

Religion and Voting in an English Borough : Poole in 1859

T. A. McDONALD

'A Tory Dissenter', wrote Thomas Price, Vicar of St. Augustine the Less, Bristol, 'is one of the most anomalous creatures in existence, and is as rare as he is strange and unnatural'.¹ Price's assertion has long been seen as a truism, and the connection between non-conformity, the Liberal Party, and eventually, the Labour Party, has been extensively studied. The aim of this article is to examine this relationship at the level of the individual by establishing the denomination of as much of the electorate of the Dorset borough of Poole as possible, and comparing it with the way they voted.

Why do people vote the way they do? Why should what would appear to be an individual act produce a pattern of uniformity from millions of votes across the country when a general election is held? Today the announcement of the result from the first constituency to declare enables confident predictions to be made for those in the remaining 634, even allowing for regional variations. Modern psephologists (and sociologists) have developed a matrix of factors which they believe help shape the way a person makes his or her choice at election time.

Two standard works on the subject, Blondel, and Butler and Stokes, identify social class, age, occupation, family tradition, and religion as having varying (but interlinked) amounts of influence, although there are variations from region to region and election to election. These factors are particularly significant when it is remembered that many (even perhaps the majority) of voters support the same party throughout their lives.

Today, with the secret ballot, we lack absolute proof of the way individuals vote, relying instead on their statements after an election, or on comparisons between the total votes cast for each candidate and the social character of the constituency. Before 1870, however, with open voting we can see how individuals

actually voted and it is therefore possible, using a nineteenth century electorate, to examine two precise parts of the matrix. One is of course voting behaviour and the other is a factor which played a more political role then than it does to today, religion.

Religion and religious problems are woven into the history of England from the mid-sixteenth century, occasionally becoming the dominant strand, often just one of many threads in the fabric of English social, economic and political life. The division of the western Christian church into two main camps was followed in England by the emergence of various groups with their own distinctive ideas of worship and churchmanship and who therefore rejected the established Church of England, a development which eventually had profound consequences for English society. By the early nineteenth century these dissenting groups had become an important section of society and were particularly prominent in trade and commerce. The Acts² passed in earlier centuries restricting their activities now appeared to the Whigs to be outmoded and unfair, and in 1828 Dissenters (but not Catholics) were finally allowed to hold public office. Other restrictions were removed during the 1830s, such as the insistence that they had to marry in an Anglican church.

The Municipal Corporations Act of 1835 was in many ways the legislation which most assisted Dissenters in their quest for respectability and political power. The abolition of the old, exclusive corporations and their replacement by elected councils meant that they could now attempt to mould society itself into the less formal fashion of their own churches and chapels.

Poole, in the mid-nineteenth century, had a population of just under 10,000 and an electorate of around 500. For centuries it had been one of the south coast's most important ports and its merchants had grown rich from its trade with Newfoundland. After 1815, though, this trade had declined and the town was seeking new forms of industry to compensate for this change in its fortunes. It had returned two members of Parliament since 1341 (intermittantly for the first hundred years) and was one of the boroughs whose Corporation had exclusive voting rights until the 1832 Reform Act.

The town received its first contact with Nonconformity in the seventeenth century, and was visited in 1655 by the Quaker, George Fox. He again visited the town in 1657 and 1658, and his journal records that 'from Ringwood we came to Poole, . . . and we had a meeting there, with sober people, and William Baily, a Baptist teacher, was convinced there at that time'.³ The Quakers

were for a time a flourishing and important sect in Poole, and are described in Hutchins' *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset* as comprising 'many of the most respectable and wealthy inhabitants . . .'⁴ and indeed many of the great merchant families were members. Hutchins, in the third edition adds, though, that the Society in Poole '. . . of late years has well nigh become extinct'.⁵ This is confirmed by the 1871 Tabular Statement (The Quakers' annual review of membership) which records only seven Friends at the Poole meeting, and six years later the Quarterly Meeting membership list has just five names.⁶

Another religious minority on Poole were the Roman Catholics. Their numbers in Poole were few until the French Revolution, when several thousand fled to England and one priest settled in Poole.⁷ Encouraged by the Weld family of Lulworth, he rented a piece of land in Longfleet, an area to the north east of the town, and established a small chapel which served the area's few Catholics during the first decade of the nineteenth century. Catholicism in Poole received a boost in 1829 when Edward Tichbourne Doughty purchased Upton House, a mansion a few miles from the town and built in 1816 by the great Newfoundland merchant family of Spurrier, and the local priest became chaplain to the new owner.

