed to him, and he was in July made to forswear them. To make his abjuration complete, he had to repeat it in
all the places where he had formerly preached, not only in Leicester but also in Market Harborough, Hallaton, Melton Mowbray and Loughborough. This may have cost him much by way of popularity, but that he still had a following in Leicester is attested by a bequest of 40s, left to him in a will drawn up on 15 September by Thomas Beeby, a leading Leicester mercer, former mayor and member of Parliament. Soon after this he must have felt the need for fresh pastures. He betook himself to Coventry, but when the bishop of Coventry and Lichfield became vigilant, he moved to the Severn Valley where he became a well-known figure, whose later notorious trial before Bishop Trefant of Hereford in 1392 need not detain us here. He finally disappeared from history into the wildness of Wales without really having been finally brought to boot, a very remarkable product of English Lollardy.

William Swinderby is such a key figure in popular Lollardy that it is worth taking a detailed look at what he was said by Knighton to have taught, or what on his appearance before the bishop of Lincoln he abjured. It will suffice here simply to set out in order the headings of belief, and to reserve the comment until the end of the paper.

I. GENERAL POINTS

i. If any cleric is evil living and does not amend his ways, then lay lords can degrade him from his priesthood by shaming the back of his head.

ii. If lay lords are evil and do not mend their ways, it is permissible for ordinary folk to correct them.

iii. There is no value in collective prayers; it is just “blabbering with the lips”.

iv. It is worthless to pay money for a recital of the psalter.

v. To pay for masses is useless unless the payer leads a good life. Those who lead good lives pray by their virtue, and such good living is prayer enough.

vi. The pain suffered by Christ in his Passion was greater than all the pains of hell.

vii. Christ never ordered anyone to beg.

viii. That Christ never said in Holy Scripture that a Christian must give up all his goods and take vows of poverty.

ix. Every counsel of Christ is a law.

x. No one ought to give alms to anyone who has better clothes or a finer house than himself.

xi. No bishop is truly one nor fit to be made one unless he is a doctor and a preacher.

xii. Anyone who has been absolved is in such a state of grace that there is no greater grace that can be added to him.

xiii. That Swinderby had the authority to hear confessions and to communicate the parishioners of any Leicester church without any licence from their respective vicars, by virtue of the appropriation of these rectories to Leicester abbey.

xiv. Alms given for confession are accursed, and anyone giving or taking them is excommunicated.

xv. No one must give alms to anyone who is known to be wicked.

xvi. No cleric should have more than the bare necessities of food and clothes.

xvii. Every new sin brings back all previous sins, even if they have already been absolved.

xviii. Preachers carrying begging bags are false preachers because Christ in the Gospel ordered the opposite. True preachers of Christ do not do this.

xix. Begging by able-bodied friars is against the law of the land, and is not sanctioned by evangelical laws.
xx. Christ converted people from all walks of life but never, in Scripture did he once convert a priest.

xxi. In his sermons Swinderby said that the Christian people had been deceived for over two hundred years, since the advent of the friars, who were false preachers, flatterers, disciples of anti-Christ, but he would reform the people by his own true preaching.

xxii. Scarcely one in ten men is saved.

2. BELIEFS ABJURED BEFORE THE BISHOP OF LINCOLN

xxiii. A child is not truly baptised if the officiating priest or the godparents are in a state of mortal sin.

xxiv. No one living contrary to God’s law is a priest, notwithstanding episcopal ordination.

xxv. Men can pursue debts in charity, but must never put debtors into prison. Those who imprison such debtors are excommunicate.

xxvi. If parishioners know that their priest is evil living and incompetent, they may withdraw their tithes, otherwise they are abettors of criminal and evil deeds.

xxvii. Tithes are pure alms and can be withheld or given to others, when the priest is evil-living.

xxviii. The priest who excommunicates a parishioner for withholding tithes is not entitled to them, and is an evil extortioner.

xxix. No bishop can excommunicate anyone unless he knows that such a person has been already excommunicated by God.

xxx. Any priest can absolve contrite sinners, and notwithstanding episcopal prohibition he can preach the Gospel to the people.

xxxi. A priest who agrees in advance to a payment for an anniversary mass is a simoniac and excommunicate.

xxxii. Any priest in mortal sin commits idolatry when he consecrates the Host.

xxxiii. No priest visits a house except to seduce the wife of the house, or the daughter, or the maidservant. Husbands should prohibit priests from entering their houses (this was said to be less defamatory than item number xxxii).53

There is little doubt that Swinderby’s preaching had given strength and direction to Lollardy in Leicestershire, and the activities of the chapel of St. John clearly continued, without intervention from the bishop of Lincoln, until the next general concern at the spread of Lollardy in 1388. The king, on 23 May, issued letters patent54 to Dr. Thomas Brightwell, dean of St. Mary Newark, and others to seize any books or quires “containing the un-sound doctrine and heresies of Master John Wyclif, Nicholas Hereford, John Aston, and their followers, on information that many such books are frequently compiled and published, written both in English and Latin; and further to make proclamation inhibiting the maintenance of these opinions, or the keeping, writing or selling of those books, under pain of imprisonment and forfeiture, and calling upon all those who had them to give them up”. There is no little irony in Thomas Brightwell having to take these steps, for in June 1382 at the Blackfriars Synod which condemned Wyclif’s teaching, he and Robert Rigge, chancellor of Oxford University, were accused of having been partial to Wyclif’s followers in Oxford, so Brightwell must have known Repyngdon well, and at first had refused to give his assent to the condemnation of Wyclif and his followers though later he did. By the time he received the King’s instructions, and was forced to come to grips with the problem of Lollardy in Leicester, he had just become chancellor of Oxford University. He was dead before 1390.
The renewed concern about Lollards in Leicester coincided with the arrival of Archbishop Courtenay in the course of a metropolitical visitation of the diocese of Lincoln. He arrived in the archdeaconry of Leicester towards the end of October 1389. Whilst he was in Leicester, Courtenay stayed for four days in the abbey where he would meet Knighton and Repyngdon with whom he was already familiar from his wayward stubbornness and submission in 1382. He may well have wondered how far the local situation which now came to light was due to the irresponsible and extravagant conduct of Repyngdon as a young and exuberant Austin canon. In the abbey Courtenay heard from townspeople and local clergy accusations against eight citizens and, later, against the wife of one of them, the first mention of a female Lollard. Two names are already familiar: William Smith and the chaplain, Richard Waytestathe, who, as we saw, were associated with Swinderby in 1382 at the chapel of St. John. Roger Dexter and his wife, Alice, seem also to have been close associates of Smith; of William Harry we know nothing. The names of the rest show their professions: Nicholas Taylor, Roger Goldsmith; Michael Scrivener and William Parchmener — the first of many associated with the book trade to be involved in Lollardy.

A schedule of thirteen alleged heretical beliefs was produced, and they too are an interesting guide to Lollard tenets:

i. That in the sacrament of the altar, after the words of consecration, there remaineth the body of Christ with the material bread.
ii. That tithes ought not to be paid to rectors or vicars in a state of mortal sin.
iii. That images ought not to be worshipped, and that no man ought to set candles before them.
iv. That no cross ought to be worshipped.
v. That masses and matins ought not to be chanted or intoned in church.
vi. That no curate or priest, taken in any crime, can consecrate the Eucharist, hear confessions, or minister any of the sacraments of the Church.
vii. That the pope and all bishops of the Church cannot bind any man by a sentence of excommunication, unless they know him first to be excommunicated by God.
viii. That no prelate of the Church can grant any pardons.
ix. That laymen may preach and teach the Gospel.
x. That it is a sin to give any alms or charity to the Friar Preachers, to the Franciscans, to the Austins or Carmelites.
xi. That oblations ought not to be sought at funerals.
xii. That it is not necessary to make confession of sins to a priest.
xiii. That every good man although unlearned is a priest.

