

1662 and Anglican Sensibilities: A Salutory Lesson from Edwardian Romsey

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I Introduction

It was an indication of the ongoing sensitivities surrounding the Great Ejection of 1662 that even 250 years after the event it could still generate controversy. More specifically, the language which Congregationalists, in particular, used when commenting upon the origins and early history of dissent could, on occasions, offend Anglican sensibilities. One notable example of this occurred in 1912. It was triggered by remarks made by a number of speakers at the celebrations held in May to mark the 250th anniversary of the Abbey Congregational Church in Romsey which dated its foundation to the Great Ejection and claimed Thomas Warren, Rector of Houghton and one of the ejected clergy, as its first minister.¹

The controversy took the form of a heated debate conducted mainly in the correspondence columns of the *Romsey Advertiser*. It lasted from late May to late September and generated 26 letters (approximately 15000 words in total) with many covering the finer points of seventeenth-century church history. As might be expected, there was some repetition. A number of contributors also took the opportunity to make reference to contemporary issues, such as the Welsh Disestablishment Bill and what one provocatively described as

1 For a history of the Abbey Congregational (since 1972, United Reformed) Church, see Ian Stirling, *The Church by the Arch* (Romsey, 1988). See also Roger Ottewill, "'Evoking the Spirit of the Past": Romsey's Abbey Congregational Church Anniversaries 1901–1912', *The Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 8(9), November 2011, 541–57.

the 'fat livings' of Anglican clergy.² Inevitably, these comments served to exacerbate the discord generated.

The debate was dominated by two pairs of protagonists. In the early stages they were the Revd Cyril Edwards and the Revd Alexander Grieve. Edwards was Rector of Mottisfont and Honorary Secretary of the Church Defence Committee for the Romsey Deanery, which had both a political and educative role in responding to what were perceived as attacks on the integrity and status of the Established Church.³ Grieve had been Romsey's Congregational minister from 1905 to 1909 when he was appointed to the post of Professor of New Testament and Church History at the Yorkshire United College in Bradford. Between them they contributed 11 letters and, to some extent, determined the parameters of the debate. By early August it appeared to have run its course, but later in the month it was resuscitated by the Revd Robert Heanley, the Rural Dean of Andover, with his remarks eliciting a robust response from 'Puritan'. Together, this pair of protagonists had five letters published. Others drawn into the debate were the Revd Ernest Clapton, the vicar of Hatherden; the Revd Carless Barber, assistant priest at Romsey Abbey; and those who preferred, in a similar manner to 'Puritan', to retain their anonymity, such as 'W.G.B.', 'Interested' and 'ETC'. There was also a letter of complaint from the vicar of Romsey, the Revd Hugh Martin St Clair Tapper, about Grieve's criticism of an article which Tapper had written for the *Romsey Magazine* on the issues raised. Unfortunately a copy of this article does not appear to have survived.

In what follows it is intended to focus on the context of the debate and its substance and tone, in so far as it covered aspects of the Great Ejection of 1662 and its antecedents and aftermath. Reference is also made to the extent to which it echoed the controversies of fifty years earlier when the past was, in Timothy Larsen's words, 'contested territory' and Anglicans claimed that Nonconformists were 'misusing history' and to relations between Anglicans and Nonconformists, more generally, in the early years of the twentieth century.⁴ The article is therefore a contribution to the very limited literature on the 250th

2 *Romsey Advertiser*, 30 August 1912.

3 Established in 1895, its full title was 'The Central Church Committee for Defence and Instruction'.

4 Timothy Larsen, 'Victorian Nonconformity and the Memory of the Ejected Ministers: The Impact of the Bicentennial Commemorations of 1862', in R.N. Swanson (ed.), *The Church Retrospective*, Studies in Church History, 33 (Woodbridge, 1997), pp. 459, 462.

anniversary celebrations but it also considers the broader historical significance of what otherwise might be dismissed as a purely local dispute.

II The Context of the Debate

The anniversary celebrations in Romsey were similar to those held elsewhere in Hampshire, although they did not incorporate a civic service as occurred in Andover and Winchester.⁵ In commemorating the Great Ejection Romsey was also demonstrating solidarity with Congregationalists throughout the country, especially those who were members of other '1662' churches. At national level, the Congregational Union of England and Wales assisted with the provision of speakers and other support for individual churches and united demonstrations held in a number of regional centres, including Southampton.⁶ Nonetheless the editor of the journal of the Congregational Historical Society felt moved to observe that they did not generate the same 'degree of enthusiasm as marked the Bicentenary in 1862'. This was explained by the fact that: 'The Bicentenary followed close on a great religious revival; and ... was very properly used for the promotion of schemes of Church extension, which were then greatly needed'.⁷ It also took place at a time when relations between militant Nonconformists and Anglicans were particularly strained as Larsen recounts.⁸

At one of the most prestigious of the 1912 celebrations, which was held in Manchester's Free Trade Hall, the Revd Sidney Berry, minister of the renowned Carrs Lane Congregational Church in Birmingham, argued that 'there was no finer story' than the saga of those ejected in 1662 and that the points of difference between Nonconformists and Anglicans then, specifically Episcopal ordination, were still a

5 For a fuller discussion of the anniversary celebrations in Hampshire see Rosalind Johnson and Roger Ottewill, 'Memorialising 1662: Hampshire Congregationalists and the 250th Anniversary of the Great Ejection' in Peter Clarke and Charlotte Methuen (eds), *The Church on its Past*, Studies in Church History, 49 (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 233–44.