The Roman Catholic congregation at this time numbered about 120, a surprisingly high figure considering the virtual non-existence of the Catholic Church in East Dorset before the nineteenth century. The figure of 120 is taken from the draft of an article published in the *Poole and East Dorset Herald* in June 1939 to celebrate the centenary of the building of the church, although it was not quoted in the printed article. The surviving Baptismal Register, and the Record of Confirmations tends to support this figure, and so too does the Religious Census of 1851, when it gives 122 people attending the morning service in Poole's only Catholic church. The records also show that Poole's Catholic community was not of Irish or French origin, for the names of those baptised were typical of the town, such as Dibben, Orchard, Barnes, Nippard, Burden and Stickland.

The first Catholic church in Poole was the result of a vow made by Mr. Doughty when his four year old daughter was gravely ill. She recovered and her father purchased a plot of land in West Quay Road in 1837, and the new church was opened in June 1839, as a realisation of Mr. Doughty's vow.⁸ The opening was reported by the *Dorset County Chronicle* as being by the 'Popish sham-bishop of the Western District' and it was irritated by the fact that

some of Poole's protestant dissenters had subscribed towards the building. The newspaper was particularly incensed by the presence at the ceremony of the Anglican Rector of Poole, Peter Jolliffe, especially as there was an admission charge of half-a-crown.⁹ Mr. Jolliffe ignored the *Chronicle's* attacks, and his attendance was in character, for he showed similar goodwill towards Poole's other non-Anglican churches.

By the 1850s the Catholic church in Poole was well-established with 22 people being confirmed by the Bishop in 1853. In 1856 a new priest, Joseph Parke, came to the town from Birmingham and remained until 1860, appearing as a voter in the 1859 poll-book.

In addition to the Quakers and the Catholics, Poole's other non-Anglicans were the Congregationalists, Baptists, Unitarians, Wesleyan Methodists, and Primitive Methodists,¹⁰ each with their own church or chapel within the town. Of these denominations the Congregationalists were the largest and longest established, having built their first chapel in Hill Street in 1705, some ten years after the first recorded indication of their presence. At that time, though, their numbers were small, totalling only 55 members.¹¹

The Congregationalists, as they were in 1859, really date from the year 1759, when divisions within the Hill Street chapel over admitting people who had not been baptised, and between the Trintarian and Unitarian groups, widened into a split. The underlying reason for the division was as much social as doctrinal. One history notes that from the early eighteenth century the Congregational or Independent Church was 'in the fullest sense of the term, . . . a powerful centre of religious life and influence in the town, and it was the spiritual home of a large number of the most influential inhabitants'.¹² In later years 'differences arose between him (The Minister) and some of the more influential members of the congregation, many of whom abstained from being members of the church, that they might qualify for municipal office by occasionally receiving the Lord's Supper in the parish church'.¹³ These social divisions tended to crystallize into doctrinal ones, and, almost inevitably, a split occurred. Interestingly, though, in Poole it was the representatives of the 'proper' Congregational Church who were forced to secede, rather than those seeking doctrinal change. In many ways the Congregational Church in Poole illustrates the grey area between English Presbyterianism and the Independents or Congregationalists.¹⁴

The victory for the Unitarians meant that the Minister and his supporters were forced to find new premises. In 1777 they built a new church in Skinner Street, enlarging it in 1814, 1833, and yet

again in 1847. It is an indication of the Congregationalists' importance during the period under consideration in this article that the church Sunday School population numbered over 800, and also that they were expanding, with nine members leaving in 1855 in order to establish a new church in nearby Bournemouth.

