

The Lancashire and Cheshire Presbyterian Campaigns of 1646 and the Politics of Accommodation

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This article explores the politics which lay behind the Presbyterian petitioning campaigns in Lancashire and Cheshire during 1646. Focusing particularly upon clerical activists, this article traces the linkages back to the petitioning campaigns of 1641-2 and highlights the continuities in both personnel and an impulse for accommodation. The article unravels the networks which stretched between London and north-western England, and investigates how Presbyterian politics in London in 1646 might have influenced the Lancashire and Cheshire campaigns for a Presbyterian settlement of the Church. Finally, the article comments upon why the Lancashire campaign succeeded when the Cheshire campaign did not.

In October 1646 Lancashire became the only county outside London to be granted parliamentary approval for a Presbyterian system of church government. This article will explore the interplay between the pro-Presbyterian campaigns in Lancashire, Cheshire and London during 1646, and how those campaigns' uses of print and of mass-subscription

BIA = Borthwick Institute for Archives, York; CALS = Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, Chester; JRRIL = John Rylands Research Institute and Library, Manchester; ODNB = *Oxford dictionary of national biography*; TNA = The National Archives

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petitions show a degree of coordination in the ways in which they sought to gain support. This close interplay should not be surprising, as prominent members of the Westminster Assembly such as John Ley, Charles Herle, Samuel Torshell and Richard Heyrick had all served as clergy in parishes around the Mersey basin in Cheshire and south Lancashire before leaving for London soon after civil war had broken out in 1642. This core was already prominent in clergy and gentry networks in Lancashire and Cheshire (and indeed, London) before achieving formal national influence at the Westminster Assembly in the mid-1640s. The local connections of these clergy would be invaluable in organising the coalitions of support upon which the Lancashire and Cheshire petitions were based.

This article will intertwine two threads which stretch back from 1646 and well into the 1630s and earlier. One is the relationship between the two counties and London. Richard Cust and Peter Lake have recently elegantly explored the interactions of the Cheshire gentry with London as a metropolis where the gentry studied and engaged in legal, political and religious discussion, crucially sending accounts back home to friends and relatives, at least five days' horse ride distant.¹ The same draw to London can be applied to clergy, particularly during the period of the First Civil War when clergy of Parliamentary persuasion fled to the safety of the capital. The second thread is that of the politics of accommodation, and again, Cust and Lake have neatly traced the career of the Cheshire clergyman, John Ley, to illustrate how at moments of tension amongst Cheshire's godly clergy, particularly during the 1630s, Ley presented himself as a figure who sought accommodation.² These impulses can be seen within the role which Ley's friend, James Ussher, the archbishop of Armagh, played in 1641 in promoting a proposal for a 'reduced' episcopacy. It was hoped that those whose perceptions of the office of bishop had been tainted by the Laudian model of episcopacy might be able to view this alternative model of episcopal government as one around which they could coalesce.³

With an intractable King Charles I failing to comprehend political reality, the moment for an Ussher-style settlement in 1641 swiftly passed. Four years of civil war later, and following Parliament's victory, in 1646 the same group of clergy from the Mersey basin region (but often operating from London) was promoting a Presbyterian church settlement akin to the Scottish Kirk, with minimal ongoing oversight from parliament. The journey to that point will be traced in this article, but again, we see at

¹ R. Cust and P. Lake, *Gentry culture and the politics of religion: Cheshire on the eve of civil war*, Manchester 2020, 92–111.

² Ibid. ch. v.

³ A. Ford, *James Ussher: theology, history, and politics in early-modern Ireland and England*, Oxford 2007, ch. x.

work the same impulses towards accommodation and coalition-building. Regarding Thomas Edwards's famous 1646 trilogy *Gangraena*, with its lurid depictions of sects and sectaries sent to him by a network of correspondents, no examples from Lancashire and Cheshire were included by Edwards until the third volume, printed in December 1646, so after the Presbyterian petitioning campaigns of that summer.⁴ Given that Ann Hughes's research has shown that Edwards was often a marginal and controversial figure within the London Presbyterian milieu, the lack of supplied examples from that region during a crucial time of politicking may well have been a tactical move by those at the heart of those machinations.⁵ Writing about the 1646 Presbyterian petitioning campaign in Lancashire, Hughes has noted that 'It is unlikely that the independent Samuel Eaton and a few companions had caused such alarm in the county, more likely that news from London spread by Edwards and others had intensified the fears of Lancashire Presbyterians.'⁶ There was certainly a close interplay between London clerical politics and the petitioning on the ground in Lancashire and Cheshire, but this article will suggest that the intensification of the Presbyterian campaign in the Mersey basin area came less from Edwards and more from those clergy with feet both in London and the north-west. What those clergy intensified was something that they knew very well existed already in the area. Opposition to the principle of independent particular congregations can be found in the Mersey basin region in the second half of the 1630s and into the early 1640s, and indeed, involved this same core grouping of clergy who would be at the heart of the Presbyterian campaign of 1646. Intriguingly, to add to the excellent research which Elliot Vernon has undertaken into the activism of the London Presbyterians in calling for the establishment of a classis system there in 1646, the attention that London-based Presbyterians gave to the Lancashire and Cheshire campaign suggests that even though the ministers' resolution in June 1646 had accepted Parliament's proposals for a form of Presbyterian church government to be implemented in London, there was still a push from those prominent on the London scene for a model of Presbyterianism which went beyond the proposals that had been accepted for London.⁷ London-based Presbyterians were innately involved within the Lancashire and Cheshire campaigns during that period, with a goal to achieving (albeit outside of the capital) what they would have viewed as being a fuller settlement than that attained for London in June 1646 that had all of the hallmarks of a Church firmly under parliamentary control, rather

⁴ A. Hughes, *Gangraena and the struggle for the English revolution*, Oxford 2004, 188.

⁵ *Ibid.* 22–31.

⁶ *Ibid.* 370.

⁷ E. Vernon, *London Presbyterians and the British revolutions, 1638–64*, Manchester 2021.

than the separation from the state which they saw longingly in the Scottish Kirk. Ultimately, the Cheshire petition failed where the Lancashire petition succeeded, and the factors as to why that was the case will be explored here.

Chad van Dixhoorn has argued that there was a variety of 'Presbyterian ecclesiologies' in England in the 1640s. Some Presbyterians had more in common with their Episcopalian counterparts on the issue of from where church power originated, whereas others were closer to their Congregational colleagues. If a brief definition of Presbyterianism may serve for the purposes of this article and its focus primarily on the practicalities of networks and activism, it is van Dixhoorn's pithy phrase of Presbyterians 'advocating a robust connectionalism in the visible Church'.⁸

Back in early 1641, with Charles I's personal rule at an end and the Long Parliament in session, the 'Laudian' governance of the Church of England was at the point of collapse. Several bishops particularly associated with the imposition of Laudian ideals, including Archbishop William Laud himself, had been imprisoned.⁹ In Cheshire, Samuel Eaton was amongst those who tried to encourage support for an anti-episcopal petition. Eaton had recently returned from New England, having previously served as the rector of the Wirral parish of West Kirby. In January 1641 he had preached sermons at Chester and Knutsford that tied the anti-episcopal campaign explicitly to calls for the establishment of a Congregational platform of church governance.¹⁰ This was ultimately a fatal move. Whilst the bishop of Chester, John Bridgeman, had become increasingly unpopular in the region thanks to his seemingly enthusiastic support for Laudianism from the mid-1630s onwards, something that had chimed unflatteringly when compared to his previously sympathetic conduct towards Puritan nonconformists within his diocese, there was little appetite for an ecclesiastical landscape of independent congregations.¹¹ Support for the Cheshire anti-episcopal petition, presented to the Commons in mid-February 1641 with 1,100 signatures, was ultimately overshadowed by that gained within the county by Sir Thomas Aston's subsequent petition in defence of episcopacy. As allegations of impropriety subsequently circulated about Aston's petition, the campaign in April 1641 for a counter-petition became associated with iconoclasm. Ultimately, the anti-episcopal campaign's explicit Congregationalism, coupled with linked outbursts of iconoclasm within

⁸ Chad van Dixhoorn, 'Presbyterian ecclesiologies at the Westminster Assembly', in Elliot Vernon and Hunter Powell (eds), *Church politics and polity in the British Atlantic*, c. 1635–66, Manchester 2020, 119.