The accused were summoned to appear before the archbishop but, we are told, they hid themselves “desiring to walk in darkness rather than light”. The archbishop solemnly denounced them in the abbey church and, in order to hasten their repentance, put the town under an interdict until they should be brought to justice. Before leaving Leicester he had also to deal with an anchoress, named Matilda, who had a cell in the churchyard of St. Peter’s. She was suspected of having been much influenced by the local Lollards, and as her answers to questions put by the archbishop were somewhat evasive, she was ordered to appear again before the primate at Northampton, where, on 6 November, after her thirty-mile journey, she
persuaded the archbishop of her sincerity and orthodoxy. Her case is interesting in showing just how fine a line there could be between odd religious behaviour and heresy, a problem that was to occur again in Leicester, many years later, with Margery Kempe.

With these accused Lollards, as so often happens, the story is not complete in the archbishop’s register. What is clear is that since they were not inclined to rush forward with their abjurations, Courtenay was forced to rely upon the new commission issued by the king in 1382, at the request of the archbishop, whereby local authorities could be called upon by the Church to arrest and hand over suspects. Of five out of the nine Lollards denounced before the archbishop we do not know how, nor indeed if, they made their peace. It may be that they were not under so much suspicion as the other four, and that on promises of good behaviour in the future, supported by friends, they were allowed to make their peace in Leicester. On the other hand, the record may simply have been lost. The other four were stubborn, and for them the affair was drawn out and caused them trouble. Three of them, William Smith, the dedicated Lollard, and Roger and Alice Dexter, who must have been much under his influence, had to journey to Dorchester-on-Thames, a journey of more than eighty miles, and there to face the archbishop. That they had not heeded previous appeals is clear from the archbishop’s mandate from Towcester dated 7 November. But between 7 and 17 November they were apprehended and brought before the archbishop, who during those days was constantly moving about in Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire. The inconvenience suffered by these Leicestershire Lollards may have been compensated for by a feeling of self-importance, but they were sufficiently cowed by the primatial presence on 17 November to abjure their errors and to be given a penance, the nature of which is a good indication of what were regarded as being the basic ingredients of their religious deviations. The elaborate penance, concerned their iconoclastic habits of mind.

On the Sunday after their return home (presumably having been kept in the archbishop’s custody) William Smith, Roger and Alice Dexter were to attend in procession at the Collegiate Church of St. Mary Newarke, William and Roger in their shirts and breeches, Alice only in a sheet, and all with bare feet and heads. William Smith was to carry an image of St. Catherine, and Roger and Alice Dexter were to carry crucifixes in their right hands and tapers in their left. Three times in the procession they were to stop and kiss the images in honour of the Crucified and in memory of His Passion and in honour of St. Catherine, genuflecting on each occasion. After the procession they were to stand in front of the rood during the mass in church holding their images and tapers, and at the end they were to offer their tapers to the celebrant. The following Saturday they were to repeat the same process in the market place; the following Sunday in their own parish churches. William Smith, because he was literate, was also to recite the antiphon and collect of St. Catherine; the other two, because they were illiterate, were simply to recite a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria, but, — a rather humane and charming touch on the
archbishop's part — because of the weather they were allowed to dress when they went into church, so long as their heads and feet were bare, a gentle reminder that church-going in the winter in the Middle Ages was not too comfortable. Knighton tells us that this penance was performed, and he also provides us with another useful, though again frustrating, piece of information about Smith. He says that he was compelled to hand over to the archbishop his books of epistles and gospels in English and others of works by the Fathers which he had spent eight years in compiling. This is quite a collection for a blacksmith who had taught himself, and we should like to know more about them. The wilful destruction of such books has unfortunately deprived us of what would have been undoubtedly an important first-hand source from which we could learn about English Lollardy.

From a separate entry in Courtenay's register it would appear that the chaplain, Richard Waytestathe, who from his alias came from or was active also in Hinckley, also appeared before the archbishop at Dorchester, and on the same day as the others (17 November) also abjured and made his peace. We are not told if he was given a penance, and that is the last we hear of him. Incomplete as much of this story is, there is a long gap before we again touch sure ground in tracing the history of Leicestershire Lollards. The increasing blindness of Henry Knighton cut short his chronicle in the spring of 1394, and he may have died soon afterwards. We lose, therefore, our most valuable local source for the crucial years 1395-1414 when we are looking for continuity between that first generation of Lollards just examined, and those who emerge in the light of day on the eve of and during the Oldcastle Rebellion, by which time one substantial group at least had become a very radical element in English Lollardy.

It must have been difficult in Leicestershire to distinguish the sort of discontent that showed itself as radical Lollardy from that which showed itself in other ways. Much attention was drawn in Leicester in the early years of Henry IV's reign to the cult of the pseudo-Richard II. Eleven Franciscans from the Greyfriars were hanged in 140256 for conspiring in a plot, and for preaching that Richard was still alive and in Scotland. The prior of Launde was also implicated. This scandal must have diverted concern from the activities of Lollards, but that there was continuity in the Lollard tradition is clear, and a Lollard network spread throughout the county, and was in touch with other Lollard networks in Northamptonshire and in Derbyshire.

In Leicester itself there had been a rumpus in 1395/1396, soon after Repyngdon had become abbot. Amongst the chancery petitions there is one from the archdeacon of Leicester, John Elvet, for a writ to restrain John Belgrave,57 who had placed a slanderous pamphlet in St. Martin's church, comparing the archdeacon's official to the judges who condemned Susannah in the Old Testament. Whatever incident lay behind this we do not know, but it is understandable that the archdeacon was a little cross, and he continued to urge in his plea to the Crown, with foresight, that if John
Belgrave and his adherents were allowed to continue their activities unchecked, then there would be a general insurrection. Whatever resulted from this petition it singularly failed to curb the vociferous John Belgrave and his friends at St. Martin's. Taken on its own, it proves, if true, that he was at that stage a very outspoken parishioner. Only in the light of what happened several years later can we see just what were the full implications of this, by which time he was being dubbed a Lollard.

There are twenty-four years between Archbishop Courtenay's visitation and the visitation of the archdeaconry of Leicester in 1413 by its own diocesan, the bishop of Lincoln, Philip Repyngdon. A new generation had grown up, but there were still those who had not forgotten 1389, and some who had not really mended their ways. Throughout this enquiry we are dealing with fragmentary evidence; and the numbers involved are small. We cannot on this account dismiss the fuss as being without foundation, and claim that all the fear about Lollardy was entirely make-believe. Reduced to a few entries in the records the picture is spare, but with most public agitation there is truth in the adage of "no smoke without fire". Few Lollards were ever brought out into the open; some were clearly protected, others ignored; many probably preferred silence and outward conformity, keeping their beliefs to themselves. It is not easy to see, when looking at those who were denounced and those who were not, what rhyme or reason lay behind the selection, but, we can be sure that behind those we know about there was a sympathetic body of Lollards, or at least of parishioners, who were just as critical of their clergy and of the nature of the religion they found around them, as were their fellow Lollards. This critical attitude was the seedbed out of which Lollardy grew and flourished, and drew attention to itself.

Episcopal records and the records of convocation in the early fifteenth century show increased preoccupation with the spread of Lollardy on the part of Archbishop Arundel and his fellow diocesans. The situation in Wigston, only three miles from Leicester, was sufficiently notorious in 1402 for the archbishop to address a stiff mandate to the rector, having heard that the village was a centre for unorthodox teachings and readings by "many sons of perdition", lay as well as clerical. The rector was ordered to summon them to appear before Arundel, but what resulted is unknown. There was a general concern which culminated in the famous Oxford Constitutions re-published in 1409 by Arundel against Lollard preaching and against unauthorised vernacular translations of the scriptures. It is in this context that we must see the added concern of Philip Repyngdon about the state of religion in the archdeaconry of Leicester, which we are fortunately helped to do by the survival of a unique document, the record of his visitation of the archdeaconry in the early summer of 1413. Although extremely difficult to read, it has considerable value as a comment upon conditions in Leicestershire at the critical period just six months before the climax of the Oldcastle Rebellion. The bishop began his visitation in early May and spent two weeks over it, visiting the various religious houses and dealing with the seven deaneries of the archdeaconry from Melton
Mowbray, Sileby, St. Martin’s church at Leicester, Kegworth, Shackerstone, Knaptoft and from Medbourne. His commissary, David Price, later followed up this visitation, also taking fourteen days, to deal with matters that had arisen in the course of the bishop’s visitation.