Although the Baptists were the first dissenters in Poole, arriving in 1646, they only became firmly established in 1804. Before this year they had worshipped in the Hill Street chapel with the Congregationalists and later in a small chapel in West Butts Street, but their numbers were small. Their re-emergence as a distinct group within the town was assisted by the Congregationalist minister, Thomas Durant, and they became more numerous as the century progressed. New chapels were established in the town's outer areas, and by the 1870s their Poole chapel could hold 500 people.¹⁵

The Wesleyan Methodists in Poole date from the end of the eighteenth century, with ministers being appointed to the town from 1797. Hutchins noted that 'the Wesleyans have gained ground amongst the Dissenters of Poole, and have considerably enlarged their meeting houses, and provided very complete arrangements for the several details of their religious system'.¹⁶ A few years after Hutchins, in 1879, a new building capable of seating over a thousand people was erected. Short¹⁷ describes this as the 'present chapel' but with its spire and its general appearance would appear to have been a substantial church.

Poole's other Methodists, the Primitive Methodists, are mentioned in Hutchins almost as an afterthought when it states simply that they had a small chapel in North Street. They were first established in the town in 1836 and were granted their own minister two years later. Originally they met in a private house in Cinnamon Lane, but in 1842 were able to build the chapel mentioned in Hutchins. Although they were never a large group, with only three people on the 1859 register of electors being traced as members, they had advanced sufficiently by the eighteenthies to build a better chapel.

The final dissenting group to be considered is the Unitarians, the descendants of those who had driven out the Congregationalists a hundred years earlier. They had continued to worship in the Hill Street chapel and although the building could accommodate 400 people, only five members of the congregation are known to be on the electoral register in 1859.

The Religious Census of 1851 provides a guide to the relative strengths of the town's various denominations, and the figures for

attendance at public worship on Sunday 30 March of that year are shown below as Table 1.

Table 1: Attendance at Poole's churches and chapels, 30 March 1851

	Morning	Afternoon	Evening
Church of England	2202	2122	1000
Congregationalists	1043	737	1060
Baptists	200	—	150
Quakers	12	8	—
Unitarians	40	—	50
Wesleyan Methodists	463	240	682
Primitive Methodists	178	58	193
Undefined	120	—	166
Roman Catholics	122	—	84
Latter Day Saints	—	12	60
	4380	3177	3445

The town's various dissenting groups therefore made up a sizeable minority¹⁸ of its population, and it would appear that amicable relations existed between them. The assistance of the Congregational minister in re-establishing the Baptists is an indication of this. Similarly good relations existed with the Anglicans, mainly due to the efforts of the Rector, the Rev. Peter Jolliffe, and he warrants a section of his own in Bernard Short's *Early Days of Non-Conformity in Poole* where he is described as doing '... everything that lay in his power to help forward the Non-Conformist movement in this town'.¹⁹ Jolliffe's goodwill towards the Roman Catholics has already been mentioned at an earlier point in this article.

Poole's Anglican church was dedicated to St. James, and it was fitting that a fisherman should be the town's patron saint. The church had been founded in 1142 and over the centuries had come to play an important part in the life of the town. This was mainly due to the Rectors, and the Corporation had managed to gain the right to nominate or elect each new holder of the post.

This had caused controversy during the eighteenth century, similar to that over their insistence that only they could elect Members of Parliament, and in 1795, after four years of deliberation, the Court of Chancery upheld the Corporation's rights. In 1791, when the case began in Chancery, the Burgesses chose as the Rector the 25 year old Eton and Cambridge educated member of an eminent Poole family, Peter Jolliffe. He was still Rector when the Poole electorate voted in 1859.

In 1819 the old church was in such a poor state that it had to be

completely rebuilt, and the foundation stone was laid at an impressive 'masonic' ceremony at the end of May. Two years later the new church was opened, the first of five²⁰ new Anglican churches built in the town (or rather, the constituency) within a fifteen year period. During the two years of building services had been held in the Guildhall, to the inconvenience of the Burgesses, and it was perhaps ironic that the Corporation, which had for so long asserted its authority and patronage over the church, found it within its own walls.

Despite the handsome new building, a visitor in 1830 was, according to an article by Bernard Short in 1962, 'shocked . . . to see the church so overcrowded'.²¹ The visitor was apparently an 'important member of the Prayer Book and Homily Society' who happened to be visiting Poole and 'told some of the local townsfolk that he knew of a certain lady, . . . who wanted to assist in the execution of an evangelical church at a sea port in the West of England'.²² The eventual result of this suggestion was a meeting at which Poole's banker George Welch Ledgard was the chief spokesman for those in favour of building a second church, and the Rev. Peter Jolliffe for those against. It was decided to go ahead without financial assistance from the parish. The lady originally being mentioned as willing to finance the project gave £1000 on the condition that she nominated the minister, and Mr Ledgard also gave a considerable sum so that the fund soon reached £4000.²³ Thus the church was built in the High Street and consecrated as St. Paul's in June 1833.