6 *Congregational Year Book* 1913, p.17. For a brief summary of the coverage of the anniversary by the religious press, see Alan Sell, 'The Doctrinal and Ecumenical Significance of the Great Ejectment' in Alan Sell (ed.) *The Great Ejectment of 1662: Its Antecedents, Aftermath and Ecumenical Significance* (Eugene, OR, 2012), pp. 198–203.

7 *Transactions of the Congregational Historical Society*, 5, (6) (1911–12), 323. The Society had been founded in 1899.

8 Larsen, 'Victorian Nonconformity'.

stumbling block to closer ties. Another speaker, however, Dr John McClure, headmaster of Mill Hill School, in the context of remarks about the value of toleration, spoke with approval of Canon Hensley Henson's suggestion that 'it would be a good thing if Congregationalists would commemorate the sequestrations under the commonwealth and if Anglicans would commemorate the ejections under the Act of Uniformity'.⁹

As these contrasting comments indicate, at the time of the 250th anniversary celebrations relations between the Free Churches and the Established Church can best be described as mixed. On the one hand there remained areas of contention, such as the lingering antipathy of Nonconformists towards the Education Act 1902 and what they perceived as the privileges it bestowed on Church of England schools and their abhorrence of the ritualism associated with Anglo-Catholicism which they considered tainted the Established Church as a whole. Writing at the beginning of the twentieth century a leading Congregationalist, the Revd Charles Silvester Horne, referred to 'the Romanising of the Anglican Church' as a 'great common peril' and that: 'Everywhere it was felt and recognised that the maintenance of the sturdy Protestant character of English life and worship rested mainly upon ... [the Free Churches]'.¹⁰ He went on to argue that this had provided a stimulus to the development of the Free Church Council movement: 'It seemed essential that whenever sacerdotal intolerance had to be resisted the machinery should be in existence for making united and effective protest'.¹¹ To some extent, however, such negativity was offset by the making of common cause on issues, including Sabbath observance and temperance, and the existence of those on both sides of the divide who were keen to empathise with their erstwhile rivals. Moreover, as Parsons observes, Nonconformists and Anglicans alike were faced with the daunting task of seeking 'to convert the masses'.¹²

In Edwardian Hampshire, relations between Nonconformists and Anglicans were variable. In some communities, such as Andover and Lymington, they were extremely warm at both a personal and

9 *Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1912.

10 C. Silvester Horne, *A Popular History of the Free Churches* (London, 1903), p. 424.

11 *Ibid.*

12 Gerald Parsons, 'From Dissenters to Free Churchmen: The Transitions of Victorian Nonconformity', in Gerald Parsons (ed.), *Religion in Victorian Britain. Vol 1: Traditions* (Manchester, 1988), p. 111.

institutional level.¹³ Elsewhere, however, the position was less clear cut. Such was the case in Romsey.

One particular incident which had aroused ill-feeling on the part of at least some Congregationalists occurred in 1896. During a period when the Congregational Church was without a minister, the Revd James Cooke Yarborough, the vicar of Romsey, 'offered to take over the conduct of services'.¹⁴ In his letter to the Congregational Church, Cooke Yarborough made clear that he was motivated by the desire 'to promote the cause of Christian unity' and sought to allay any fears that his approach might arouse:

The differences which part the congregation of the Abbey Church from those of the Abbey Chapel are, I am convinced, comparatively small, and most of ... [those] which operated when your chapel was founded some centuries ago have ceased to operate ... how our hands would be strengthened & our hearts cheered against our real dangers of sin & indifference if only we were more united? ... I should consider myself bound to conduct the services with such simplicity & absence of ritual as should avoid hurting the feelings of your worshippers ... [in making] this offer I am seeking the best interests of our common Christianity ... It may be that such an opportunity of healing the divisions that we all deplore may not occur again for many years ...

Needless to say, although they did so courteously, the deacons and members of the Congregational Church firmly rejected the proposal on the grounds that they felt 'the differences between the principles of nonconformity & the Established Church ... [were] such that the suggestions made in the Rev Cooke Yarborough's letter would be decidedly impracticable'.¹⁵ As Ian Stirling, the Abbey Congregational Church historian records: 'Both the vicar's letter and the reply were published in the local press with the result that ... [they generated] a considerable correspondence, some of it acrimonious ... [and

13 In the case of Andover, see Roger Ottewill, "'Strong and Blessed'? An Assessment of East Street Congregational Church during the Edwardian era, 1901-1914", *Lookback at Andover*, 3 (2), 2011, 79-80.