Eight cases of Lollardy are reported in the visitation record, from which much can be learnt: at Twyford, at Castle Donington, at Mountsorrel, at Wigston and in the parish of St. Martin’s, Leicester. The first three are some distance apart in the county, and there is no apparent connection either between them or with Leicester and Wigston. Only one Lollard was denounced in four of the five places, but at Wigston four Lollards were named. Wigston is so close to Leicester that there was a connection between the town and the village.

At Twyford William Trivet was said to have propagated heretical and erroneous opinions, not least in expounding the Gospels in taverns, a common charge. He set a further bad example by staying at home in bed on Christmas and Easter Days though he was in perfect health. All this he denied, but when given a chance to proceed to compurgation, he found it difficult to produce the requisite number of compurgators. To do this he had, moreover, to journey to Sleaford in Lincolnshire, where the bishop normally resided in his manor, and having failed he had to repeat his visit to receive sentence and a penance. He was to be whipped seven times around the church of St. Martin’s in Leicester carrying a candle, and also once round the market place, with nothing on his head or feet, and clad only in shirt and breeches. If he performed all this, as we must assume he did, he would probably not be free to return to his home and his work — we are not told what his status was — until October 1413. Two trips to Sleaford, more than forty miles away, and another of about ten miles to Leicester, may have been sufficient to discourage William Trivet from being an active Lollard. Nothing is heard of him in 1414.

From Castle Donington came the cobbler, John Anneys, who had also preached his doctrines in taverns and elsewhere. In particular he objected to confessing everything to one priest, thinking that if it suited him he need only make a partial confession. He thought all the doctors and bishops in the Church were “to put it in a nutshell” commonly believed to be, and were, stupid. More significantly, he was said to be a disciple of “William”, a Lollard chaplain. There is no doubt that this Lollard chaplain was the same person as William Tickhillpriest, who was also mentioned in the visitation and was accused of having infringed Arundel’s Oxford Constitution with regard to unlawful preaching on Easter Day 1413 at Castle Donington and in the vicinity. Anneys was also ordered to appear at Sleaford with compurgators, and as nothing else was recorded about him, presumably he must have been successful in his compurgation. We hear nothing more about him, but he comes from a part of Leicestershire which is closer to Derby than to Leicester. Castle Donington is across the River Trent from Aston-upon-Trent, where it is known that William Ederick, a chaplain, was an active Lollard and the organiser of a contingent that went to St. Giles’s Fields to participate in the Oldcastle Rebellion. Ederick was
harboured by Thomas and Agnes Tickhill. Thomas Tickhill, a successful lawyer, figures conspicuously in the enquiries after the Oldestone Rebellion, and suffered imprisonment in the Tower for having sheltered Ederick. There can be no doubt that William Tickhillpriest, or William the Lollard, the mentor of John Anneys, must be the same man as William Ederick. It argues some notoriety for the Tickhill family that across the River Trent a Lollard chaplain was known as William Tickhillpriest. The fact that no proceedings were taken against this chaplain in Repton’s visitation may be explicable by the fact that he came from another archdeaconry, Derby, and also from another diocese, Lichfield, where he was out of reach of officers from the Lincoln diocese. An area like this where the dioceses of Lichfield, York and Lincoln all met was clearly a happy hunting-ground for itinerant chaplains who could thus easily evade arrest.

These unbenefficed chaplains had a vital rôle to play in the spread and sustenance of Lollardy. From Mountsorrel the bishop was told of the activities of another, John Edward, who was also held to have infringed Arundel’s constitution against unlawful preaching. His offences had been committed at Mountsorrel and at Woodhouse, a chapelry of the parish of Barrow-upon-Soar, where he had preached twice on St. Matthew’s Day (21 September 1412). Appearing before Price at St. Martin’s in Leicester, he brought with him a group of eminent parishioners who all swore that everything had taken place in sublime ignorance of any impediment having been placed upon anyone preaching wherever he liked. This story was accepted, and they all returned home. Perhaps they were telling the truth; one wonders how ordinary men and women knew of things like the Oxford Constitutions. Again we might wonder if John Edward was so ill-informed. Was he perhaps the same man as John Parlebien, also a chaplain, and from Mountsorrel, who was sufficiently implicated in the Oldestone Rebellion to have to buy a pardon. We would dearly love to know just how he got his splendid name — John Speakwell. Perhaps some of these Lollard chaplains were over-endowed with the gift of the gab. But whether we are dealing here with one or two chaplains, we know nothing more about him or them.

Whatever had been done about Lollards in Wigston in 1402 had not had much effect. For now in Wigston the story of Lollardy involved leading families. John Hutte, the younger, William Smith and Peter Herrick, were all said to be possessors of suspected English books in contravention of Arundel’s Oxford Constitutions, and also they had spoken against these same constitutions and asserted that anyone could preach anywhere. It is not impossible that William Smith may be the same man whose Lollard went back to Swinderby’s day, and have been responsible for the village’s notoriety in 1402. These men were further alleged to have consorted with many who were suspect of Lollardy and to have harboured and hidden such persons. This they all denied, but because of the ill-repute thus brought upon them, they were required to swear on the Gospels that they would never again hold or maintain such doctrines, nor consort with those who did. They had to submit for inspection by the diocesan their English books,
and they were bound over on good behaviour to the supervision of their rector. A fourth man, John Friday, also from a well-known family, was said to have consorted with Lollards, and he too had to swear on the Gospels to mend his ways and be bound over to the rector for good behaviour. In view of the background of Lollardy in Wigston, it is not clear why their sins were considered to be less serious than those of Anneys and Trivet, and merited so slight a penalty, unless their higher social status was of assistance.

Finally, from the deanery of Christianity in Leicester, from the parish of St. Martin, came the familiar and now notorious figure of John Belgrave, who also had property interests in Wigston. He must have been a perpetual thorn in clerical sides in his parish church, which was appropriated to Leicester Abbey. He was held to have preached in taverns and other public and private places, denying that there were any rules of fasting, that it was not necessary to observe the Ember Days, that it was enough to abstain from vice. He further suggested that since on fast days it was permissible to take one meal, there was no reason why it should not be divided up into three parts and eaten as breakfast, lunch and dinner. More seriously, he had argued that offerings should not be made in church unless the rector were personally present, a slight at Leicester Abbey. He had often interrupted church services at St. Martin’s, especially on the great feast days when the church was full, exhorting the mayor and the parishioners to make no more offerings until the abbot and convent of Leicester had completed the building of the chancel which they had commenced in 1409. He had refused to be silent even after many admonitions, and had addressed himself to such an extent and with such effect to successive mayors and parishioners that offerings had almost ceased in the church. These various errors, it was said, he had been propagating for more than five years. His final enormity was to have denied the validity of the priestly and episcopal offices in the Church, and to have made some rather pointed remarks about Bishop Repyngdon himself. He had maintained that nowadays in his preaching the bishop contradicted what he had once preached as a young canon, and that if he were true to his earlier doctrine he would still go round the countryside preaching on foot after the manner of the apostles. One cannot help wondering what effect this candour had upon the bishop when he heard the charge on 8 May, and recalled his own more delinquent days and less orthodox ways. Others besides John Belgrave must have wondered how the bishop subsequently reconciled his two rôles. Few of Leicester’s Lollards could have matched their own diocesan’s intransigence in the face of archiepiscopal authority in 1382.