Two more Anglican churches were also opened in 1833, in the outlying areas that were now becoming suburbs of the town. These were in Longfleet and Parkstone and there was a definite political reason for two churches being built. The growth of the outer areas had led to a demand for a church, especially as in Longfleet two disused cottages were being used as a place of worship. The original intention was to build on the boundary of the two parishes and the Hon. W.F.S. Ponsonby, owner of the nearby Canford Manor, offered £1600 towards a new church. Ponsonby's role as a leading Liberal and the belief that he sought control of the town's Parliamentary representation led to the demand for a separate church for Parkstone, most notably by the Parr family. The Parris had long been active in Poole politics and Freemasonry, and were staunch Tories. When they failed to raise the money to finance a new church they paid for it themselves. The first minister was James Culshaw Parr, previously curate in Poole's third suburb, Hamworthy, and another Parr, John, became vicar in 1858. The

rivalry between those building the two churches is well-illustrated by the fact that they were completed simultaneously, but St. Mary's at Longfleet was consecrated the day before St. Peter's at Parkstone.

Poole in 1859 therefore contained a variety of religious groupings and organisations, each with its own place of worship. Anglicanism expanded with the building of new churches during the 1820s and 1830s, and the Dissenters, too, were consolidating themselves in new areas as the suburbs became established and also as neighbouring Bournemouth grew in size and importance. Despite the occasional new chapel being established as early as the eighteen-forties, the main growth in Dissent came nearer the end of the century. The elector in 1859, though, could belong to one of a number of different congregations, and it is this membership which will be examined, and a possible relationship to his voting behaviour sought.

The source for establishing the denomination of members of the electorate were the civil burial registers for the municipal borough which have been kept since 1854. These were not copies of death certificates, but the borough's own record of those interred in its municipal cemetery. In addition to recording the name, age, and occupation or status of the person buried in the cemetery²⁴ they also state whether he or she was interred in consecrated or unconsecrated ground, and the name of the person performing the burial service.²⁵ Thus those buried in consecrated ground were Anglican, and those in unconsecrated ground were Dissenters, with the Minister's name revealing the particular church or chapel at which they worshipped. In this way the denomination of 249 of the 1859 electorate (or almost half) were positively identified. Overwhelmingly, though, they came from the old town for most of those living in the outer districts of Longfleet, Parkstone, and Hamworthy, whatever their denomination, were buried in the grounds of their local Anglican church. It was not until 1880 that an Act of Parliament allowed Dissenters to be buried in churchyards by their own Ministers.

Those voters who were not present in the burial registers must be presumed to have left the town, perhaps going no further than Parkstone or Bournemouth. The burial records include a complete index of names, and this was used to check that voters had not been overlooked in the general chronological section.

One of the two poll-books from the 1835 general election, that published by the Conservatives, appeared to be an alternative or confirmatory source for establishing a voter's religion but turned

out to be unreliable. Although it is clearly divided into 'Churchmen' and 'Dissenters' at least two²⁶ of those listed were shown by the burial register to be Anglicans and not Dissenters. Several others listed as Anglicans, but who cannot be traced in the registers²⁷ have a voting pattern which contrasts dramatically with those known to be members of the Church of England.

Another useful source for confirming that an individual was a Congregationalist was the Register of Marriages and Baptisms for Skinner Street Church between 1837 and 1902. This, however produced some anomalies or contradictory information, such as that pertaining to one John Graves. He is listed as an Anglican in the 1835 poll-book and described by the same source as 'Clerk to Longfleet Church'. Both denomination and occupation are confirmed by the burial register. However, a John Graves is recorded as marrying Martha Goff in 1853 in the Congregational church, and assuming that it is the same man, he would have been 42 years old. This would suggest that he was marrying for the second time and that he was deferring to his new wife's wishes. There were three Goffs on the 1859 electoral register, and two of them (father and son) are known to be Congregationalists, whilst the third was a brother and uncle to the others, and was therefore probably also a Congregationalist.