⁹ Ford, *Ussher*, 235.

¹⁰ James Mawdesley, 'Peers, pastors and the particular Church: the failure of Congregational ideas in the Mersey Basin region, 1636–41', in Vernon and Powell, *Church politics*, 39–40.

¹¹ Idem, 'Clerical politics in Lancashire and Cheshire during the reign of Charles I, 1625–1649', unpubl. PhD diss. Sheffield 2014, ch. iv.

Cheshire's churches, proved to be an unattractive combination. Whilst some forty-eight Cheshire gentry explicitly distanced themselves from Aston's petition in May 1641, there is little evidence that they joined the anti-episcopal campaign either.¹²

Whilst Aston's petition enjoyed some clerical support, the Cheshire anti-episcopal campaign is notable for its lack of clerical support. In this middle group of clergymen who did not support Aston and who are not known to have supported the anti-episcopal campaign are the clergy within the grouping surrounding John Ley, vicar of Great Budworth and sub-dean of Chester Cathedral, as well as being the city's most prominent lecturer. In the early 1630s, with a sabbatarian controversy raging in Chester, fourteen clergy wrote to Ley to ask him to pronounce on the controversy. This group included both Charles Herle, rector of Winwick in Lancashire, and Samuel Clarke, then curate of Shotwick, who would both be prominent on the London scene in the mid-1640s.¹³ Given the way in which this group continued to look towards Ley as a counsellor and indeed as a spokesman, the explanation as to this group's apparent silence during the intense petitioning of early 1641 may well lie in the attempts to secure an accommodated settlement between King and Parliament, built upon a church settlement through which bishops would never again be able to repeat the perceived excesses of the Laudian moment.

The recent excellent research of Cust and Lake has shone much light on the relationship between Ley and his diocesan bishop, Bridgeman, and offers tantalising precedents of Ley seeking compromised solutions to knotty problems. As far as back as 1622, with both Ley and Bridgeman relatively new in the diocese, the pair had corresponded about a Puritan nonconformist minister, a Mr Roles of Knutsford, with Ley having evidently at one time had some optimism about bringing Roles to conformity. However, after Roles had sent a bribe to Bridgeman's wife, Ley conceded the gravity of the offence, but asked that Roles might be allowed to leave his cure voluntarily rather than through suspension.¹⁴ Ley and Bridgeman clearly had a close relationship, and in 1635, Ley had addressed a letter to Bridgeman about the alleged restoration of St Werburgh's shrine in Chester Cathedral into a stone altar. By this point, wooden communion tables in the churches of the diocese had undergone railing along Laudian lines since 1633. Ley's argument was based upon a distinction between wooden tables and stone altars, which, as Cust and Lake note, allowed Ley to make a distinction between railed communion tables not being in themselves 'popish' in the way that a stone altar was. If we are to look forward to Ley's position in 1641 (when this letter was printed in London), we see Ley as a senior clergyman of the

¹² Ibid. 169–85.

¹³ J. Ley, *Sunday a sabbath*, London 1641 (Wing L.1886), sig. Ar.

¹⁴ Cust and Lake, *Gentry culture*, 187–8.

diocese, whose counsel was sought by other prominent clergy in the diocese, offering advice to the ordinary, and beseeching Bridgeman to take that advice.¹⁵ One might say that it was the recalibration of the relationship between a diocesan bishop and his clergy so that advice could be given by the latter to the former, as opposed to a Laudian model of episcopacy which stressed a bishop's primacy over their presbyters, which lay at the heart of the proposals in 1641 for a 'reduced' episcopacy.

In the late 1630s, though, opposition to the office of bishop itself was not widespread. After Richard Mather and William Tompson had sent correspondence from New England to their native county of Lancashire in 1636 which had outlined a Congregational system of church government, it was clergy working within the nexus of influence surrounding the Stanley family in south Lancashire who had taken the lead in combatting these ideas. This grouping included Herle, who had operated as a *de facto* chaplain to the family, as well as having been close to both Mather and Tompson when they were based in Lancashire, with Tompson having served as Herle's curate.¹⁶ Whilst there is no direct evidence at this point to link Ley to the opposition to Congregationalism, he was certainly closely associated with clergy who had taken such a stand by the late 1630s. This linkage between Herle and Ley was further cemented in 1640 in the context of the clerical opposition to the *et cetera* oath appended to the newly issued canons. On 18 August 1640 Ley and Herle preached at a monthly exercise, 'our minds and tongues united in pressing *Peace and Charity*, most needfull Themes for these crazie and distracted times'.¹⁷ The paper that Ley subsequently produced was not ultimately required as the calling of the Long Parliament in November 1640 removed the impetus behind enforcing the oath. When Ley printed this paper as *Defensive doubts* in early 1641, and whilst the text was addressed to the clergy of the diocese generally, amongst the clergy identified specifically was Richard Heyrick, the warden of the Manchester collegiate church.¹⁸ As well as cementing clerical relationships locally, Elliot Vernon has highlighted the significance of the debates around the canons in cementing relationships between London clergy and their provincial counterparts, noting that Ley had been on his way to London to consult with clerical colleagues about a response to the canons when he heard that the Short Parliament had been dissolved in May 1640.¹⁹

Heyrick offers an interesting comparison to Herle and Ley. Whilst they were longstanding incumbents in the region, Heyrick was a relative

¹⁵ Ibid. 201–4.

¹⁶ Mawdesley, 'Peers', 46–53.

¹⁷ J. Ley, *Defensive doubts, hopes, and reasons, for refusall of the oath, imposed by the sixth canon of the late synod*, London 1641 (Wing L.1874), sig. a4r. Italics original.

¹⁸ Ibid. sig. a3v.