Belgrave appeared before Price at St. Martin’s on 23 June, and there denied the articles charged against him “in the form in which they were put”. Admitted to compurgation the same afternoon, he purged himself satisfactorily over all the charges except those relating to his activities in St. Martin’s church and his remarks about the bishop. Those he partly denied and partly admitted, but put himself upon the grace of the bishop’s
commissary. Whereupon he was allowed to swear an oath that he would maintain none of these beliefs again, nor associate with any who held them. He was let off lightly, so leniently that he was allowed to proceed to compurgation on the same day that he was charged, whereas two others had been required to undertake a journey to Sleaford a month later in order to do so. His social standing and the lies of his friends saved him. The names of seven of his compurgators are given; all came from leading families in the town, and were connected with the Guild of Corpus Christi and its chantry in St. Martin’s church. There seems little doubt that the church if not the Guild contained Lollard sympathisers if not active Lollards. And some of those who testified to Belgrave’s innocence before Price were not themselves above suspicion. One such was Ralph Friday who was perhaps a kinsman of the John Friday from Wigston. He was charged in 1414 with the expression of strong views about Archbishop Arundel.\(^6\) Another compurgator was John Barber who, in 1414, was a kinsman of two others whose names appear in an indictment for Lollardy.\(^7\) The rest were all well-known Leicester burgesses: Richard Chaloner, Thomas Lewin, William Cooper, William Skinner and John Winger. Neither leniency nor an oath seem to have curbed either Belgrave’s activities or his tongue and, some of his fellow citizens had more to say about him in 1414. What is most surprising is that only Belgrave’s name occurs in the Repyngdon’s visitation of the deanery of the Christianity of Leicester when, seven months later, at least nine suspected Lollards including Belgrave are mentioned in Leicester itself, and some had records of Lollard sympathies going back to 1389.

V

Repyngdon’s visitation throws light upon Leicestershire Lollards in 1413, but the beam is not very penetrating. Seven months later, after the failure of the Oldcastle Rebellion on the night 8/9 January 1414, when the kings’ commissioners came round in full strength, more Lollards were discovered, in Leicester itself and in parts of the county where none were mentioned before Repyngdon. John Belgrave was still in the forefront, with views now so advanced as to deny that there had been any papal power since the time of St. Clement, which was going back a very long way. Eight other Leicester citizens, all parishioners of St. Martin’s, were charged along with him.\(^7^1\) Belgrave and seven of the eight were all arrested, kept in the Marshalsea prison and finally sent for correction to Repyngdon on 16 June 1414.\(^7^2\) Three of these, William Mably, parchmener, Roger Goldsmith and William Smith, sound suspiciously like the same Lollards who had appeared before Courtenay in 1389, a remarkable example of the continuity of Lollardy in Leicester from its earliest days. The fact that these Leicester Lollards were only charged with Lollardy and not with complicity in the Oldcastle Rebellion seems to show that for them Lollardy was essentially a religious attitude, and that they were not interested in the wider implications which Oldcastle and his friends had tried to arouse, with some response in the county.
When we see the results of the extensive inquiry as far as complicity in the Oldcastle Rebellion was concerned the total for Leicestershire is not very great. Only seventeen Lollards were named as having been involved in the Oldcastle Rebellion, and it is by no means certain that all these actually went up to London. Given the size of the county, with a population of about fifty thousand, it is small wonder that with such little enthusiasm the Oldcastle Rebellion was a failure, and that contemporary estimates as to its extent and its danger were much exaggerated. That is not to deny that great interest attaches to the story of those who did participate, nor to the way in which propaganda was distributed to organise it. The rebellion shows us how religion could easily merge into a radical tradition and involve its adherents into legal proceedings not just for heresy but also for sedition or treason itself. Some Leicestershers Lollards did go to St. Giles’s Fields and certainly two of them were hanged there. It is possible that the inconclusive results in some other cases may mean that the victims were killed in the skirmish with the king’s men on that ill-fated night.

To tell the story of all this would, in fact, require another paper. We can only here summarise extremely briefly.73 By 1414 there were pockets of Lollards in and around Kibworth Harcourt, Smeeton Westerby, Shangton and Illston-on-the-Hill. Leicestershire could not boast of any Lollard knights, but it did house a Lollard gentleman. The most interesting figure undoubtedly in Leicestershire Lollardy in 1414 was this gentleman, whose name was Thomas Norey and who came from Illston-on-the-Hill. On the other side of the county there was quite a pocket of Lollards at Mountsorrel, Belton and Sileby; there was an isolated Lollard at Goadby and there were two at Saddington. The types of men represented are in the main the artisan class, smiths, ironmongers, weavers, with some more educated types provided by the scriveners and the Leicester citizens. The names of the two chaplains involved remind us again of the crucial rôle in the spread of Lollardy played by these unbenefficed priests, a sort of clerical proletariat, who often did the bulk of parish work. Walter Gilbert of Kibworth Harcourt was so involved in Lollardy and the Oldcastle Rebellion that he was one of its ringleaders, and with his brother was hanged at St. Giles’s Fields.74 His activities were well known on the other side of the county, where in fact he was known as Walter Kibworth. From Mountsorrel came the chaplain, John Parlibien, who, I have already suggested, might have been the same man as John Edward, described as chaplain of Mountsorrel and denounced before Repyngdon six months earlier.

The effect of the Oldcastle Rebellion was, of course, to focus attention on the more insidious and seditious side of Lollardy, and it never quite recovered from the futile attempt its leaders had then made. The memory of its aftermath put an immediate damper on Lollard spirits in Leicestershire, with an atmosphere of restiveness and vigilance on the part of the authorities well illustrated in the summer of 1417. Oldcastle was still at large, though shortly to be captured, when that fascinating, erratic, much-travelled, lady mystic from King’s Lynn, Margery Kempe, passed through
Leicester on her way to York. Wherever she went it was difficult not to be aware of her, for she had disturbing ways that often, as then, got her into trouble.

"She came", we are told in her autobiography, "into a fair church where she beheld a crucifix that was piteously portrayed and lamentable to behold, through beholding which, the Passion of Our Lord entered her mind, so that she began all to melt and to relent by tears of pity and compassion. Then the fire of love kindled so eagerly in her heart that she could not keep it secret, for, whether she would or not, it caused her to break out with a loud voice and cry marvellously, and weep and sob so hideously that many a man and woman wondered on her therefor".

"When it was overcome and she was going out of the church door, a man took her by the sleeve and said:

'Damsel, why weepest thou so sore?'

'Sir', she said, 'it is not you to tell' ".

Not surprisingly, this episode was retold to the mayor of Leicester, who sent for her and asked her "what country she was and whose daughter she was".

"'Sir', she said, 'I am of Lynne in Norfolk, a good man's daughter of the same Lynne, who hath been mayor five times of that worshipful borough, and alderman also many years; and I have a good man, also a burgess of the said town of Lynne, for my husband' ".

"'Ah!' said the mayor, 'Saint Catherine told what kindred she came of, and yet ye are not like her, for thou art a false strumpet, a false Lollard, and a false deceiver of the people, and I shall have thee in prison ' ".

"And she answered: 'I am ready, sir, to go to prison for God's love, as ye are ready to go to church' ".

"When the mayor had long chidden her and said many evil and horrible words to her, and she, by the grace of Jesus, had reasonably answered to all that he could say, he commanded the jailer's men to lead her to prison".

She was eventually, in All Saints church, brought before the abbot of Leicester, the dean of St. Mary Newarke and the mayor, with whom she had an outspoken altercation, in the course of which she doubted his worthiness. He refused to allow her to depart from the town until instructions had been received from the bishop of Lincoln, who, good and knowing man that he was, wisely without seeing her, sent the desired instructions, and Margery after three-weeks delay in Leicester went on her way to York, where a similar performance was enacted before Archbishop Henry Bowet. There was much that was tiresome about Margery Kempe, whomsoever she met she upset by her spiritual exercises and weepings, but she was perfectly orthodox and no Lollard. In being remarkably outspoken and no respector of persons, as well as a critic of the bishops she met, she does resemble the Lollards. The borderline between doubting a mayor's worthiness and a Lollard doubting a priest or a bishop's worthiness is a
fine one, but the bishops got to know her rather well, particularly Repyngdon, and he like the others was remarkably patient and forebearing with her.