Another example is that of the stonemason Richard Perkins Collins. He received an Anglican burial by the vicar of St. Paul's church, the Rev. George Morgan, in 1868 and is recorded by the census of 1861 as being 73 years old. (He was 82 when he died according to the burial register.), and living with his 75 year old wife Harriet. The Congregational register has the baptism of a baby girl in 1839 and gives the parents as Richard Perkins Collins and Martha his wife. It would therefore appear that the rather irritating tradition of fathers' perpetuating their name in its entirety has occurred here, and that the baptismal entry is for a son rather than the gentleman in the 1859 poll-book. Because of these puzzles, the burial registers were the only source used for establishing denomination because they were consistent throughout. There are, for instance, no examples of an individual being entered as buried in consecrated ground but with a nonconformist minister conducting the service.

On occasion the wife or children of a member of the 1859 electorate are recorded in the burial register as receiving (say) an Anglican burial, but no entry can be found for the husband. An instance of this is the master-mariner James S. Furber whose wife Harriet died in 1885 and is described as the widow of James.

James Furber could well have been lost at sea, but despite his wife's receiving an Anglican burial, it cannot be assumed that he too was an Anglican, although in virtually all cases where the denomination of both husband and wife is known, they are the same.

One final point is that there are the occasional instances of 'mixed dissent' as for example, Henry Bolton Smith who was a Congregationalist but whose father, Henry Boothby Smith, received a Baptist burial service, and whose mother, Louisa, was buried by the Primitive Methodist minister. Walter Paull, a hairdresser, is shown by the burial register to be a Baptist but his wife was a Congregationalist, and they were married in the Congregational church. The assistance given by the Congregational minister in re-establishing the Baptist Church in Poole has been referred to at an earlier point in this article and as both denominations shared the same polity, the interaction was not unusual.

The 249 individuals whose religious denomination is known for certain were 134 Anglicans and 115 Dissenters, and this latter category was itself divided into 20 Baptists, 41 Congregationalists, three Primitive Methodists, five Roman Catholics, five Unitarians, 24 Wesleyan Methodists, and seventeen 'others'. These 'others' were definitely Dissenters, but the precise denomination is not known because the minister performing the burial service was not the regular incumbent at a local church or chapel. In some instances he was probably the minister (or assistant) at one of the suburban churches or from Bournemouth, or possibly even farther afield.

An examination of these 249 people by occupation reveals some differences, and these are shown in the table overleaf. The most noticeable difference is the number of Anglicans who are classed as 'capitalists', although in Poole this term is best used to mean 'merchant'. There were 30 Anglican capitalists as against only six Dissenters (four of whom were Wesleyan Methodists) who were capitalists in this sample of half the 1859 electorate. This is perhaps surprising when the importance of the Quakers as leading Poole merchants in the eighteenth century is taken into account, and also when the general historical importance of non-conformists in the early stages of industrialisation is considered. Perhaps the most reliable interpretation of these figures is that they stress the importance of commerce, rather than industry, to a sea-port like Poole.

The other intriguing figure is in the Drink category where, of the fifteen innkeepers or beersellers whose denomination is known,

Table 2: Anglicans and Dissenters by Occupation

	Anglicans	Dissenters
Capitalists	30 (22%)	6 (5%)
Respectables	21 (23%)	31 (27%)
Retailers	29 (22%)	36 (31%)
Craftsmen	24 (18%)	25 (22%)
Farmers	1 (0.7%)	7 (6%)
Drink	14 (10%)	1 (0.8%)
Mariners	3 (2%)	7 (6%)
Miscellaneous	2 (1.5%)	2 (1.7%)

(The categories above are based on the precedents set by J.R. Vincent in his 'The Electoral Sociology of Rochdale'. *Economic History Review*, vol. XVI, no. 1, 1963, and by T.J. Nossiter in his *Influence, Opinion and Political Idioms in Reformed England* (Hassocks 1975).

fourteen were Anglicans.²⁸ This is perhaps not surprising, given the connection between non-conformity and temperance, but obviously not all non-conformists eschewed drink. Only one Dissenting inn-keeper appears in this analysis, but there were presumably others, for Dissenters were involved in other aspects of the trade. The brewer, Frederick Styring, for example, was a Wesleyan Methodist. Despite this, a ratio of 14 : 1 does seem to indicate a definite connection between occupation and denomination in this instance.