¹⁹ Vernon, *London Presbyterians*, 22; Ley, *Defensive doubts*, sigs cv–c2r.

newcomer, being London-born, Oxford-educated and having served latterly as the rector of Northrepps in Norfolk. His presentation as warden at Manchester in 1635 had been the subject of intrigue amongst the college's Fellows, and it ultimately took the intervention of Archbishop Laud and a royal presentation before he was secure in post. Heyrick was by no means unique in the region for overseeing a grand renovation of his church in the spirit of Laudianism whilst also behaving in ways that implied criticism of the current regime.²⁰ He was particularly supportive of Thomas Case, his school friend and latterly his curate in Norfolk who, having subsequently become the rector of Erpingham, then fell foul of Matthew Wren's regime in the diocese of Norwich. Case then joined Heyrick as one of the clergy at the Manchester collegiate church.²¹

In Lancashire, other than a single comment in 1634 that some critics of the consecration service presided over by Bishop Bridgeman at Ringley chapel in Prestwich parish objected simply because they 'Love not Bishops', there is no evidence in the county of opposition to the office of bishop for much of the 1630s.²² The impasse was broken by a series of sermons preached by Thomas Case in and around Manchester during the Scottish crisis of 1638–9. On Christmas Day 'last past' (1638), he was alleged to have preached a sermon at the collegiate church comparing the 'Scribes and Pharisees' who had opposed Jesus to 'Bishopricks, Deanes or Prebends', though he claimed that he did not remember using that phrase, and if he did use it, he had done so unintentionally. He was also alleged to have preached 'that many kingdomes at this day were in great Persecution meaneing Denmark, Germany, Sweed-land, France, and the Low-Countries; And yow said there were many others, which were likewise in persecucion, which you would not name: Vnder which many others, diuerse of your Auditors conceiued that yow meant the kingdome of Scotland for one'. To cap off this sermon, Case also argued that the ceremonies of the Church of England were 'indifferent', and he condemned 'the Gouvernors of the Church of England' for enforcing them as 'necessary'.²³ Furthermore, a Manchester bookseller, Thomas Smith, was cited before the consistory court in the spring of 1639 for selling seditious literature and for attending conventicles, both of which he denied.²⁴ Smith would later be active in the Lancashire Presbyterian petitioning campaign in 1646.

²⁰ Mawdesley, 'Clerical politics', 120–1; Michael Mullett, 'Heyrick, Richard (1600–1667)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/13175>>.

²¹ Michael Mullett, 'Case, Thomas (bap. 1598, d. 1682)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/4855>>.

²² *The correspondence of Nathan Wakworth and Peter Seddon of Outwood*, ed. J. S. Fletcher (Chetham Society cix, 1880), 32.

²³ CALS, EDC 5/1638/112.

²⁴ CALS, EDC 5/1638/113.

As the political crisis deepened over the next couple of years, the opposition to episcopacy took on a rather different form in Lancashire when compared to Cheshire. As we have seen, in Cheshire the anti-episcopal petition became associated with the promotion of a Congregational platform of church government, and this may well have cost it support. This does not seem to have happened in Lancashire, and what little evidence there is points away from Congregationalism and towards a Presbyterianism more in line with the Scottish and continental church models. On 8 January 1641 the redoubtable Manchester cleric and longstanding Puritan nonconformist William Bourne wrote to the Herefordshire member Sir Robert Harley in expectation that the Manchester college's business would soon become a topic of debate in parliament, 'As Organs, Altars, gestures, vestares [vestments?], crosses, &c: which I hope you will remoue ... I doubt not but you are resolved to remoue whatsoever savours of Anti-christ from amongst vs.' Bourne, though, was concerned about Harley's links to London clergy involved in the group formulating the Ministers' Petition and Remonstrance and who may have been willing to compromise over the issue of episcopacy. Bourne's solution was clear: 'I think you may doe well to conforme the same to the Apostles times; whereof wee haue presidents in France, Geneva, Scotland, & other reformed churches; the which if you doo; you shall make a most comfortable & perpetuall accord betwixt the Kingdomes.'²⁵

Whilst Bourne was certainly not alone in looking to the Scottish Kirk as an example for the Church of England to follow, this was not the position taken by Ley. Indeed, the position which that group would come to take in 1646, where the Kirk was viewed as a desirable model, was still some way off. For much of this period in early 1641, Ley was away from Cheshire in London, with his dedicatory to his *Defensive doubts* being dated from his lodgings at Paul's Churchyard on 22 February 1641.²⁶ On 23 January 1641 Sir Robert Harley had presented to the House of Commons the Ministers' Petition and Remonstrance, which called for substantial reform of episcopacy, but not for its outright abolition.²⁷ It is plausible that Ley was involved in drafting the Remonstrance; his *A patterne of piety*, printed in 1640, was co-dedicated to Sir Robert's wife Lady Brilliana, and Sir Robert evidently read the printed version of Ley's treatise, *Sunday a Sabbath*, printed in early 1641.²⁸ The London minister Cornelius Burges afterwards recalled

²⁵ William Bourne to Sir Robert Harley, 8 Jan. 1640/41, BL, MS Add. 70105, unfoliated.

²⁶ Ley, *Defensive doubts*, sig. a3r.

²⁷ J. Adamson, *The noble revolt: the overthrow of Charles I*, London 2007, 174–5.

²⁸ J. Ley, *A patterne of pietie: or, The religious life and death of that gracious matron, Mrs. Jane Ratcliffe, widow and citizen of Chester*, London 1640 (RSTC 15567), sig. A3; BL, MS Add. 70062, unfoliated (undated notes in the handwriting of Sir Robert Harley on 'Sunday a sabbath').

twice-weekly meetings in the early 1640s involving himself, John White, Stephen Marshall, Edmund Calamy ‘and one or two ministers more ... not one was for total abolishing of all, or any, but usurped episcopacy’.²⁹ Burges, Calamy and Marshall all accompanied Harley when he presented the Remonstrance to the Commons. It is intriguing to wonder if Ley was one of these other ministers noted by Burges. Ley certainly had connections to Lord Brooke, who according to Burges had attended some of these meetings.³⁰ Ley was also a long-standing friend of Archbishop Ussher, whose proposals for ‘modified episcopacy’ were what John Adamson has described as being ‘broadly compatible’ with what is known about the contents of the Ministers’ Petition and Remonstrance.³¹ Indeed, in February 1641, Ley noted that he had spoken to Ussher only ‘the other day’.³²

The excellent research by Cust and Lake has unpicked Ley’s positioning of himself in early 1641 with regards to proposals for a modified or reduced episcopacy. *Defensive doubts*, Ley’s tract in opposition to the *et cetera* oath of 1640, printed in 1641, was not simply a call for a return to the Church of the Elizabethan settlement, but rather, if its proposals had ever come to fruition, would have represented a fundamental reordering of the relationship between bishop and presbyter. For Ley, the powers of excommunication and absolution were those of a presbyter rather than a bishop, and ordination was to be exercised by presbyters under the supervision of a bishop, rather than being exclusively the preserve of a bishop.³³ What Ley avoided being drawn into was from where the power of a bishop originated – *iure divino*, from the Apostles, or *iure humano*, by human invention. Ley’s sympathies lay with the latter viewpoint; the views of others, not least that of the man whom Ley was most seeking to promote as a model of Calvinist episcopacy, James Ussher, probably aligned with the former viewpoint.³⁴ None the less, in Ley’s view, Ussher’s promotion of ‘a forme of ecclesiasticall government, wherein you might be but one of us in a sociable participation of ordination and jurisdiction with the rest of your brethren, the incumbent pastors and preachers of particular churches’, was certainly a model around which he could align, regardless of Ussher’s personal view of from where episcopal power had originated.³⁵

Again, we see Ley as accommodator at work. Cust and Lake have demonstrated the lengths to which Ley went to cultivate ‘the middle ground’, using the medium of book dedications to reach out both to Ussher and to Viscount Kilmorey, an ally of Sir Thomas Aston who was himself

²⁹ Cornelius Burges to Richard Baxter, 10 Sept. 1659, Dr Williams’s Library, London, Baxter’s letters, iii, fo. 80r.