VI
Repyngdon comes out well for his fair and sympathetic dealing with other Lollard suspects. He was, no doubt, all too conscious of his own chequered past, but he could still admonish gently and wisely. That he was no vengeful heretic-hunter is shown clearly over the issue of Wyclif's remains. The final sentence on John Wyclif was passed by the Western Church at the Council of Constance, where during the Eighth General Session in May 1415, the famous Forty-Five Propositions were condemned, and his bones were ordered to be dug up and burned. The then rector of Lutterworth, a curial lawyer, John Forster, was present at Constance when this was ordered, but nothing was done about it for another thirteen years. Repyngdon forbore to take such action against one to whom as a young doctor he had so readily listened, and with whose sincerity he was clearly impressed. He resigned his see in 1420, but only died in 1424, and may well have spent his retirement back at his old abbey in Leicester, where his will was proved though he was finally buried in Lincoln Cathedral. His successor as bishop, Richard Fleming, was clearly in no greater hurry to carry out the sombre and gruesome task at Lutterworth, and may well have been dissuaded by his predecessor. Much further prompting from Pope Martin V was necessary before he eventually carried it out in the spring of 1428.

Leicestershire Lollardy was quiescent in that year, though there were active persecutions in Kent and Norfolk. We have no evidence of the persecution of Lollards in the archdeaconry of Leicester but this does not mean that there were no Lollards, or no proceedings. Survival of documents is casual. There is evidence from trials of 1511/12 conducted by Geoffrey Blyth, bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, of a strong Lollard group in Coventry that had connections with other groups in Bristol, London and Leicester. The full story involved the activities of a Lollard incumbent of Stoney Stanton in south-west Leicestershire, who held his living from 1465 to 1510. Master William Kent's youth may well have been spent in contact with Lollards who were taught by some of those encountered in these pages. And in 1511 two Lollard painters thought Leicester a safer place to be in than their native Coventry. Tantalisingly brief though these references are, they show that underground groups of Lollards were in touch with like-minded groups elsewhere, and this suggests that where there were horizontal links of connection, there were also vertical links of continuity in the same area. What is here involved are attitudes of mind and ways of life, which can show remarkable continuity and toughness, particularly in country districts, where the pace of social change was slow and whose local communities were tight and closely knit. As long as there was no seeking after notoriety, no brushing with the clergy or with officials, religious attitudes probably continued beneath the surface waiting until the time came when, under more favourable conditions, they could blossom forth.
VII

So far singularly little has been said about what were the distinctive characteristics of these Lollards as religious folk, and the contributions they made to the dissenting tradition. What was the gist of the Lollard message, what made it appeal and gave it an enduring quality? Knighton is a hostile, sometimes muddled, but informative witness as far as Lollard beliefs and practices are concerned. He attributed to Aston what was clearly taught by Swinderby. He certainly exaggerated the numbers and influence of Lollards: "the greater part of the people", "one out of every two men you meet in the street"; but in so doing he pays tribute to the infectious quality of popular Lollardy. He is also a good guide to the reaction of straightforward churchmen to the new challenge which the Lollards brought. To such men Lollards were stiff-necked folk who feigned sanctity, were outspoken and arrogant, too censorious of others' weaknesses and too little aware of their own, too boastful and self-righteous, excessively uncharitable especially about the clergy and the mendicants, always behaving and talking as if no one had known about or practiced the Christian religion until they came along. Lollards upset families when they gained converts, by putting neighbours against neighbours, sons against fathers, servants against masters and — a nice touch — mothers-in-law against daughters-in-law. And all this has a familiar ring. Sincere and ardent they may have been, but this type of personal religion often does bring out all the characteristics which Knighton lists. If we must be careful not to get our opinions of Lollards from their foes, we must also be careful not to assume automatically that goodness and true religion was all on the Lollard side, and blackness, hypocrisy and evil only on the side of the orthodox. The motives behind Lollard conversion could be just as complex as in any other group of devotees. Religious fashions can catch on like ladies' fashions, and Lollards were human like the rest of us.

Chaucer's skipper was unimpressed by Lollards:

"'This Lolland here was like to preach, that's what'.
The skipper said, 'By thunder he shall not',
He shan't come here to vex us with his preaching,
His commentaries and his Gospel-teaching.
We all believe in God round here, said he,
'And he'll go starting up some heresy'".82

And Lollardy, like other religious and political forces had its lunatic fringe. Having said all this it is still necessary to try to get under the surface.

First and foremost, it is clear from what Knighton says, that there was a wide variety of beliefs and no fixed corpus of Lollard doctrine, although there were many similarities of belief between different groups and individuals in different places and at different times. Nor was there any closely-knit organisation holding Lollards together. Lollardy was not a Church, though there were connections between the different groups in Leicestershire and, as we have seen, by being scattered about the county there were easy connections between one county and another and between one diocese and another. Preachers moved about from one group to
another, often, of course, to escape detection, but also to keep control between groups and to strengthen faith. There was clearly a strong feeling of mutual identification, which seems to have shown itself in the adoption of simple styles of dress, hence the digs in Knighton at the russet garb. This is, after all, not a very remarkable state of things in a world full of monastic and medican habits. There are also hints of a special language. Both these features of dress and speech are reminiscent of the Puritans and Quakers. Mixed up in the various types of belief, there are elements of non-conformity, of puritanism and of a sturdy anti-clericalism. We hear more of the beliefs that Lollards did not hold or of which they were critical or on which their views were unsound, than about the positive beliefs and the religious practices that nurtured their spiritual life. We must, even so, try to understand something of these, though it is no easy task for the historian.

The basic elements of the story of human salvation Lollards had in common with all Christians. This was the rule and inspiration of their lives. Many probably continued outwardly to conform with the religious practices of their friends and neighbours by going to their parish churches to hear mass and to receive communion, although, one must remember, it was a world in which infrequent communion was general. There is no firm evidence that they ordained ministers on their own account to any significant extent. For the most part they nourished their spiritual lives outside the parish church by their own prayers and by intensive reading and study of the Bible, which could be best done in schools or conventicles wherever there was a literate reader. This was necessary because Lollards seem to have been for the most part uneducated men and women, and poor. They would thus be unable in a manuscript world to afford the cost of copies of the Lollard Bible, either in toto or in parts even had they been able to read them. By such Bible study and prayer many sustained their lives and brought up their families, found peace with God and man, and lived out their lifespan in sure and certain hope of heaven thereafter. Lollards were types of religious individualists, of which there have been many in the history of the Christian Church. This religious individualism has had, and continues to have, its own type of spirituality.

It is right to speak first of this positive side of Lollardy because in the last resort a religious tradition cannot be made entirely out of protest, though there is no doubt, as summaries of belief in Knighton show, that Lollardy was too a religion of protest, whose origin lay in an intense dissatisfaction with the state of fourteenth-century religion in England. The protest was, of course, wider. It is not a mere coincidence that there are parallel religious movements on the continent at the same period, arising from the same causes. The very existence in England of Lollardy is a living proof of the low standard of lives of too many clergy of high and low estate, of excessive formalism in the ministrations and in the worship and life of the Church, as well as too great a concentration upon the things of this world. This is not to say that the fourteenth-century Church was corrupt beyond endurance, that there were not many good and excellent
clergy, monks, friars, nuns and lay people in it, nor that there were not
good men who were trying to do something about the inadequacies of the
time. Dr. W. A. Pantin has given us an excellent picture of all this in his
book, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century.* Protesters exagger-
ate and often misrepresent their opponents in order to strengthen their own
case. When all this has been said and every allowance made it is impossible
not to believe that if the rank and file of clergy had been of better moral
fibre, better educated, better equipped to meet the challenge of a more
articulate and a more demanding laity, and if the Church had been less a
prey to worldly values, and less manipulated by those who were using it for
their own secular ends, then there would have been less response to the
challenge of Lollardy, if indeed it had ever arisen.