Members of the three categories of Respectables, Retailers, and Craftsmen were drawn from both the Anglican and Dissenting churches, although there was a tendency for there to be a slightly higher proportion of the latter. Thus 31% of the known Dissenters were shopkeepers as against 21% of the known Anglicans, and there was also a slightly larger percentage of Dissenters as Retailers and Craftsmen. The figures for the remaining categories are based on too small a sample to have any real significance, although seven out of eight farmers were Dissenters, as were seven out of ten mariners.

Having used occupation as a criterion for seeking a possible pattern to religious differences, a further step is to use the concept of status, or to be more precise, formally achieved status by virtue of a citizen becoming a Councillor, Alderman, Sheriff, or ultimately, Mayor.²⁹ Sixty-nine members of the 1859 electorate achieved, or were to achieve by 1885, membership of Poole Municipal Council, and the denomination of 44 of them is known.³⁰

It is perhaps worth re-stating at this point that the burial registers, as the most valuable source for establishing denomination, mainly provide information on citizens of the old town. Those people who served as Councillors had to live (or own property) within the town, and were also more committed to remaining there, thus providing a substantial sample for study.

In the event, though, the religious amity was maintained, for of the 44 electors under discussion, 23 were Anglicans and 21 Dissenters. Even the sixteen individuals who held the office of Mayor at least once during their careers managed to produce a split of eight Anglicans and eight Dissenters. It can therefore be assumed from this that Poole's political divisions, bitter though they had been in the past at this level, were not based on religion. An example is given in a detailed account of Poole's local politics, *The Pride of Poole*,³¹ when Joseph Knight found himself unable to pay the rent for the franchise of running Poole's market. Two gentlemen undertook to act as guarantors to Knight and both were Reform (eventually 'Liberal') Councillors, John Williamson and William Waterman. Williamson was an Anglican and Waterman a Baptist.

The opening sentence of this article states that 'a Tory dissenter is rare, strange, and unnatural' and it is now necessary to test the truth of this assertion, and also the unstated but corresponding belief that Anglican Liberals were equally rare. In order to do this, individual voting behaviour in the consecutive elections between 1841 and 1865 was studied. Poll-books survive from Poole for eight out of a possible eleven elections, the missing ones being 1831, 1837 and 1868. The only uncontested election in Poole occurred in 1852, but a by-election in 1850 conveniently makes up for this. By studying only the elections between 1841 and 1865, although many of the 1859 electorate voted in both general and by-elections in 1835, the possibility of conclusions being invalidated by the possible discovery of a poll-book for 1837 is alleviated.

The overall findings of voting behaviour based on an individual's religion are shown below as Table 3 :

Table 3: *Party Preference of Anglicans and Dissenters*

	Conservative	Liberal	Split
Anglican	59.1%	23.6%	17.2%
Dissent	8.7%	80.5%	10.7%

The method used to obtain the percentages quoted in the above table was to total the number of occasions the 249 voters in the

sample went to the polls. Thus there were 499 instances of voting by Anglicans between 1841 and 1865, and 401 by Dissenters. Those occasions when voters abstained were omitted from these figures because the 1847 poll-book does not include those who chose this course, and could include people eligible to vote for the first time but who failed to exercise this right.

The figures quoted in Table 3 reinforce the accepted wisdom of a correlation between religion and voting behaviour in the nineteenth century, particularly the nonconformists. The Anglican vote of only 59% is influenced by the fact that on each occasion there was only one Conservative candidate and there was therefore scope for tactical voting. The elections of 1857 and 1859, in which the same three candidates participated, saw a noticeable amount of this, with consistent Tories supporting a rather radical, independent Liberal against the one backed by the Manor of Canford.³² Even so, on a quarter of the occasions when Anglicans voted, the choice was solely for Liberal candidates, contrasting strongly with the figure of around $\frac{1}{12}$ for Dissenters voting (or to be more precise, plumping) for a Tory.

The Dissenters' preference for Liberal candidates was, as a figure of 80% shows, fairly conclusive and Table 4 gives a more detailed analysis of the way the larger nonconformist church members voted.