³⁰ Ann Hughes, ‘Thomas Dugard and his circle in the 1630s—a “Parliamentary-Puritan” connexion?’, *HJ* xxix (1986), 771–93.

³² Ley, *Defensive doubts*, sig. b2v.

³⁴ *Ibid.* 259–60.

³¹ Adamson, *Noble revolt*, 174.

³³ Cust and Lake, *Gentry culture*, 256–9.

³⁵ Ley, *Sunday a sabbath*, sig. a4v; Ford, *Ussher*, 246.

seeking to cultivate the middle ground with a vision of the post-Laudian Church which was somewhat different from Ley's. Crucially, any model for church reform needed the support of Charles I.³⁶ As Alan Ford has shown, Ussher was around the king at that crucial time in 1640–1, with a privileged access which was probably not in Ley's possession. If a Church was to be attained which was in effect built upon bishops governing in consultation with synods of presbyters, then the king's support would be crucial in securing such a settlement.³⁷

That support was not to be forthcoming. The king's Banqueting House speech of January 1641 had spoken of the Church of England being restored as it had been in Queen Elizabeth's reign, but with little movement from the king or the bishops, and with the earl of Strafford's attainer making slow progress, positions hardened in the House of Commons as anti-episcopal petitions were received from the counties. The Lancashire anti-episcopal petition (with 4,488 signatures) was presented to the Commons on 21 April 1641 by the knight of the shire, Ralph Assheton of Middleton. The Commons diarist Sir Simonds D'Ewes noted its explicit call for the abolition of episcopacy, and its referral to the committee considering the Ministers' Petition and Remonstrance with the restriction that the abolition of episcopacy was not to be considered by the committee.³⁸ There is no suggestion that it promoted a Congregational platform (or even a Presbyterian one as favoured by William Bourne). Unlike its Cheshire counterpart, the Lancashire anti-episcopal campaign does not seem to have provoked the splits seen within the Cheshire gentry and clergy – for example, there was no pro-episcopal petition submitted from Lancashire until one was presented to the king at York in the early summer of 1642. One possible reason for this is that the Protestant gentry in the county could see the advantages of root and branch church reform, not least as it may have created opportunities for themselves in governing the Church, a possibility which gained support after the commencement on 11 June 1641 of the root and branch debates in the Commons.³⁹ By 14 July 1641 the Liverpool member of parliament, John Moore, noted that the Lancashire members had nominated the eight gentlemen who would form Lancashire's commission 'for causes Ecclesiasticall'.⁴⁰ On the same day, nominations were made for Lancashire's committee for scandalous ministers, though there is no evidence of any ministers being ejected in the county until 1643.⁴¹ Unlike in Cheshire, where splits had been apparent since early 1641, the Lancashire Protestant gentry showed a remarkably unified sense of purpose. The presence of numerous

³⁶ Cust and Lake, *Gentry culture*, 264–6.

³⁷ Ford, *Ussher*, 230–5.

³⁸ BL, MS Harleian 163, fo. 80r. The text of the petition has not survived.

³⁹ A. Fletcher, *The outbreak of the English civil war*, London 1985, 104.

⁴⁰ BL, MS Harleian 479, fo. 801r.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

Catholic gentry in the county may have sharpened their focus, though it is notable that even in the tense context of 1641, instances of open discord in the county between Catholics and Protestants were rare.⁴²

A further common factor may have been the Stanley influence within the county. James, Lord Strange, had been running the Stanley family's estates since the retirement in 1627 of his father William, the sixth earl of Derby.⁴³ During the 1630s, as lord lieutenant of Lancashire, Strange worked closely with his deputy lieutenants who were drawn largely from the county's gentry.⁴⁴ Whilst a Stanley linkage to the anti-episcopal petition of 1641 cannot be proven directly, there are some tantalising pointers. One of the few sources which directly refers to the petition is a letter dated 20 April 1641 written by Charles Herle to Bishop Bridgeman. Herle informed Bridgeman that petitions were being gathered against him at Kirkham and at Wigan (where Bridgeman was the rector), and given that the Lancashire anti-episcopal petition was presented to the Commons on 21 April 1641, we might surmise that Herle is referring to this.⁴⁵ Kirkham is an interesting location. Herle noted that the petition there was being organised by the vicar, Edward Fleetwood, who in 1638 had been the first incumbent to be prosecuted in the diocesan consistory court for failure to comply with the Laudian innovations, including refusing to administer communion to those kneeling at the newly installed communion rails.⁴⁶ Herle's connections to the Stanleys have already been noted, but especially intriguing is that the Stanley family held estates in Kirkham that were included within the family's composition for Royalism in 1649.⁴⁷ Whilst one should be careful of pointing to a direct influence by Lord Strange in Lancastrian affairs in 1641, not least as he was away from the county for much of that year as a member of the House of Lords, individuals with associations to the family certainly had much to gain from the anti-episcopal movement in the county. The proposed Lancashire committee for scandalous ministers included William Farington of Worden and Alexander Rigby of Burgh, both members of families with longstanding Stanley connections, whilst Rigby's son-in-law was the Liverpool member of parliament, John Moore, who was appointed to both committees.⁴⁸ When, in 1636,

⁴² Mawdesley, 'Clerical politics', 208–10.

⁴³ B. Coward, *The Stanleys, Lords Stanley and earls of Derby, 1385–1672: the origins, wealth and power of a landowning family* (Chetham Society 3rd ser. xc, 1983), 57.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 156.

⁴⁵ Charles Herle to John Bridgeman, 20 Apr. 1641, Bridgeman papers, Staffordshire Record Office, Stafford, D1287/18/2 (P/399/210); BL, ms Harleian 478, fo. 610v; Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 92, 194.

⁴⁶ CALS, EDC 5/1638/14.

⁴⁷ Coward, *Stanleys*, 207.

⁴⁸ BL, ms Harleian 479, fo. 801r; Coward, *Stanleys*, 86; Malcolm Gratton, 'Moore, John (c. 1599–1650)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/37779>>.

Farington's tenure as high sheriff of Lancashire had become bogged down in allegations of mismanagement, a petition sent to the Privy Council in his defence was signed by various Lancastrian magistrates. They included the likes of Rigby who had clear Stanley connections, but another signatory was Ralph Assheton of Middleton, the future presenter to the Commons of the Lancashire anti-episcopal petition.⁴⁹ Indeed, if it is correct to assume that the Lancashire anti-episcopal petition perhaps did not propose an alternative platform of church government, then it is certainly possible that such gentry within the Stanley nexus arguably had much to gain from involving themselves in church affairs whilst the replacement platform remained undecided.

After the passage of the bishops' exclusion bill in parliament in late December 1641, and Charles's failed attempt to arrest the Five Members on 4 January 1642, the king had symbolically breached with parliament by departing for London from York, and government by the king-in-parliament broke down. As political polarisation became more entrenched, both nascent Royalists and Parliamentarians sought to cultivate support from wider audiences through print and petitioning.⁵⁰ By the spring of 1642, Ley was back in Cheshire and was involved in the campaign in the county calling for an accommodation between king and parliament. Addressed to the king, the petition centred upon Charles's plan to lead an army to Ireland which had emerged in early April 1642, and the petitioners stressed their wider concern for his personal safety. The printed version of the petition noted that it was presented to Charles at York on 7 May 1642.⁵¹ John Ley was one of fifteen clergymen who signed this petition, of whom seven supported Parliament during the forthcoming Civil War (in contrast to two known Royalists).⁵² Five days earlier, Richard Heyrick had presented the Lancashire accommodation petition to the king. According to Richard Hollinworth, the petition received a frosty response, and 'was crossed, by a suggestion at the court, that that petition was not the petition of the county, but of a party, and there would come shortly up another petition'.⁵³

The signatures of the Cheshire accommodation petition were headed by three gentlemen: Sir George Booth, Sir Richard Grosvenor and Sir Richard Wilbraham. As military recruitment developed in Cheshire, the Booth-Grosvenor-Wilbraham group launched a final attempt at accommodation in June 1642, gathering what would become the Cheshire Remonstrance,

⁴⁹ *The Farington papers*, ed. S. M. Farington (Chetham Society xxxix, 1856), 28–9.