The underlying Lollard message was a twofold one: that clergy
should be better than they were, and that religion should be less formal,
less external, more internal. In too many cases priests had become a by-word
for loose sexual morality, so that husbands were warned about the dangers
to their women folk that might come from a visit by the local clergy.
The spiritual ministrations were too often only given in return for monetary
offerings, for hearing confessions, for anniversary masses, for requiems,
for churchings. In other places because of worldly pre-occupation and
absenteeism there were no ministrations to the laity at all. Trafficking in
benefices was a great clerical scandal. The whole system of tithes was a
perennial sore point; those who did not pay, whether from poverty or from
bloody-mindedness, or from deliberate withholding of them on principle
were often proceeded against in court for debt or excommunicated. All
this in Lollard eyes was wrong. Too many clergy had fine clothes, fine
horses, fine houses, and all in marked contrast to the example of Christ
or in immediate contrast to the standard of living of the average layman
of the fourteenth century. In saying all this the Lollards, were, of course,
only repeating what was said by many earnest churchmen, and was a
stock-in-trade of all reformist literature, manuals or preaching. Chaucer’s
parson, it will be remembered, was loath “to cursen for his rythes”.

Wherein then did the Lollards step beyond traditional ways of protest
and complaint and invite persecution? Essentially it was in the conclusions
to which they were prepared to take their criticisms, so far as ultimately
to undermine if not to deny all episcopal and sacerdotal authority. If
clerks were lascivious, evil-living or mercenary, then their administrations
of all the sacraments were null and void, they were possessed of no holy
orders in spite of ordination. Tithes and offerings should be withheld from
them. This was really a more important and far-reaching doctrine than
odd or wrong-headed views on the nature of the Eucharist, though these
are found too. Excommunications by bad bishops were of none effect.
Preaching did not depend upon episcopal licences. The clergy could hear
confessions and give communion elsewhere than in their own parish
churches. This latter had, of course, long been a bone of contention between
the friars and the parish clergy, but with the Lollards it was slightly
different. Here were laymen attacking the very roots of ecclesiastical and
parochial discipline. In some cases, though they would not have realised it, their outlook amounted to a thorough-going Donatism, but their responses were instinctive rather than theological. Anti-clericalism can soon breed Donatist attitudes.

Wyclif did provide an academic theology which covered many points which Lollards raised, and in the more extreme views of his later years he too can be charged with Donatism, but as far as popular religion is concerned he should be seen, I would suggest, rather as a mirror reflecting existing situations and inchoate attitudes, rather than as an originator and instigator. He found a ready response in Oxford amongst those who shared his concern at the state of religion and who were capable of understanding the garb in which his ideas were clothed. Amongst non-academic Lollards many of the ideas that are elaborated in Wyclif, were taken to points which he would never have sanctioned, not even in his last extremist days. Swinderby, for instance, not only said that there could be no peace until the Church were deprived of all its temporal goods, which Wyclif also said, but that the reasoning behind this was equally applicable to lay as well as to spiritual lords. Wyclif no less than the duke of Lancaster would have winced at that. It was this dangerous radicalism that took Lollardy into rather deep water in the early fifteenth century, and nearly killed it. Equally it would have been killed spiritually by other extreme views not to be found in Wyclif, which would have led to a sort of spiritual nihilism. There was such emphasis upon good living that some Lollards thought scarcely one in ten could consider himself saved. And the further notion that every new sin cancelled out all previous absolution must have been cold spiritual comfort indeed. The majority of Lollards did not go so far, and thereby saved English Lollardy.

The other pivotal point of Lollard protest, was against excessive formalism and externalism. This seems on the surface to be less important and less destructive, but in the long run it did a great deal more to influence dissenting attitudes of mind, and it did create a distinctive Lollard spirituality. Late medieval religion was highly formalised, often highly elaborate, with fixed routines of the mass, the offices, the litanies, the collective intercessions, the elaborate sequence of fast days and saints' days, the multiplication of local shrines, often with wonder-working images, the centres of pilgrimage, the holy pictures, the countless statues of the Virgin and the saints and their cults, the images of the Holy Trinity, the veneration of crucifixes. All these played an important part in kindling devotion, and in encouraging much excellent local art and craftsmanship. They also encouraged matter-of-fact attitudes to religion, and fostered superstition. Running through Lollard attitudes was a strong puritan streak which rejected all this. Art apparently does not avail in heaven. Singing and music in church for some were reprehensible, and this at a time when English Church music was at a peak of development. All collective prayers were worthless "blabber". The great centres of pilgrimage, whether as was popular in Leicestershire, to Our Lady of Lincoln or to Our Lady of Walsingham, were no more than visits to witches. The prayers of the
saints are of no avail because no one is certain whether the saints are in heaven. About all this there is much that is plain and homespun. It is unnecessary to find learned academic treatises to account for it. Every popular heretical movement seems to have had touches of it.

The attack upon image worship and pilgrimages is certainly one of the most consistent and virulent parts of the Lollard outlook, one that figures in the majority of heresy trials, and has a continuous history from the time of Swinderby and his friends down to the Reformation. Without such a background it is difficult to understand the strength and vigour of the iconoclasm of the sixteenth and later centuries. This attitude of mind cannot be readily fathered upon Wyclif. There was little about which he was silent in dealing with the state of contemporary religion, but he is remarkably silent about image worship and pilgrimages. The Lollard protest over them has a more deeply-rooted psychological basis. There are many forms of spirituality, and here as elsewhere, one man's meat is another man's poison. We do not need to be reminded what strong passions this sort of thing can arouse, even today. For the orthodox of the fifteenth century, the images of the saints were the books of the unlettered; for the Lollard there was only one book, the Bible. If humble Christian men were illiterate, then literate helpmates must assist by reading it to them, hence the schools and conventicles which are such an important part of Lollard history. What mattered was the individual reaching out to God through the Bible and his own prayers. This was worth all the masses, all the images and all the pilgrimages in creation.

In asserting this the Lollard was consciously or unconsciously proclaimed the very thing for which John Wyclif, the doctor evangelicus, had striven. There was much in the more extreme notions of Lollardy that crop up in trials with which Wyclif would have had little sympathy, and he would not have welcomed the paternity of much that was fathered upon him in the fifteenth century, or indeed later. But he would not have been ashamed of those who tried to live by God's law as found in the Bible, and to make it the rule and measure for Christian men and women. It was the failure of radical Lollardy that enabled this spiritual tradition to survive. Wyclif became a Lollard worthy because he was the great symbol of the attack of the medieval Church upon "true religion". We are now more accustomed than were Englishmen then or indeed much later, to see that there could be two sides to the question. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries saw a growing articulateness and literacy amongst lay folk. The increased use of the vernacular and the vast output of religious literature shows that many more than before wanted to find out about their religion and to take more part in the life of their Church. For the majority this could, as always, still be done within the framework of the existing Church hence the fascinating phenomena of late-medieval piety and all the books of devotion and manuals for better living. The saints, the images, the pilgrimages could still lead some to heaven. There was also a minority, small but growing, certainly persistent, that wanted new ways and brought a new challenge; that wanted few externals of worship; that was nourished on its
own vernacular books and the Lollard Bible. It made thereby its own
contribution to the tradition of English spirituality. The ecclesiastical
historian can see the two streams of piety together without having to make
a choice.

Once the spiritual Lollard tradition had been saved by the failure of
its radical pretences, it could settle down as part of the deep, ingrained,
down-to-earth religion of many Englishmen and women. It could continue
on a more even keel, for the most part unnoticed, until later outbursts of
persecution in the sixteenth century. In isolated closely-knit communities
there was always much mutual understanding, forbearance and tolerance,
and a spirit of live-and-let-live, which may account for the absence of noise
and persecution; and the same spirit may have helped to keep persecution
down to a minimum when it did raise its ugly head. Without such an
assumption it is difficult to understand how rapidly the religious changes
of the sixteenth century could be accepted. It cannot be sheer coincidence
that places in Leicestershire such as Kibworth and Mountsorrel, where
Lollards were to be found, have had a long history of dissent. The attitudes
of mind observed amongst these Leicestershire Lollards strike a ready
chord amongst those who have studied the dissenting tradition in England.
Leicestershire has a place in the making of that tradition, and if we readily
remember that George Fox came from Fenny Drayton we must not forget
that before him there were Leicestershire Lollards.