14 Cooke Yarborough was Vicar of Romsey from 1892 to 1910, when he was succeeded by Tapper.

15 'Correspondence concerning offer by Revd James Cooke Yarborough, Vicar of Romsey, to take services in the Abbey Chapel', Hampshire Record Office, 78A01/D1/2.

impugning] the vicar's motives whilst others praised them'.¹⁶ Whatever Cooke Yarborough's motivations, by their actions the leaders and members of the Congregational Church made clear that they wanted to preserve their cherished independence.

In the years which followed there were a number of other matters which strained relations between the two churches. These included the issue of education, which was a running sore, and what was perceived as the threat to Britain's Protestant heritage arising from, as it was put in the *Abbey Congregational Magazine* the 'united forces of "Catholicism", Roman and Anglican'.¹⁷ Moreover, at meetings of the Romsey and District Free Church Council, remarks were sometimes made which could cause offence in Anglican circles. For example, at the Council's annual meeting in 1903, a guest speaker, the Revd David John, Winchester's Congregational minister, claimed that 'the Anglican keynote was ritual; ... [while] the Free Church was spiritual'.¹⁸ While at the annual meeting in 1912, the secretary in expressing the hope for a 'time when we shall welcome as an honourable and an honoured ally the great Anglican church' this was not possible 'at present ... [because it was] fettered ... by State connection and control'.¹⁹

Nonetheless while the Congregational and other Free Churches in Romsey can be said to have kept their distance from the Established Church, there were examples on both sides which suggest that there was a desire for a degree of harmony. For example, in his New Year's message for 1903, when opposition to the Education Act 1902 was at its height, Cooke Yarborough 'eschewed any temptation towards triumphalism and was at pains to be as even handed as possible in evaluating the legislation'.²⁰ While a couple of months later in March 1903, at a meeting chaired by the vicar and attended by all the Nonconformist ministers the following resolution was carried unanimously:

That this meeting regards with much satisfaction the conclusive evidence as to the good results of Sunday closing [of public houses] in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, which has recently been submitted to the Royal Commission [on Liquor Licensing Laws] and earnestly

16 Stirling, *The Church by the Arch*, p. 27.

17 *Abbey Congregational Church Home Messenger* 7, (6) (1906), xxiii.

18 *Romsey Advertiser*, 23 January 1903.

19 *Hampshire Independent*, 13 January 1912.

20 Roger Ottewill, 'Discord and Concord: Education and Religion in Hampshire Communities c. 1900 to c. 1905', unpublished MRes dissertation, University of Southampton, (2007), p. 89.

calls upon Parliament to pass a Sunday Closing Bill in England in order that similar advantages may be realised in this country.²¹

Likewise a collaborative spirit was evident in the Millenary Pageant held in June 1907 to mark the one thousandth anniversary of the founding of Romsey Abbey. As Alexander Grieve, who was Congregational minister at the time, wrote:

The long looked for Pageant has come and gone, and ... was a great success. A goodly number of our people took part ... and thus contributed to the completeness of the celebration. Indeed one of the most conspicuous and valuable features of the event was the way in which all our ordinary cleavages were disregarded, and the spectacle of a united township given to the thousands who visited Romsey for the occasion. It would be too much to expect that we should all see eye to eye in every ecclesiastical or political matter, but I venture to think that the months of united effort, culminating in the week of pageant and thanksgiving, have left their mark on all, and have helped to bring about what may not unhappily be called an "entente cordiale".²²

Notwithstanding the warm words, however, it would seem that there remained within Romsey an undercurrent of rivalry, suspicion and, even hostility between Nonconformists and Anglicans, which could easily come to the surface at any time. Such was the case in 1912.

III The Substance of the Debate

On Monday 20 May 1912 the Revd Cyril Edwards felt sufficiently moved, not to say angered, by what he had read in an account in the *Romsey Advertiser* of the 250th anniversary celebrations at the Abbey Congregational Church to put pen to paper. His letter which appeared in the 31 May edition began:

Dear Sir, - Perhaps you will allow me to draw attention to a statement made by the Rev G. Saunders [pastor of the historic Above Bar Congregational Church in Southampton] at the recent festival of the Congregational Church in Romsey. In your last issue he is reported to have said: "On Aug. 24 1662 [St Bartholomew's Day], 2000 clergymen of the Episcopal Church, feeling that they

21 *Hampshire Independent*, 14 March 1903.

22 *Abbey Congregational Church Home Messenger* 8, (7) (1907), xxv.

could not betray their consciences left their churches, and went out from their livings, not knowing whither they went." The Rev. W. Miles [pastor of Buckland Congregational Church in Portsmouth] made a similar statement, "The Act of Uniformity led to 2000 ministers resigning their livings and coming out like tramps having been driven out of their Church." And taking up the thread of the argument the Chairman [Mr Alfred Peach of Bournemouth and Chairman of the Hampshire Congregational Union for the year 1911/12] added: "If they thought of it a State Church could hardly be anything but a persecuting church." I should like to point out that the word "persecution" does not apply to the 2000 ministers who resigned their livings in 1662.²³