⁵⁰ M. Braddick, *God's fury, England's fire: a new history of the English civil wars*, London 2009, ch. vi; Fletcher, *Outbreak*, ch. v.

⁵¹ Anon., *The humble petition of 85 gentlemen and free-holders, and 15 ministers of the county palatine of Chester*, York 1642 (Wing H.3463A).

⁵² BL, MS Add. 36913, fo. 60r; Mawdesley, 'Clerical politics', 193–4.

⁵³ R. Hollingworth, *Mancuniensis: or, An history of the towne of Manchester, and what is most memorable concerning it*, Manchester 1839, 120–1.

though there is no evidence that it was ever submitted to parliament. The Cheshire Remonstrance contained 8,376 signatures collected on a parish-by-parish basis, and called for joint action from the king and parliament to tackle 'sects and schisms', as well as 'papists, Donatists and Arminians'.⁵⁴ Anthony Fletcher has emphasised the unique nature of this petition in its stress of loyalty to both sides, and its earnest appeal for a reunion of king and parliament.⁵⁵ Amongst the clerical signatures were moderate Puritans who would become Parliamentarians, including the future Westminster Assembly members John Ley and Samuel Torshell, the preacher at Bunbury. Torshell later admitted that by this point he had already decided against episcopacy, having read a copy of John White's speech given in the Commons during the bishops' exclusion debates in June 1641.⁵⁶ Another signatory was George Byrom, the rector of Thornton-le-Moors.⁵⁷ Byrom had been presented for Puritan offences at Archbishop Neile's metropolitan visitation of the diocese of Chester in 1633, and he had previously engaged the nonconformist Samuel Clarke as his curate.⁵⁸ He would become the focus for some of the conservative coalition-building which would surround the 1646 petitioning campaign.

From the Remonstrance of the summer of 1642, it appears that there was a sizeable body of support for accommodation, which, though perhaps alarmed by Charles's activities, was none the less anxious to avoid a war against their sovereign. Individuals may have had different motives for subscribing to the two accommodation petitions, including a genuine desire to avoid Civil War. For some, though, there was perhaps no need to involve themselves at this point in an anti-episcopal petitioning campaign, given the negative connotations that such campaigns had in Cheshire. Rather, a successful accommodation between king and parliament was likely to generate some kind of settlement which would enable them to fall into line, even if that perhaps took the shape of a reduced episcopacy rather than of outright abolition. Given the links which the likes of John Ley had to London, there is the possibility that this attitude may have developed as a response to the so-called Aldermanbury accord, agreed at Edmund Calamy's house in late 1641, whereby ministers agreed to direct their efforts towards securing the abolition of episcopacy, with the exact details of religious settlement being considered afterwards.⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 270–1; J. S. Morrill, *Cheshire, 1630–1660: county government and society during the English revolution*, Oxford 1974, 58–9.

⁵⁵ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 270–1.

⁵⁶ S. Torshell, *The hypocrite discovered and cured*, London 1643 (Wing T.1938), 'epistle dedicatorie'.⁵⁷ BL, ms Harleian 2107.

⁵⁸ BIA, V. 1633, court book 2, fos 430v, 515v; S. Clarke, *The lives of sundry eminent persons in this later age*, London 1683 (Wing C.4538), 3–4.

⁵⁹ F. J. Bremer, *Congregational communion: clerical friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan community, 1610–1692*, Boston 1994, 132–3.

After civil war broke out later in 1642, the Royalist war effort in Lancashire soon collapsed in the following year apart from in some individual garrisons and a brief revitalisation under Prince Rupert prior to his defeat at Marston Moor in July 1644.⁶⁰ In Cheshire, a similar pattern emerged whereby the Parliamentarians quickly took control of most of the county, though the Royalist garrison at Chester would remain a constant presence until its surrender in February 1646.⁶¹ None the less, the early military manoeuvrings in 1642 had been enough for the likes of Heyrick, Herle, Ley and Torshell to flee their cures for London; indeed, Torshell even wrote a treatise defending his decision, providing examples of exilic precedent from Scripture and from the Marian persecutions of the 1550s. The imprimatur was provided by Herle.⁶²

In Macclesfield Hundred in north-eastern Cheshire, Congregationalism had arguably originated as a practical pastoral response. It was an area with large parishes, upland in nature towards its eastern side. With twelve clergymen having recently been ejected, and a hundredal sequestration committee particularly willing to fund Congregationalist ministerial replacements, such a system enabled the godly from across a wide area to join together and receive the sacraments.⁶³ In either late 1643 or early 1644, Samuel Eaton and Timothy Taylor established their gathered church at Dukinfield, under the protection of the Parliamentary army colonel, Robert Dukinfield. They insisted that their congregation was a practical response to such problems, and that the congregation and its covenant would be dissolved once a godly parochial system was properly established.⁶⁴ They maintained that ministers did have a broader duty to preach to (and hopefully prompt repentance amongst) the broader local population, but with admission to the sacraments being restricted to those who were covenanted members of the gathered church. In the Congregationalists' own perception, this commitment to the parish-based preaching ministry was what distinguished them from religious Independents, though this distinction was frequently lost on critics.⁶⁵ Meanwhile, in London in December 1643, members of the by then established Westminster Assembly called for people to 'forbear' from

⁶⁰ Ronald Hutton, 'The failure of the Lancashire Cavaliers', *Transactions of the Historic Society of Lancashire and Cheshire* cxxix (1979), 47–62.

⁶¹ Morrill, *Cheshire*, 128–33.

⁶² S. T[orshell], *A case of conscience, concerning flying in times of trouble*, London 1643 (Wing T.1934).

⁶³ BL, MS Harleian 2130; Morrill, *Cheshire*, 99–101; Mawdesley, 'Clerical politics', 249–50.

⁶⁴ S. Eaton and T. Taylor, *The defence of sundry positions & Scriptures, for the Congregational-Way justified*, London 1646 (Wing E.120), 19–21; S. Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims: New World settlers and the call of home*, New Haven–London 2007, 138–9.