APPENDIX

Lincoln Diocesan Records: VI/o.

f. 1 Visitation cleri et populi archidiaconatus Leycestre facta diebus et locis
subscriptis anno Domini millesimo ccccxiiii per Reverendum in Christo
Patrem et Dominum Dominum Philippum, Dei gratia Lincolniensem
episcopum, anno consecrationis sue nono.

f. 6 Decanatus de Goscote: Twyford.
Willelmus Tryvet de eadem tenet et affirmat quamplures opiniones et conclusiones
erroneas et hereticas contra determinacionem universalis ecclesiae, et uxor pube
cedat in tabernis publicis et reputatur publice diffamatus super hereticae pravitate
et lollardiae, nec exerceat ecclesiam suam diebus dominicis et festivis tempore
divinorum et presertim in festis Pasche (23 April) et Nativitatis Domini ultimo
preteritae 75 (December) non eger, lacedbat in lecto suo usque post altas missas
decantatas, et predicat aperte de evangelio in tabernis publicis, et quamplura
consimilia enormia committit in detestabile exemplum ceterorum Christianorum.
Vir comparuit apud Twyford et negat omnes articulos.
Unde habet diem lune post Iacobum (31 July) in ecclesia de Sleaford ad purgandum
se cum xiiima manu.
Quo quidem termino et loco coram prefato Pryce comparuit personaliter prefatus
Willelmus et nihilus produxit computagures. Unde nichil proposito per eum vel
allegato pronunciatus est deficiisse in purgacione et datus est ei dies sabbati
proximus post festum Exultationis Crucis (16 September) proximo futurum in
eadem ecclesia et coram eo ad proponendum quare non debeat pronunciaria pro
convicto et pro convicto puniri, presentibus Johannes Peyntour et Johannes Boule.
Quo die vir comparuit et quia nichil propositum, pronunciatus pro convicto et deinde
de confessione sua expresse ita(est) de peragendo penitenciam unde habet vii
(iii crossed out) benefitaciones circa ecclesiam cum cereo iiid. et i benefitaciones
circa mercatum Leycestre nudus caput et pedes camisia et braccc tantum indutus
cum cereo iiid., presentibus Oudeby et Ernesby, et quod huiusmodi cereum post
penitenciam factum circa forum offeret in ecclesia sancti Martini.
Decanatus Cristianitatis Leycestri : Sanctus Martinus

1. Johannes Belgrave notatus super heretica pravitate et reputatus secundum vulgus communis publicus et notorius lollardus nam tenet publice asserit et docet in aperto huysmodi opiniones.

2. In primis quod secundum legem divinam non sunt aliquia ieiunia precepta, in tantum quod ipsemet non ieiunat in quattuor temporibus anni secundum instituta canonica. Et si quis ipsum super violacionem huysmodi ieiuniorum fuerit allocutas, accipit prandium suum paratum pro una dieta et dividit illud in tres partes et dicit, si liceat mihi commodere istas tres partes in una dieta, quis prohibebit me commodere eam unam partem videlicet in iantaculo, aliquam in prando et tertiae in una die, quis dicit quod satis est ut quis ieiunet a viclis licet non ieiunandum ubi esclis carnibus.

3. Item dicit quod non est offerendum in ecclesiis ad utilitatem rectorum nisi ipsimet rectores ministraverint personaliter in eisdem ecclesiis.

4. Item idem Johannes diversis temporibus et presertim diebus principalibus et festivis assurgens in ecclesia cum maior afferuit populi multitudo publice predicando quasi ceteris comparochianis suis palam et aperte prohibuit et interdicti ne quis eorum quicquam offerent in dicta ecclesia quousque proprietari ipsius ecclesie, videlicet Abbas et conventus Leycestre, structuram cancelli eiusdem ecclesie usque ad plenum consummassent. Et huysmodi prohibiciones et interdicta, fecit sepsius singularibus maioribus et quasi omnibus parcianis eiusdem ecclesie ne quicquam in ipsa ecclesia offerent. Et hoc singulariter et singillatim et in huysmodi erroribus et pluribus aliis stetit per quintos annos et ultra.

5. Item detrahit et depravat omnem statum in ecclesia militante religiosis, videlicet, sacerdotium et dignitatem episcopalem, dictis de episcopo moderno quod contravent predicacionibus per ipsum olim factis, quia si faceret secundum quod olim in minoribus constitutis predicavit, circumisset per patrias pedibus eundo et more apostolorum predicaret. Et ista publice predicat et asserit in tabernis coram laicos et aliis locis tam publicis quam privatis.


Decanatus de Akele
Casteldonsington
Johannes Annesy sutor, discipulus, ut asseritur, ipsius Willemi lollardi, tenet et affirmat, ac in publico utpote in tabernis et alii locis publicis predicat et docet quamplures conclusiones et opiniones erroneas et hereticas determinationi sancte matris ecclesie repugnantes, et reputatur pro publico lollardo. Item dicit se nolle uni sacerdoti integre et plenarie una et eadem vice conferiti, sed si quid sibi placuerit reservare, non confessurum. Item dicit quod omnes doctores et episcopi in ecclesia militante iuste breve essent fatui et pro fatuis reputabantur.

Comparuit apud Rothley et negavit articulos prout articulantur. Unde habuit diem lune apud Seforde ad purgandum se cum XIIima manu. Et abjuravit simpliciter omnes articulos conclusiones et opiniones determinationi sancti matris ecclesie repugnantes et presertim hereses et errores. Juravit eciam simpliciter quod
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communicabit publice nec aperte cum aliquibus personis suspectis vel diffamatis, et preseritum cum prefato domino Willemo, nec eos aut eum favebat, substantebat aut manutenebat nec eis aliqualiter ei adherebit, presentibus Ernesby et Oudeby.

f. 16v Kegworth
Quidam dominus Willelmus Tykyl capellanus, non admisus nec privilegiatus contra constitutionem provinciale nuper Oxon. celebratam admisssus per parochianos ibidem absque licencia loci dioecesani apud Carleton.

f. 22 Decanatus de Gudelaxon. Wykyngeston.
Johannes Hutte junior, Willelmus Smyth et Petrus Eyryke habent quamplures libros anglicos suspectos et sunt publice diffamati super nephanda doctrina vocata lollardia nam cum personis super huiusmodi doctrinam multum suspectis confabulantur et communicant et tenent opinionem quod non ostantibus constitutionibus novellis Oxonie nuper editis possit et potest quilibet presbiter indifferenter predicare.

Et dictus Johannes huiusmodi suspectas personas hospico recepit, reficit, occultat et sustentat scienter.

Comparuerunt omnes apud Broughton et objectos sibi omnes articulos singulariter negant expresse. Tamen propter famam in hac parte laborantem et abhominacionem et horribilitatem et detestandam nominacionem doctrine huiusmodi ipsi omnes iurant simpliciter tanti evangeliis quod ipsi nunquam ab hac hora inantea nullam opinionem conclusionem sinse articulum contra determinationem sanctorum ecclesiae aliqualiter repugnamentem tenebunt, docebunt, asserent, affirmabunt seu predicabunt aut credent publice vel occulte. Nec eos credentibus predicantibus docentibus aut tenentibus publice vel occulte credent adherebunt favebunt aut ipsos sustenabunt quomodolibet in futurum. Quod-que si aliquos habuerunt libros anglicos, paginant divinan quomodolibet sapientem vel habentem, in presenti ipsos dioecesan loci presentabunt secundum formam constitutionum novellarum nuper Oxonie celebrarum et editarum examinandos. Presentibus Johanne Ernesby et Johanne Oudeby. Et pro contemplacione magistri Willelmi Neuport rectoris de eadem tunc presente dimissi sunt.