Thus, it was not so much the fact that 1662 was being celebrated in such an exuberant and high profile manner that rankled with Edwards as the use of the word 'persecution' to describe the treatment of those clergy who, depending on one's point of view, left of their own accord or were forced out of the Church of England. Later in his letter he sought to put the events of 1662 into a broader historical context by referring, in particular, to the dispossession of clergy in the 1640s following the adoption of a Presbyterian mode of Church governance and the abolition of Episcopacy. As he put it, 'Just as the clergy had resigned in 1645 sooner than give up their faith, so these 2000, among who was the rector of Houghton, resigned in their turn'.²⁴ In support of his position, he quoted, with approbation, the words of the Revd W.H. Hutton, an Anglican and prolific author of works on Church history, 'those who left for conscience's sake were free to teach and worship as they willed'.²⁵ He ended by making clear his view that the ejected clergy were not subject to persecution:

And so while it is good to commend loyalty to principle as shown by those men who resigned their livings, it does not seem just to say they were "persecuted" by the Church. The very fact, as mentioned by Mr Bage [the current minister of Abbey Congregational Church], that Mr Warren received a distinct licence to preach and that the

23 *Romsey Advertiser*, 31 May 1912.

24 *Ibid.*

25 His works include *The English Reformation* (1899) and *The Household of Sir Thomas More* (1896).

Congregational Church was subsequently formed legally, shows that the word "persecution" does not apply to this episode in history.²⁶

In referring to a 'distinct licence to preach' Edwards was being somewhat disingenuous since this was issued in 1672, while Parliament was prorogued, under Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence, to which many churchmen took exception.²⁷ Early in 1673 the king was obliged to recall Parliament for financial reasons. As a price for Parliament's co-operation, Charles II had to withdraw the Declaration in March of that year. Following its withdrawal, the 'persecution' of dissenters resumed.

At this point, the matter might have rested but for the intervention of the Revd Alexander Grieve. As he explained in a later letter, 'I happened to be in Romsey soon after the Congregational anniversary, and read both the addresses on that occasion, and Mr Edward's letter, which seemed to me to call for ... [a response]'.²⁸

In his interventions Grieve sought to demonstrate that the treatment of the ejected clergy was far worse than the rather bland remarks of Edwards and the quotation from Hutton might imply and that therefore the use of the word 'persecution' to describe their treatment was justified. Indeed, in one letter he reinforced his argument by quoting two dictionary definitions of 'persecution':

I do not know which dictionary Mr. Edwards uses, or what would be his definition of "persecution." Two I have at hand (Chamber's 20th Century and The Oxford Concise) explain the word "persecute" thus: "to pursue with enmity and injury (especially the holder of any opinion held to be heretical), to harass, to worry:" "to annoy or punish especially for religious or political opinions." I leave your readers to judge whether these definitions do not fit the case of Thomas Warren and his fellow non-conformists.²⁹

26 *Romsey Advertiser*, 31 May 1912. He might also have mentioned that Thomas Warren and his wife were both buried in Romsey Abbey, where there is a memorial tablet to him in the South Transept. On this are the words 'Here Lyeth Ye Body of Mr. Tho. Warren, a Learned Pious and Faithful Minister of Christ, a Solid and Nervous Asserter of Discriminating Grace and Free Will, Who Died January Ye 27 1694, Aged 77. Twas Christ He Preached Lovd, Livd, But now is Gon To Live with Christ In Th' Heavenly Mansion May We Christ Love and Live, So Living Dye, So Dying Live in Blisse T'Eternity'.

27 See G. Lyon Turner, (ed.), *Original Records of Early Nonconformity Under Persecution and Indulgence*, 2 vols (s.l., 1911), I, p. 537, II, p. 1039.

28 *Romsey Advertiser*, 21 June 1912.

29 *Romsey Advertiser*, 12 July 1912.

To add weight to his argument he pointed out that 'the Act of Uniformity was carried out in direct violation of the understanding on which Charles II had entered on his Restoration'. He then went on to mention the principal components of what he regarded as the iniquitous legislation passed in the aftermath of the Great Ejection, during what he described as 'a long and miserable period of persecution', namely the Conventicle Act of 1664 and the Five Mile Act of 1665. In keeping with Nonconformist rhetoric and what might be described as folk law he referred to the ejected clergy as being 'turned out into the world to starve' and having 'to preach to such as would hear them in fields and private houses till they were apprehended and cast into jail'.³⁰ In a similar manner and using comparable language, 'W.G.B.' commented: 'How grateful ought we to feel to these heroic men, that they courageously faced privation, poverty, persecution and misrepresentation rather than conform to that which they held to be error'.³¹ Grieve also observed that 'though it was proposed in Parliament that the ejected clergy should be allowed to retain the fifth part of their benefices (like those of 1653) the proposal was rejected'. He ended his first letter with a rhetorical flourish:

But we who pride ourselves on standing in the succession of those who suffered would do well to ... make it our care to catch and hand on the living spirit which served them from the "great refusal" of which Thomas Warren was so fine an example. These men taught us that true religion is something too great and holy to be imposed from outside by any human compulsion, that evangelical Christianity is the moulding force in English religion, and they prepared the way for our ideal of "a Free Church in a Free State," which is the only one in full harmony with the genius of the Gospel and the Church of the New Testament.³²

Here he sought to link the events of 1662 with what he portrayed as the essence of Nonconformity. In the eyes of Grieve and those who thought like him, liberty of conscience was seen as morally and spiritually superior to the externally imposed creeds and formularies they associated with the Established Church.