⁶⁵ Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims*, 140.

establishing their own congregations until the reformation had been authorised by ‘Christian Magistrates’ and led by ‘Ministers of the Gospel’. Whilst the treatise accepted that some rights might have to be granted to particular congregations, the emphasis was very much on waiting for the Assembly to complete its deliberations shaped by Scripture. Amongst the signatories of this treatise were Herle and Heyrick.⁶⁶ Indeed, Herle had already nailed his colours to the mast earlier in 1643, as his *The independency on Scriptures of the independency of churches* had categorically come down against the particular church being supreme in matters of church governance. In doing so, he had shattered the silence on the issue that prominent clergy such as Edmund Calamy had held since the Aldermanbury accord in late 1641.⁶⁷

Over the next couple of years, positions hardened in the Westminster Assembly between those who advocated a Presbyterian system of church government, and those who wanted the particular church to have supreme authority on ecclesiastical matters. In London, the Scottish Presbyterian Robert Baillie (present as an observer at the Westminster Assembly) saw Herle as being ‘of our mind’, and, in early 1646, another Scot at the Westminster Assembly, George Gillespie, had defended Herle and Heyrick’s close associate Thomas Case from attack by the erastian Thomas Goodwin.⁶⁸

Back in Manchester, local mobilisations had been underway in support of a Presbyterian system of church government. On 8 January 1645 the London bookseller George Thomason had acquired his copy of Richard Hollinworth’s *An examination of sundry Scriptures alleadged by our brethren, in defence of some particulars of their church-way*, printed in London for the Manchester bookseller Thomas Smith. The text predictably criticised New England-style Congregationalism, and was written explicitly for the attention of the Westminster Assembly, then considering that matter.⁶⁹ Hollinworth, the son of a prominent Manchester family, seems to have been a close associate of Richard Heyrick, serving as a minister there alongside him.⁷⁰ 1645 into 1646 saw the building of local coalitions which would be crucial as matters came to a climax in the summer of 1646. By 1646, Hollinworth, alongside John Harrison (the minister at Ashton-under-Lyne) and Thomas Johnson (the minister at Stockport), was regularly

⁶⁶ [Westminster Assembly], *Certaine considerations to dissuade men from further gathering of churches in this present juncture of time*, London 1643 (Wing C.1696A).

⁶⁷ C. Herle, *The independency on Scriptures of the independency of churches*, London 1643 (Wing H.1559); Bremer, *Congregational communion*, 132–3. I owe this point to Dr Elliot Vernon.

⁶⁸ Van Dixhoorn, ‘Presbyterian ecclesiologies’, 113, 120.

⁶⁹ R. Hollingworth, *An examination of sundry scriptures alleadged by our brethren, in defence of some particulars of their church-way*, London 1645 (Wing H.2492).

⁷⁰ C. W. Sutton, rev. R. C. Richardson, ‘Hollinworth, Richard (bap. 1607, d. 1656)’, ODNB <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/13565>>.

using the weekly lecture at Manchester to criticise religious Independency.⁷¹

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of this coalition-building, though, was the recruitment of clergy suspected of Royalism during the First Civil War. Observed in both Lancashire and Cheshire were attempts to build coalitions of clergymen, both Royalist and Parliamentarian, around a proposed Presbyterian system of church government. At the investigation in 1645 into the alleged Royalism and liturgical conservatism of the rector of Prestwich, Isaac Allen, Richard Heyrick claimed that Allen was 'indifferent' about the matter of episcopacy, and on 3 March 1646 Heyrick was joined in subscribing a certificate defending Allen's ministry by Hollinworth, Johnson and Herle.⁷² A similar dynamic was also witnessed in Cheshire as attempts were made to save from sequestration George Byrom, the rector of Thornton-le-Moors, a longstanding pre-Civil War magistrate who (like Allen) had been presented for Puritan offences at the 1633 metropolitanical visitation.⁷³ Particularly intriguing about this case are the links with London. After being forced to back down in March 1646 with a previous campaign to parliament (who were increasingly divided over various inter-linked issues including religious settlement and attitudes towards the Scots), on 14 April 1646 the broadly pro-Presbyterian London Common Council had voted to formulate a Remonstrance. The Remonstrance, ultimately presented to both houses of parliament on 27 May 1646, outlined the Council's loyalty to the Solemn League and Covenant whilst calling for a strong Church in response to the growing threat of the sectaries.⁷⁴ Shortly after the decision to formulate a Remonstrance, a petition dated 27 April 1646, which robustly defended Byrom as 'a godly, industrious, constant preacher of Godes word', was signed by eighteen ministers.⁷⁵ The signatories included the Westminster Assembly members Ley, Herle and Samuel Clarke (who had previously served as Byrom's curate at Thornton-le-Moors); because of the handwriting and that the Westminster Assembly on 1 May 1646 granted Ley permission to return to Cheshire for a month, Ley may have drafted the petition before his return to Cheshire.⁷⁶ He then gathered further signatures from Cheshire and Lancashire ministers, including both Royalists and Parliamentarians.⁷⁷ Though the petitioners did not save Byrom's position in Cheshire, the Committee for Plundered

⁷¹ *The life of Adam Martindale, written by himself*, ed. R. Parkinson (Chetham Society iv, 1845), 63.

⁷² TNA, SP 23/158, fo. 339; Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS J. Walker c. 5, fo. 285r.

⁷³ TNA, SP 23/201, fo. 757; BIA, V. 1633, court book 2, fo. 43ov. For Byrom as a magistrate see Cust and Lake, *Gentry culture*, 127.

⁷⁵ TNA, SP 23/201, fo. 757.

⁷⁶ *The minutes and papers of the Westminster Assembly, 1643–1652*, ed. C. van Dixhoorn, Oxford 2012, iv. 99.

⁷⁷ Mawdesley, 'Clerical politics', 257.

Ministers admitted him to the rectory of Chingford in Essex in December 1646.⁷⁸

Given that Ley had not returned to Cheshire for so long, it is highly suggestive that he should decide to return just as the London Presbyterians were getting ready for another campaign in parliament, and that whilst in Cheshire, he used a petition ostensibly to save a godly minister to gather support from clergy on both sides of the political divide. Ley's activities here probably stemmed from other forms of Presbyterian activism, as he was an ally of Thomas Edwards and was 'frequently commended' by him in the first part of *Gangraena*.⁷⁹ It can be suggested that Ley had returned to Cheshire to lay the ground for a Presbyterian petition from that county, which subsequently emerged dated 6 July 1646. Whilst only known to survive in a later copy and unfortunately without signatures, the petition made explicit links to the developments in London. It called for the suppression of 'separate congregacions' and asked that a Scottish-style Presbyterian system of church government with powers of ordination be established in Cheshire. The Cestrians hoped that with the English Church reformed, 'our Bretheren of Scotland ... would returne home a people contented'.⁸⁰ With his Westminster contacts, Ley may well have intended this petitioning campaign to ride on the coat tails of the Newcastle Propositions, which would be sent northwards on 13 July 1646 and which required the king to swear to the Solemn League and Covenant and to accept reformation based upon the Covenant as a basis for a peace settlement.⁸¹

The involvement of former Royalists in Ley's campaign to save Byrom is interesting, as the Cheshire petition of July 1646 also called for the punishment of 'Delinquents'.⁸² In a county where Congregationalism had gained ground in its eastern parts, and with the future of episcopacy now looking bleak, Presbyterianism had now emerged as a conservative position fighting for a parochial-based, settled, national Church, against the perceived threat of the separated congregations.⁸³ It is at this point that we might identify these threads of clerical activism coming together as being the outworking of what Anthony Milton has identified as being 'the abortive reformation' of 1640–2.⁸⁴ If the king had agreed to a church settlement during that period, which might have avoided civil war, the Church of England would have been fundamentally changed. Bishops would have had a greater obligation to consult with the presbyters of their diocese

⁷⁸ A. G. Matthews, *Walker revised: being a revision of John Walker's Sufferings of the clergy during the grand rebellion, 1642–60*, Oxford 1948, 89.

⁷⁹ Hughes, *Gangraena*, 315.

⁸⁰ JRRIL, MS English 745, fo. 26.