Table 4: Baptist, Congregationalist, and Wesleyan Methodist Voting Preference

	Baptists		Congregationalists		WesleyanMethodists	
	Number of occasions voting	%	Number of occasions voting	%	Number of occasions voting	%
Liberal	61	82.4%	127	82.5%	72	82.7%
Conservative	3	4.0%	13	8.4%	6	6.9%
Split	10	13.5%	14	9.0%	9	10.0%

All three groups show a consistent 82% of their members voting only for Liberal candidates, with very little support for the Conservatives, and even split voting was less popular with Dissenters than it was with Anglicans. The other two non-conformist groups, the Unitarians and the Primitive Methodists, had too few members amongst the Poole Electorate for their voting behaviour to be valid, but the figures are shown as Table 5, along with those for the Catholics and the 'others'.

Table 5: *Primitive Methodist, Unitarian and Roman Catholic Voting Preference*

	Prim. Methodists		Unitarians		Catholics		Others	
	Number of	%	Number of	%	Number of	%	Number of	%
	occasions		occasions		occasions		occasions	
	voting		voting		voting		voting	
Liberal	7	100%	11	68.7%	9	53.0%	43	81.1%
Cons.	—	—	3	18.7%	5	29.4%	5	9.4%
Split	—	—	2	12.5%	3	17.6%	5	9.4%

The 'others' produce figures for the Liberals remarkably similar to the Baptists, Congregationalists, and Wesleyan Methodists, whilst the Catholics, contrary to legend did not all vote the same way as their priest. He plumped for the radical Haly in 1859 but the two ropemaking Cull brothers split for the Tory Franklyn and for Haly, whilst the bone-gatherer, Jeremiah Galpin, plumped for the 'official' Liberal, H.D. Seymour. Only the auctioneer, Adolphus Woolfrey, joined the priest, Joseph Parke, in plumping for Haly. It was, in fact, the Baptists and the Congregationalists who were more likely to vote in the same way as their minister, for both the Rev. John Osborne, and the Rev. Eustace Conder plumped for the Liberal Seymour in 1857 and 1859, as did the majority of their flocks. Table 6 shows the total votes for each of the possible permutations in the elections of 1857 and 1859, the latter being a re-run of the former.

Table 6: *Total votes cast in 1857 and 1859 for the various permutations of candidates*

	Baptist	Congregationalist	Wesleyan	Methodist
Franklyn (Con)	1	6		2
Seymour (Lib)	15	30		20
Haly (Ind. Lib)	6	13		8
Seymour/Haly	7	10		7
Franklyn/Haly	4	2		4
Franklyn/Seymour	0	6		2
Abstained	7	9		3

One final aspect of Poole's religious life was the tendency of a number of leading Anglicans to be members of the Freemasons. The Lodge of Amity had been established in 1765 and despite periods of little activity, was a viable branch in the mid-nineteenth century.³³ Thirty-eight Poole electors were members in 1859, and

two others joined in 1860 and 1861. Several of them became Worshipful Master at some point during their membership.

The Freemasons among the electorate were generally from the Merchant³⁴ and Respectable classes, although there were several who could be categorised as craftsmen and retailers, but recorded by the 1861 Census as being employers on a small scale.

A majority of the Freemasons were Conservative voters, although at least eight were consistent Liberals, and several split, or changed their allegiance on more than one occasion. Martin Kemp Welch, a leading figure socially, who joined in 1854 was always a Liberal voter and was also a Congregationalist, which made him rather an exception among the Freemasons. This was because the characteristic that most of them had in common was their Anglicanism. Of the 38 Masons of 1859, the denomination of 31 of them is known, or can be stated with reasonable confidence,³⁵ 27 were Anglicans. The others were two Congregationalists and two Wesleyan Methodists.

The American historian R.K. Webb, maintains that religion is 'one of three or four essential keys to an understanding of early-Victorian England'³⁶ and this would appear to be borne out by this study. Of the various factors which are currently accepted as influencing a person's voting behaviour, age, class, sex, occupation, family and religion, this last example can be clearly seen as having an importance in the nineteenth century that it lacks today.³⁷ In this study religion ranks with family relationships³⁸ in producing the most positive results, and the two factors are obviously linked. Nonconformists (of all types) *were* nearly always Liberals, and Anglicans more often than not used only one of their two votes in order to avoid voting for a Liberal. Despite this clear result, the town's divisions were political and not religious. A person's Anglicanism or Non conformity may have helped make him a Tory or a Liberal, but it never seems to have become an issue in itself in Poole's elections.