30 *Romsey Advertiser*, 7 June 1912. In this letter he made it clear that he was 'not concerned to defend the proceedings of 1643 and 1645', but did argue that 'the clergy who were ... deprived were not only "malignants" but incompetent or vicious'.

31 *Romsey Advertiser*, 14 June 1912.

32 *Romsey Advertiser*, 7 June 1912.

In dealing with Grieve's assertions, Edwards made it clear that he was not seeking to defend the Great Ejection and the legislation which followed it, only that it did not amount to persecution. As he wrote:

Those were evil days. Each party was only too eager to turn the tables on its opponents. But we may fairly say, I think, that some such legislation was the almost inevitable outcome of the reaction from the Cromwellian regime.

Moreover, the ejection of clergy, most of whom had not been ordained by a bishop, from benefices that were not lawfully theirs did not constitute persecution. Or as Edwards put it: 'To create a situation and then complain of its ultimate effect reminds one of the young man who after murdering both parents appealed to the jury to pity a poor orphan'.³³

With respect to the specific case of Thomas Warren, Edwards argued:

It cannot be denied that he was a Presbyterian minister. Who was intruded into the living of Houghton, from which the rightful incumbent (Dr James Sessions) was expelled by the Puritan party. I shall be glad if the Professor will answer this one plain question, "Was it the policy of persecution to restore to the benefice an episcopally ordained clergyman when the church came back to its own"?³⁴

In dealing with this direct question, although Grieve did not know who replaced Thomas Warren as Rector of Houghton, he doubted 'whether the change was for the good of the parish'. Moreover, he argued that 'he could hardly have been superior in intellect or piety to the man who might have had [the Bishopric of] Salisbury or Winchester if he had been willing to "offend his understanding" by submitting to re-ordination'.³⁵ Not surprisingly, Edwards felt that in focussing on the qualities of Thomas Warren, Grieve had missed the point. For him, this concerned the legitimacy of what he considered to be the necessary steps to secure an acceptable degree of uniformity, based on the principle of Episcopal ordination, with respect to the clergy of the Church of England. In his words: 'By all means hold Thomas Warren in honour as a conscientious and honourable man, but do not say that

33 *Romsey Advertiser*, 14 June 1912.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Romsey Advertiser*, 21 June 1912.

it was persecution to turn him out of a position which he was never qualified to occupy'.³⁶

Other contributors to the debate provided additional detail on the ejections of both the 1640s and early 1660s in west Hampshire. The Revd Robert Heanley, for example, went to great lengths to detail the ignominies heaped upon the Revd Robert Clark, the vicar of Andover, who lost his living in the 1640s. He also sought to show that in the treatment of local clergy in 1662, 'there was no shadow of persecution about this' since they were intruders and, in the Andover area, the numbers involved were very small, just six by comparison with 32 clergy who were ejected from their livings between 1642 and 1650, 'mostly simply for continuing to use the Prayer Book in Church'.³⁷ He did concede, however, that the persecution came later in the form of the legislation that discriminated against dissenters, but somewhat contentiously claimed that this was the work of Parliament and not the Church of England.³⁸

Given the animosity which the debate had already engendered it is not surprising that a new participant, 'Puritan', now entered the fray. He considered that Heanley's letter was 'unjust to those noble men who in 1662 gave up their livings for conscience sake'. Moreover, if they wanted to retain their benefices there were two particularly irksome requirements. They had 'to give their unqualified assent to ... [the new revised Prayer Book] before they had seen it ... [and] they had to acknowledge the King (Charles II., of blessed memory) as supreme head of the church'.³⁹ 'Puritan' also vigorously attacked Heanley's claim that it was Parliament and not the Church that was responsible for the offending legislation: 'To say that the church was not responsible for the persecutions which followed is an insult to credulity'.⁴⁰

In his rejoinder, on the question of whether ministers had to assent to the Prayer Book without having seen it, Heanley argued that:

The historical fact is that every Puritan minister in the land must have been intimately acquainted with it. Each and every proposed alteration had been openly discussed between the Bishops and a Committee of Puritan ministers with Richard Baxter at their head. I imagine that every girl in Andover High School could tell "Puritan"

36 *Romsey Advertiser*, 28 June 1912.

37 *Romsey Advertiser*, 23 August 1912.

38 *Ibid.*

39 *Romsey Advertiser*, 30 August 1912.