Johannes Friday de eadem multum favet et adheret huiusmodi suspectis personis et preseritim prescriptis, dimissus est contemplacioni rectoris ibidem promisso primitus de se emendendo.

NOTES

1. This paper was read to the Society on Thursday, 17 April 1969
2. For the spelling of the names of Oxford graduates I have followed that under which they can be found in A. B. Emden’s A Biographical Register of the University of Oxford to A.D. 1500, 3 volumes (1957-59)
3. Fasciculi Zizaniorum, ed. W. W., Shirley, Rolls Series (1858), 311-2
5. The Complete Works of John Gower, ed. G. C. Macaulay, Confessio Amantis, Prologus: “The new Sect of Lollardie” (1, 349, p. 14); liber 5: “Be war that thou be noght oppressed, With Anticristes lollardie” (11, 1866-7); there is a note in the margin of the manuscript at this point: “Nota hic contra istos qui jam lollardie dicuntur”; “That holi cherche stod relieved, Thei oughten betre be believed, Than these, whiche that men knowes noght holy, thogh thei feigne and blywe Here lollardie in memnes Ere” (11, 1869-79). Confessio Amantis was written in 1390.
7. This analogy also appears in the bishop of Worcester's mandate of 1387: "sub magnae sanctitatis velamine venenum sub labis in ore mellifluo habentes, zizaniam (tare) pro frumento in agro dominico seminantes" (Wilkins, op. cit., 202)
10. In view of their popularity and acceptability, and not least of the appeal that the Lollards had for sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sectaries, it is surprising that none of them called themselves Lollards.
12. J. Gairdner, Lollardy and the Reformation in England, 4 volumes (1908-13)
14. English University Press, 1952
17. A. G. Dickens, Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York, 1509-1558 (1959); The English Reformation (1964), vid. esp. chapter 2
18. M. Aston, "Lollardy and the Reformation, Survival or Revival?", History 49 (1964) 149-70
19. G. Leff, Heresy in the Later Middle Ages, 2 volumes (1967)
20. ibid., vol. 2, p. 559
21. Wyclif received this benefice in 1374, but there is no evidence that he resided there until his departure from Oxford in the early summer of 1381, after the publication of his Confession on the Eucharist on 10 May.
22. Lincoln Record Office V/1/0
23. Wilkins, op. cit., vol. 3, 208-12
25. P.R.O. K.B. 9/203 - 12
26. P.R.O. K.B. 27/611 - 20
27. Records of the Borough of Leicester, ed. M. Bateson, volume 2 (1901)
28. A. Hamilton Thompson, A Calendar of Charters and other Documents belonging to the Hospital of William Wyggeston at Leicester (Leicester, 1933)
29. G. F. Farnham, Leicestershire Medieval Village Notes, 6 volumes (Leicester, 1929-30)
31. Knighton is now a suburb of Leicester, in the fourteenth century it was a village, two miles out of the town.
32. Thomas Walsingham, Historia Anglicana, ed. H. T. Riley, Rolls Series (1864), volume 2, pp. 50 - 59, 188-9 et alii
35. Walsingham singles out Repyngdon and Nicholas Hereford as the major followers of Wyclif. He calls Repyngdon "quidam canonicius Lyecestrie". (Hist. Anglica, 2, p. 57). His cardinal sin in Walsingham's eyes was to have preached that all orders except his own, the Austin Canons, were too much conformed to the world.
36. He was consecrated on 29 March 1405, being by this time high in Lancastrian counsels.
37. The Register of Henry Chichele, ed. E. F. Jacob, volume 2 (Oxford, 1938), 285-7. This will is a remarkable one and deserves to receive more attention than it has been given.
38. Knighton, op. cit., 152
39. ibid., 152-6
40. ibid., 179
The theological significance attached by K. B. McFarlane to the fact that Wyclif was only hearing mass and not celebrating it, is without substance. There was normally, except on Christmas Day, only one mass in each parish church. He may not have been well enough to do anything else but be present. If significance is to be attached to this incident, it should surely be rather on the grounds that he was at mass at all (McFarlane, op.cit., 119).

Most of what can be known about Purvey has been collected together by McFarlane (ibid., 119-20, 149, 152, 162, 187). Purvey is described as capellanus simplex by Knighton, and this he remained, except for a brief spell when he was given the benefice of West Hythe near Saltwood in Kent by Archbishop Arundel on 11 August 1401, only to resign it on 8 October 1403.

Knights of the Lollard Bible (repr. 1966), chapters 9 and 10.

There is a full account of Swinderby in McFarlane, vid. index s.v. Swinderby, William, "the Hermit".

Walsingham says that Swinderby was one of those apostates sent out by Wyclif, a hermit in sheep's clothing, but, inwardly a ravening wolf (Hist. Anglicana, vol. 2, p.53). Knighton who knew him better and more intimately, and who also disliked him does not say this. It would therefore be unwise to accept Walsingham on this point. Anything said against the Church, or monks or clergy was to Thomas Walsingham just a wild and execrable madness invented by Wyclif.

Knighton (op.cit., 190) says "in boso domini ducis". Local folklore memory may well still recall this in the Western Park area of Leicester, where there is a cave known as "Lollard's Cave". The area would certainly have been wooded in the fourteenth century.

ibid., 180-1

ibid., 183

ibid., 192

ibid., 192

Knights, op.cit., 124

ibid., 174-5, 196-7

Cal. Pat. Rolls (1385-89), 468


Bulog, Hist. Contin., op.cit., 391-4. The plot was very intricate. None of the executions took place in London, two in Lichfield.


The thirteen Constitutions dealing with Lollardy were passed at a convocation in St. Frideswide's, Oxford in November 1407, and repeated before another in St. Paul's in January 1409, presumably because too little action had been taken (Snappe's Formulary, ed. H. E. Salt, Oxf. Hist. Society volume 80 (1924), 99). The text of them can be found in Wilkins, op.cit., volume 3, pp. 314-9.

It is written on paper, and consists of 32 folios. Attention was first drawn to it by Professor K. M. Major ("Lincoln Diocesan Records", Trans. R. Hist. Soc. 22 (1942), 60), but it has not yet been printed. The parts relevant to this article are printed as an appendix to this paper (vid. pp. 39-41).

Lincoln [Record Office], VI/6, f. 6

ibid., f. 6

ibid., ff. 146, 169

McFarlane, op.cit., 175

L.R.O. VI/6, f. 10

Cal. Pat. Rolls (1413-16), 262

L.R.O. VI/6, f. 22


L.R.O. VI/6, f. 10

P.R.O. K.B. 9/204, No. 189

ibid.

P.R.O. K.B. 27/613; Rex rol., m. 6

The story of the rebellion as a whole is best read in McFarlane. (op.cit., chapter 6)
74. McFarlane, op.cit., 174, 178
75. W. Butler-Bowden, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (World Classics, 1954), 144 - 55
76. J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio* (Venice, 1759), volume 27, p. 635
77. A. B. Emden, *Biographical Register*, volume 2, s.v. Forster, John
78. *ibid.*, n. 37
85. “Blabber with thi lyppus” (Knighton, *op.cit.* 174)
86. “wyche of Lincolne and wyche of Walsingham” (*ibid.*, 183)
87. This refers to the previous entry which concerns the Lollard chaplain, William Ederick, *alias Tichhillpriest alias Tichhill* (f. 16v). It is not easy to read the entry but it is roughly as follows:
“Civitatur xii de... ipsa parochia super eo quod admiserunt quendam dominum Willielmum Tykelprest capellanum pretensum ad predicandum in ecclesia ibidem in die Pasche ultimo preterita contra tenorem constitucionis nuper Oxonie celebrata. Apud Brecon vicarius fecit fidem quod dominus... huiusmodi interdictum apud Ulvescroft...”

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