Notes

¹ Cited in A. Llewellyn, *The Decade of Reform, the 1830s* (Newton Abbot, 1972), p. 205.

² E.g. The Corporation Act of 1661, and the first Test Act of 1673.

³ B.C. Short, *Early Days of Non-conformity in Poole* (Poole, 1927), p. 6.

⁴ John Hutchins, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset*, 3rd edition, (1861-1874), vo. 1, p. 60.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ From information supplied by Miss Margaret Matthews of Southampton, and

the Religious Society of Friends.

⁷ There were apparently two priests sheltered at Stapehill, near Wimborne, during the eighteenth century according to an article in the *Poole and East Dorset Herald*, 21 June 1939.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ The Religious Census of 1851 also has one 'undefined' Protestant Church, and a Church of Latter Day Saints.

¹¹ H.V.F. Johnstone, *A Short History of Skinner Street United Reformed Church, Poole, 1777-1977* (Poole, 1977), p. 7.

¹² W. Densham and J. Ogle (eds.) *The Story of the Congregational Churches in Poole and Parkstone* (Bournemouth, c. 1898), p. 15.

¹³ Ibid., p. 16.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Dr. Clyde Binfield of the University of Sheffield for his assistance and advice on this topic, and particularly for this last observation.

¹⁵ This account of the dissenting churches is largely drawn from B.C. Short, *Op. cit.*

¹⁶ J. Hutchins, *Op. cit.*, vol 1, p. 60.

¹⁷ B.C. Short, *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

¹⁸ This, it must be stated, is based on circumstantial evidence. The presence of a majority of Anglicans amongst the electorate, and the size and number of their churches points to the majority being Anglican.

¹⁹ B.C. Short, *Op. cit.*, p. 46.

²⁰ Three other churches are discussed below. The fifth was St. Michael's in Poole's other suburb of Hamworthy.

²¹ *Poole and Dorset Herald*, 5 December 1962.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Opened in 1854 on land donated by the leading merchant family of Garland.

²⁵ B.C. Short's *Early Days of Non-conformity in Poole* and various directories list the ministers of the chapels. The dates always match.

²⁶ James Cadie and John Osment were both labelled 'Dissent' but were buried in consecrated ground by the vicar of St. James. Osment's wife and son also received Anglican burials.

²⁷ Some of them, though, were farmers renting their land from the (very) Liberal Canford Manor.

²⁸ There were actually 39 people in the 1859 poll-book who can be classed as inn-keepers, beersellers, etc., but there is no reason to presume that the fifteen discussed in this article are anything but a representative sample.

²⁹ As was probably the case in most English boroughs, political and civic leadership was available to those who wanted it, had the necessary social status, and could afford it.

³⁰ The religion of some of the remaining 25 can be guessed with a fair amount of confidence, but without conclusive evidence.

³¹ D. Beamish *et. al.*, *The Pride of Poole, 1688-1851* (Poole, 1974), p. 266.

³² Canford was now owned by Sir John Josiah Guest, the Welsh iron-master and Liberal M.P. for Merthyr Tydfil.

³³ H.P. Smith, *History of the Lodge of Amity 1765-1936* (Poole, 1937), p. 475.

³⁴ One very important merchant family, the Slades, seem not to have been Masons at this time.

³⁵ The Parr family, for example, who built St. Peter's Church in Parkstone.

They do not appear in the Municipal burial registers, presumably being interred in Parkstone, but were obviously Anglicans.

³⁶ R.K. Webb, *Modern England, from the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (London, 1969), p. 408.

³⁷ J. Blondel, in his *Voters, Parties and Leaders* (1970), pp. 60–61, discusses the influence of religion on modern elections, reaching the conclusion that 'the precise impact of religion on voting is difficult to determine'. Recent by-elections in Glasgow Garscadden and Crosby, where there are substantial numbers of Catholics, support this view.

³⁸ It should, at this late stage, be pointed out that this article is drawn from an M. Litt. thesis for the University of Bristol, and it was shown that if people were related, they voted similarly. Even when there was no proven relationship, a shared surname produced the same results.