40 *Ibid.*

the date and name of that famous [Savoy] Conference, so he can easily verify this fact for himself.⁴¹

While in a later letter, Heanley simply quoted directly from the Act of Uniformity: 'Every Parson, Vicar, or Minister shall, before the Feast of S. Bartholomew, 1662, *after the reading of the said book*, declare his unfeigned assent and consent to the use of all things in the said book [emphasis in the original]'.⁴²

In so doing, however, he glossed over the practical difficulties involved in implementing the legislation since, as Richard Clark points out, the Act of Uniformity imposed a very tight schedule 'whereby the Book of Common Prayer had to be put to press, proof read, corrected, printed in sufficient numbers to supply all parishes, and be distributed to them'.⁴³ In these circumstances, it seems quite likely that some clergy, at least, would not have had the opportunity to scrutinize and evaluate it by the last Sunday before St Bartholomew's Day, that is by 17 August. By then they were supposed to have read Morning and Evening Prayer from it, while making a public declaration of their 'unfeigned assent and consent to all and everything contained and prescribed' in it. Ian Green notes that 'not only did the new Prayer Book fail to reach many incumbents by 17 August, but also bishops could not possibly have known who had and who had not made the appropriate public declaration by that date'.⁴⁴

Concerning the headship of the Church, Heanley assured 'Puritan' that there was 'at least one happy point of agreement between all Churchmen and Nonconformists ... [given] that no Churchman dares to acknowledge anyone but the Lord Jesus Christ as the Head of the Church'. However, in a rather patronising manner, he did suggest that 'if "Puritan" will borrow a Prayer Book and carefully read Article 37 he will learn what Churchmen do acknowledge about the "Governorship" of their earthly king'.⁴⁵ Presumably he had in mind 'that prerogative which we see to have been given always to all godly princes in Holy Scriptures by God himself, that is, that they should rule all estates and degrees committed to their charge by God, whether

41 *Romsey Advertiser*, 6 September 1912.

42 *Romsey Advertiser*, 20 September 1912.

43 Richard Clark, 'How was the Church of England Restored in the 1660s? Bishop Hackett, the Act of Uniformity of 1662, and the Archdeaconry of Derby', *Midland History* 38 (2013), 16–35.

44 Ian Green, *The Re-Establishment of the Church of England 1660–1663* (Oxford, 1978), p. 145.

45 *Romsey Advertiser*, 6 September 1912.

they be ecclesiastical or temporal, and restrain with the civil sword the stubborn and evil-doers'.

Turning to what happened in the years following the Great Ejection, Heanley commented that 'with respect to "Puritan's" vehement assertion that the Church *was* responsible for the persecution of Nonconformists I must content myself with simply saying that it is now universally recognised that the Church was *not* responsible [emphasis in the original]'.⁴⁶ In what was to be his final letter, 'Puritan' strenuously refuted this claim:

As to the church's responsibility for the persecutions that followed [1662], I could cite a dozen historians to prove it, but instead will let a great churchman (the present Bishop of Ripon) reply for me. In his "History of the Church of England" Dr Boyd Carpenter says "The House of Commons and the church were united in enforcing uniformity. The Commons were eager to act vigorously, and the clergy showed themselves ready to stir up Parliament to action." Again, referring to the Second Conventicle Act 1670, he said "This culminating shame was approved by the Primate Gilbert Sheldon, who called on the clergy to enforce the Act which was in his eyes likely to promote the glory of God, the welfare of the church, and the praise of his Majesty and Government."⁴⁷

Needless to say, the Rural Dean did not let the matter rest and dismissed 'Puritan's' claim that it was the Church rather than Parliament that was responsible for the post-1662 legislation to which dissenters took exception. Here he argued along the following lines:

... I never denied that *individual* bishops and clergy such as Sheldon urged the passing of these Acts and strictly enforced them when passed, just as other individual bishops and clergy such as Bishop Reynolds of Norwich, our own Morley of Winchester, and Earle of Salisbury, opposed them with all their might, and when passed, did their best continually to lighten their burden; but what I did say, and still maintain, was that the House of Commons more royalist than the king and more ecclesiastical than the Church, insisted on the passing of them. And I stated this fact on not the authority of mere amateur historiographers like Bishop Boyd Carpenter [pointing out that he was no longer Bishop of Ripon], but on that of really competent historians, such as Dr. Hutton and Professor

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ *Romsey Advertiser*, 13 September 1912.

Gardiner, men who have spent the best portion of their lives in carefully examining all the evidences which modern research has made accessible, and then delivering their reasoned judgement upon them [emphasis in the original].⁴⁸

'Puritan' was then referred to Hutton's *History from the Death of Charles I to the Death of Queen Anne*, and specifically his comment on page 203 that: 'The Parliament dealt with church questions in a very drastic temper ... like the leaders of the Long Parliament, it attached great importance to tales of plots which were probably no real danger to the Government; and it showed itself much more solicitous for the Church's power than was the Church itself. To reinforce his point, Heanley also quoted directly from page 191 of Professor Gardiner's, *Puritan Revolution*: 'The Cavalier Parliament passed Act after Act against those Puritans who refused to conform to the Established Church'. Heanley's position, also seems to receive some support from contemporary historians since, with respect to the Act of Uniformity, the point is made by Clark that: 'Opinion had not been tested; the act had been imposed by a parliament sufficiently vengeful in character to be nicknamed "the Cavalier Parliament"'.⁴⁹

As will be apparent from this analysis of the arguments, there were strong feelings on both sides. As had been the case fifty years earlier, the 'territory' remained contested, with historical events being interpreted in ways which lent weight to the respective stances of the Anglican and Nonconformist contributors to the debate. Not surprisingly, perhaps, there was also an unwillingness to let matters drop with the accompanying desire to have the last word.