⁸¹ Braddick, *God's fury*, 465. I owe this observation to Professor Sarah Mortimer.

⁸² JRRIL, MS English 745, fo. 26.

⁸³ Hughes, *Gangraena*, 349–50.

⁸⁴ A. Milton, *England's second reformation: the battle for the Church of England, 1625–1662*, Cambridge 2021, ch. iv.

over matters such as ordination, and there would have been periodic diocesan synods of bishops and their clergy to discuss grave matters.⁸⁵ This was not simply a return to the Elizabethan settlement, as a common refrain of the time would have had it, but rather would have been a new juncture in the way in which the Church of England functioned at diocesan level.⁸⁶ In effect, what we see in the clerical machinations of 1646 is the continuation of these reforming threads of 1640–2, though rather than the ignoring of clerical advice by bishops, the issue now was the danger of the clerical voice being sidelined in a nation of particular congregations, where by definition it would be much more difficult for groups or synods of clergymen to impose their collective will across multiple congregations. By 1646, what in 1640–2 would have represented a fundamental recalibration of the collective role of presbyters within the governance of the English Church was now much more of a rearguard action, seeking to preserve what had been secured in terms of that clerical voice, rather than risk throwing those gains down the drain if the Church was to fragment into a nation of particular congregations. It should thus be no surprise to see that in the Presbyterian campaign of 1646, old friendships which crossed Civil War allegiances were renewed, and what we see is in many respects the revitalisation of John Ley's network of 1640–2, with the collective role of presbyters within a rebuilt post-Civil War society being the point at stake. However, the Lancashire and Cheshire campaign was less about the establishment of a 'Presbyterian' system of church government, as there were various such potential models then subject to circulation and discussion. Rather, at its heart was a movement for a particular form of Presbyterianism, much more aligned to the model of the Scottish Kirk, where presbyters rather than laity or even parliament would have the upper hand. As such, the pursuit of such a model would undoubtedly have held interest for observers far beyond the two counties.

On 18 August 1646 George Thomason acquired a copy of a pamphlet which recorded an alleged petition from Lancashire (which Thomason recorded as 'a false copie'), together with a commentary which disparaged the petition. The alleged petition shared many of the same aims as the Cheshire petition, calling for the establishment of Presbyterianism, the suppression of separatist congregations and the punishment of delinquents.⁸⁷ The Lancashire Presbyterian minister John Tilsley claimed that the hostile commentary had been written by John Lilburne.⁸⁸ There is no evidence that the Cheshire petition dated 6 July 1646 was ever presented to

⁸⁵ Ibid. 123–6.

⁸⁶ Ibid. 130.

⁸⁷ Anon., *A new birth of the city-remonstrance: or, A Lanchashire petition*, London 1646 (Wing N.581), 1–3.

⁸⁸ J. Tilsley, *A true copie of the petition of twelve thousand five hundred and upwards of the well-affected gentlemen, ministers, free-holders and others of the county palatine of Lancaster*,

parliament, though the Lancashire petition (with text identical to that circulating in print on 18 August) was presented to the Lords on 25 August 1646 and was afterwards ordered by them to be received in the Commons. The petition was read in the Commons on 15 September 1646, the same day that the bill for the establishment of Presbyterian classes in Lancashire was introduced.⁸⁹ It would thus seem that the Lancashire petition and the abortive Cheshire petition were the product of the same machinations which had begun with John Ley's return to Cheshire from London and of which the Byrom petition was one aspect. One of the signatories of the Byrom petition was Edward Gee, the minister at Ecclestone in Lancashire. The author of the commentary to the Lancashire petition had obtained a letter sent by Gee to an anonymous minister dated 26 June 1646, in which Gee requested that the subscriptions be returned to him by 6 July 1646, the same date as the ultimately abortive Cheshire petition.⁹⁰

It seems evident that the two petitions were prepared in tandem thanks to promptings from John Ley, but why only the Lancashire petition made it through to parliament is unclear. By the late summer of 1646, parliament had started to legislate to reform the governance of the city of Chester and to endow its preaching ministry following the city's surrender in February that year, so a Presbyterian petition from Cheshire may have seemed impolitic at that time.⁹¹ It appears that the Lancashire petition had already been circulating in London, and from the commentary to the 'false copie' of the Lancashire petition, 'by a providence' a copy had come into the commentator's hands.⁹² It seems plausible that contacts in London were involved in the management of the Lancashire petition: a letter from Ley's associate Edward Gee had found its way to London, and John Tilsley, the minister at Deane who authored the commentary to the Lancashire Presbyterian leadership's version of the petition, was evidently at Westminster on 25 August 1646 when the petition was read in the Lords.⁹³ Gee was also part of the Stanley family network in the north-west, serving in the 1630s as chaplain to Richard Parr, the bishop of Sodor and Man who had worked closely with Lord Strange to improve clerical standards on the island.⁹⁴

London 1646 (Wing T.1274), 9–10. George Thomason acquired his copy of this pamphlet on 31 August 1646.

⁸⁹ *Minutes of the Manchester Presbyterian Classis, 1646–1660*, ed. W. A. Shaw (Chetham Society n.s. xx, xxii, xxiv, 1890–1), xx. 1.

⁹⁰ Anon., *New birth*, 5; JRRIL, ms English 745, fo. 25.

⁹¹ This ordinance was passed by the Lords on 1 October 1646: *Journal of the House of Lords*, viii, at *British History Online*, <<https://www.british-history.ac.uk/lords-jrnl/vol8/pp505-507>>, accessed 12 December 2023.

⁹² Anon., *New birth*, 3–4.

⁹³ Tilsley, *Petition*, 21.

⁹⁴ S. J. Guscott, 'Gee, Edward (bap. 1612, d. 1660)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/10497>>; Brian Quintrell, 'Parr, Richard (1591/2–1644)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/21400>>.

On 19 June 1646, the London Presbyterian ministers had agreed broadly to accept parliament's ordinance of 5 June 1646 for the establishment of a Presbyterian system of church government in London.⁹⁵ In Robert Baillie's view, what was offered was 'a lame Erastian presbytery', though, as Elliot Vernon notes, parish presbyteries were granted powers of discipline over a wide variety of sins, with only those sins not specified then falling under the jurisdiction of parliament as 'the final court of appeal'.⁹⁶ However, the subsequent pursuit of the Lancashire petition into parliament became in effect a vehicle for promoting a type of Presbyterian settlement through which the Church would have had a greater independence from parliamentary oversight. This hope was perhaps encouraged by the ordinance of 5 June being initially time limited for three years.⁹⁷ In its edition of 9–16 September 1646, *The Scottish Dove* newsbook praised the proposed Lancashire system as 'a good example to all the Kingdome'.⁹⁸ In an undated letter, but probably dating from August or September 1646, Baillie wrote to a member of parliament, Zouch Tate, to ask that 'The pious and honest petition of Lancashire, deserves a speedie hearing and favourable answer: it's the work of some to have it slighted and disgraced.' In the same letter, Baillie suggested that one 'Mr Lee', presumably John Ley, be a suitable candidate for 'the Deanerie of Christ's Church' (Ley's college at Oxford), as reward 'for his zeal against Independents'.⁹⁹ One wonders why (if John Tilsley's implication is correct) the London-based anti-Presbyterian John Lilburne took so much interest in a petition from Lancashire, unless he saw it as being part of a broader picture at least partly influenced by the Scottish Presbyterians.¹⁰⁰ It is perhaps not without significance that Michael Mahony has demonstrated that the signatories of the two London citizens' petitions in support of Presbyterianism, dated 12 November 1645 and 9 March 1646, were dominated by inhabitants of parishes towards the west of the City of London pastored by close clerical allies of Baillie.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, the two presidents of the Sion College conclave of London clergy were consecutively Ley and then the Lancastrian George Walker.¹⁰² This suggests that in the

⁹⁵ Elliot Vernon, "They agree not in opinion among themselves": two-kingdoms theory, "erastianism" and the Westminster Assembly debate on Church and State, c. 1641–48', in Vernon and Powell, *Church polity*, 144–6. ⁹⁶ Ibid. 144. ⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Anon., *The Scottish Dove* 151 (9–16 Sept. 1646), fo. 39v.