IV Tone of the Debate

In spite of the strong confessional opinions that were engendered by this interpretation of the past, they did not tarnish the spirit of the debate. At one level it was conducted in what might be described as a civilised and even friendly manner, with Edwards referring to Grieve as 'my old friend' and Grieve indicating that a conciliatory letter from Edwards proved 'once more the truth of the adage that "A soft answer turneth away wrath"'.⁵⁰ Moreover, both agreed that, despite having

48 *Romsey Advertiser*, 20 September 1912. It is not entirely clear to which of Samuel Rawson Gardiner's works Heanley was referring.

49 Clark, 'Church of England Restored', p. 19.

50 *Romsey Advertiser*, 26 July 1912.

different views on the nature of the Great Ejection and subsequent events, they shared much in common.

However, this did not prevent their language being, on occasions, as robust as that used by protagonists in 1862.⁵¹ For example, Edwards made reference to those 'self-willed men who neither conformed nor resigned [who] had to be ejected from positions which had never legally or morally belonged to them, and this is called persecution'.⁵² Grieve responded by claiming that 'Mr Edwards ... [was] going too far ... [and] degrading this controversy by charging his opponents with evasion, with ignorance, and with dishonesty amounting to crime'. Later in the same letter he adopted a sarcastic tone 'if, instead of reading history he [Edwards] nourishes himself on an account which describes the Act of Uniformity and its allied proceedings as "kind and lenient treatment," I do not wonder at his trouble in defining "persecution"'.⁵³ While Tapper, the Vicar of Romsey, was equally critical of Grieve 'whose tone, temper, and method in controversy (as illustrated in the recent correspondence in your columns) must be the despair of all who wish to see peace and a better understanding established between Churchmen and Dissenters in Romsey and elsewhere'.⁵⁴

In a similar manner, 'Puritan' was equally angered by the stance adopted by the Rural Dean of Andover: 'I do not wish to stir up sectarian strife, but when a minister of the gospel deliberately defends such an iniquity as the "crime of Black Bartholomew" it makes my blood boil'.⁵⁵ While Heanley rather pompously commented that: 'Out of respect for the intelligence of your readers, as well as to the seriousness of the subject with which we are dealing, I must decline to follow further the declamatory portion of "Puritan's" letter'.⁵⁶

Thus, it could be said that old animosities remained and could not always be constrained. While the vitriol of fifty years earlier was avoided, a shared assessment of, and common language to describe, the events of 1662 was not forthcoming. Edwards, Heanley and those who thought like them either sought to play down the injustices of 1662 and subsequent legislation or, at the very least, saw them as a necessary and equitable restoration of the pre-1640 settlement. While Grieve, 'Puritan' and their supporters argued that, on the contrary, they were a

51 *Romsey Advertiser*, 14 and 21 June 1912.

52 *Romsey Advertiser*, 28 June 1912.

53 *Romsey Advertiser*, 12 July 1912.

54 *Romsey Advertiser*, 30 August 1912.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Romsey Advertiser*, 6 September 1912.

crude form of vengeance, which did indeed justify the use of the term 'persecution'.

Although the language used could be highly emotive at times, it is also noteworthy that, as previously illustrated, the contributors often made reference to the work of historians as well as archival material in order to lend weight to their assertions and counter arguments, thereby conferring an aura of academic respectability on the debate. For example, in his contributions 'W.G.B.' quoted from 'Rev. W. Benham, B.D.'s ... "Diocesan History of Winchester," published in 1884, page 214 ... "The most important Ecclesiastical event of his time (Bishop Morley's episcopate) was the ejection of the Presbyterian ministers on St Bartholomew's Day 1662 ...' and from the writings of Richard Baxter and Thomas Macaulay.⁵⁷ While Heanley's account of the treatment of Robert Clark is in the form of an extensive quotation from an 'unpublished manuscript now in the Bodleian Library, and numbered "C.7." in the Walker M.S'.⁵⁸ However, even when making use of such material, there was still an element of partisanship.

That said, Grieve did endeavour to combine criticality with a degree of even handedness in his response to the vicar of Romsey's article:

... no one side has a monopoly of truth. But, as the Vicar has said, it is essential that man should read history fairly. What then of the books he recommended? Hardwick is out of date, Jennings has no great weight, Perry is notoriously biased, Hutton is modern and scholarly. The Vicar should really have advised his people to read something on the definitely Nonconformist side just as Nonconformists should read something on the other side. What both ought to do is eschew so called church histories, and remember that you cannot treat church history apart from general history, read a history of the whole period by some recognised authority on it, like Gardiner, Firth or Trevelyan.⁵⁹

Looked at in the round, in their references to secondary sources, the protagonists were keen to demonstrate that they were well read and to display their erudition as a corollary to their point scoring.

57 *Romsey Advertiser*, 7 June 1912, and 5 July 1912.

58 *Romsey Advertiser*, 23 August 1912. See above, p. 160.

59 *Ibid.*

V Conclusion

It cannot be said that either side won the debate, presumably readers would have reached their own conclusions and it is doubtful whether any would have been persuaded to change or modify their position. From a broader historical perspective, however, the dispute does reveal various matters that are worthy of consideration.

First, not only did it demonstrate a wealth of knowledge of seventeenth century church history on the part of the protagonists, more pertinently it highlighted the varying truth claims stemming from the events of the 1640s and 1660s. Edwards, in particular, was keen to stress that his primary motivation was to establish what he considered to be the truth of what had happened. In his first letter, he wrote, 'if we are anxious to get at the truth',⁶⁰ in a further letter, 'I am only out to defend the truth';⁶¹ and in another, 'My object is not to stir up strife. It is simply to defend the truth'.⁶² However, taking into account all the various contributions to the debate, the correspondence confirmed that the Great Ejection of 1662 and what preceded and followed it remained a 'bone of contention' between Anglicans and Nonconformists. In short, there was an Anglican 'truth' and a Nonconformist 'truth'.

Insofar as it is possible to establish exactly what happened within Hampshire and further afield, modern scholarship suggests that the situation was more complex and confused than either Edwards, Grieve or other contributors would allow. Many clergy who gave up their livings did so, in the words of Michael Watts, 'with the utmost reluctance and often in the hope that the terms of the Act of Uniformity might soon be modified to enable them to conform'.⁶³ This hope was never realised, but it did mean that for some, at least, of the ejected clergy, the more extreme Nonconformist rhetoric was ill founded. Moreover, the degree of hardship which ejected clergy experienced was variable.

Secondly, the dispute confirmed that notwithstanding moves towards greater understanding and mutual respect across denominational boundaries, the fault line between Nonconformists and Anglicans continued to exert an influence. Indeed, old animosities could be triggered by contemporary developments. A few weeks after the dispute with which this article has been primarily concerned, there was further

60 *Romsey Advertiser*, 31 May 1912.

61 *Romsey Advertiser*, 28 June 1912.

62 *Romsey Advertiser*, 2 August 1912.

63 Michael Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford, 1978), p. 219.

acrimonious correspondence in the *Romsey Advertiser*, specifically concerning the disestablishment of the Church of Wales, with Edwards again being a major contributor.⁶⁴ In the earlier correspondence he had described this as a 'cruel measure' and made the point that the Church in Wales was 'doing grand and noble work' and even some Nonconformists were 'not prepared to injure the Church'.⁶⁵

In many respects the language and tone of the debate was as significant as its substance. Put a little differently, the emotive content of what was said resonated as much as its descriptive content, reflecting the strength of feeling on each side. It also illustrated the preparedness of Edwardians to express themselves forcefully and even belligerently in public discourse. This clearly points to the need to consider the laudatory and pejorative connotations of particular words such as 'persecution' and 'toleration' and how these might change over time.

Finally, that a secular newspaper was prepared to devote so much space to a dispute over an aspect of ecclesiastical history lends some credence to Callum Brown's claim that Edwardian Britain was a 'faith society' with Christian values still permeating many aspects of life and that even those who did not attend church were affected by them. In other words, 'British people were accustomed to the intrusiveness of religion'.⁶⁶ That said, surprisingly perhaps, the dispute did not attract editorial comment. Most weeks, using the pseudonym, 'Scribe', the editor of the *Romsey Advertiser* commented on various issues affecting the town under the by-line, 'In and Around Romsey'. There is no indication as to whether he was an Anglican or a Nonconformist sympathiser. Whatever his confessional stance, he did not, however, feel sufficiently moved or qualified, to venture into the controversy or perhaps he just wished to demonstrate his neutrality.⁶⁷

Ultimately, as 'W.G.B.' pointed out, the irony of 1662 was that 'instead of stamping out Nonconformity through this very measure [i.e. the Act of Uniformity] Nonconformity became perpetuated in England'.⁶⁸ Indeed, using very similar language to Grieve, Watts makes the point that 'although the immediate effect of the Restoration religious settlement was to bring persecution and suffering to those outside the Established church, it can, in retrospect be seen as step

64 See for example, *Romsey Advertiser*, 1 November 1912.

65 *Romsey Advertiser*, 28 June 1912 and 19 July 1912.

66 Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow, 2006), p. 47.

67 No editorial comment on the dispute has been found, despite an extensive search.

68 *Romsey Advertiser*, 7 June 1912.

towards the eventual and permanent liberation of Dissent'.⁶⁹ In a similar manner, Clark argues that the cost of seeking to impose uniformity on the Church of England, rather than pursuing a policy of comprehension, was high. 'Not only were able ministers lost to the Established Church, it had lost a moral high ground, and the seeds of later bitterness were sown'.⁷⁰ While the bitterness might have subsided by 1912, as the controversy arising from Romsey's 1662 anniversary celebrations shows it had not entirely disappeared.

69 Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 220.

70 Clark, 'Church of England Restored', 35.