⁹⁹ *The letters and journals of Robert Baillie, A. M., Principal of the University of Glasgow*, ed. D. Laing, Edinburgh 1841–2, ii. 393; Hughes, *Gangraena*, 383.

¹⁰⁰ Andrew Sharp, 'Lilburne, John (1615?–1657)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/16654>>.

¹⁰¹ Michael Mahony, 'Presbyterianism in the City of London, 1645–1647', *HJ* xxii (1979), 93–114.

¹⁰² E. H. Pearce, *Sion College and Library*, Cambridge 1913, app. A; David R. Como, 'Walker, George (bap. 1582?, d. 1651)', *ODNB* <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lancs.ac.uk/10.1093/ref:odnb/28478>>.

summer of 1646, London Presbyterians had turned their attentions towards Lancashire in an attempt to promote a Presbyterian ecclesiology independent of parliamentary jurisdiction. Indeed, the Lancashire petitioners hoped 'That the city of London, in their adherence to the Covenant, may not receive the least discouragement, much less any mark of displeasure, from the honourable Houses.'¹⁰³

Back in Lancashire, Adam Martindale (the minister at Gorton) identified three ministers as being the driving forces behind the Presbyterian petition in circulation there: John Harrison of Ashton-under-Lyne, Richard Hollinworth and John Tilsley 'of Dean[e], but then living in Manchester also'. Despite claiming 12,578 subscriptions, Martindale was cynical about the petition, pointing out that many subscribers had simply followed the example of others, and that it had also prompted what he called 'an anti-petition'.¹⁰⁴ Martindale described Harrison, Hollinworth and Tilsley as being 'very zealous (usually called Rigid) Presbyterians, that were for the setting up of the government of the Church of Scotland amongst us, (some few circumstances excepted,) and the utter extirpation of Independencie, root and branch, as schismaticall and inconsistent with the covenant'.¹⁰⁵ The commentary to the petition printed on 18 August 1646, allegedly written by John Lilburne, attacked the manner of the gathering of signatures for the petition, with Hollinworth claiming in a sermon at Manchester 'that none refused to subscribe but Malignants, or Covenant-breakers', whilst William Alte (the co-minister at Bury) had 'professed it was not against Independents'.¹⁰⁶ The best gloss that Tilsley could place on Alte's comment was that it had not been made in a public congregation, but rather, in private correspondence to a minister in London.¹⁰⁷ Lilburne also chastised Hollinworth for attacking non-subscribers as 'Malignants, or Covenant-breakers', but as Tilsley pointed out, anyone who had sworn to the Covenant and had subsequently refused to sign the petition was indeed in breach of the Covenant.¹⁰⁸

Having passed through the Commons, the Lancashire classis bill was passed into statute by the Lords on 2 October 1646.¹⁰⁹ A week later, on 9 October 1646, episcopacy was abolished in law.¹¹⁰ Despite the wider political machinations, both petition and subsequent ordinance were silent on the thorny issue of exclusion from the sacrament.¹¹¹ Perhaps in an effort to cool tensions retrospectively, Richard Heyrick apparently proclaimed in a sermon at a fast day in Manchester that he was 'so perfect a Latitudinarian as to affirme that the Episcopall Presbyterians and

¹⁰³ *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, pp. xx. 5.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* 63. ¹⁰⁶ Anon., *New birth*, 5–6.

¹⁰⁸ Anon., *New birth*, 5; Tilsley, *Petition*, 15.

¹⁰⁹ *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, pp. xx. 2.

¹¹¹ *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, pp. xx. 3–12.

¹⁰⁴ *Life of Adam Martindale*, 62.

¹⁰⁷ Tilsley, *Petition*, 18.

¹¹⁰ Braddick, *God's fury*, 477.

independents might all practice according to their owne judgements, yet each by divine right'. In the sermon immediately following Heyrick's, John Harrison attacked the Independents.¹¹² As has been argued, it was local anti-Independent coalitions rather than necessarily a singular committed party that had obtained classical Presbyterianism for Lancashire, but those coalitions encompassed relationships which stretched back to opposition to Congregationalism in the late 1630s and which formed the basis for manoeuvrings towards an accommodation based upon church reform (but not necessarily the abolition of episcopacy) in 1641–2.

This article has sought to demonstrate that the Presbyterian activism of 1646 which saw a classical system of church government established in Lancashire (and the linked, but unsuccessful, campaign in Cheshire) was the culmination of threads of politicking which can be traced back to the heady days of 1641 as the future of the Church of England was debated, and even further back into the opposition to both Laudianism on the one hand and to Congregationalism on the other in the late 1630s. As well as having the right London contacts, the likes of John Ley were respected within godly circles in the north-west. Ley had a history of collating and representing clerical viewpoints on sensitive matters, not least (as Cust and Lake have shown) when negotiating the finer points of Puritanism and conformity in the 1620s and the 1630s.¹¹³ By 1646, and operating within a post-Civil War context in which some clergy had gained preferment and others had lost livings, this carefully cultivated reputation allowed him, and close colleagues such as Charles Herle, the leverage to build coalitions of support which even extended to alleged Royalists with whom they had shared platforms back in the 1630s and early 1640s, such as George Byrom. In this building of coalitions in 1646, we see something of the attempts by Ley in 1641 to build a coalition of support for a church settlement which stopped short of outright opposition to the office of bishop, but which, if implemented, would have represented a fundamental recalibration of the relationship between bishops and their presbyters. Come 1646, facing the perceived threat of independent congregations, the likes of Herle and Ley could contribute towards the formation of conservative coalitions in campaigning for a Presbyterian structure that linked together the different congregations in a locality.

The Presbyterian system of church government, granted to Lancashire in 1646, was one which went further than that offered to London earlier in the year in terms of its independence from parliamentary oversight, yet with striking *lacunae* over issues likely to prove contentious, such as exclusion from the sacrament. Whilst the surviving minutes from the late

¹¹² *Life of Adam Martindale*, 63–4.

¹¹³ Cust and Lake, *Gentry culture*, 197–200.

1640s of the Manchester and Bury classes show rounds of meetings whereby prospective ministers were examined, and ordinations recorded, both classes were notable for the lack of sanctions available to deal with laity accused of misdemeanours, or indeed, clergy who chose to operate outside the classical system.¹¹⁴ The ‘lame Erastian presbytery’ mocked by Robert Baillie was, in the end, just a lame presbytery.

¹¹⁴ *Manchester Presbyterian Classis; Minutes of the Bury Presbyterian Classis, 1647–1657*, ed. W. A. Shaw (Chetham Society n.s. xxxvi, xli, 1896–8).