

REFORMERS, CONFLICT, AND REVISIONISM: THE REFORMATION IN SIXTEENTH-CENTURY HADLEIGH*

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ABSTRACT. *The cloth-making town of Hadleigh in Suffolk has often been cited in the annals of the English Reformation as a town that early embraced Protestantism apparently effortlessly. This view owes much to John Foxe's famous description of this 'Universitie of the learned', yet a closer examination of the surviving evidence from Hadleigh indicates that the Reformation was as bitterly contested here as it was in many another mid-Tudor community. And the nature of the bitter struggle between the advocates of reform and a group of conservatives in the town may have proved so fierce that the energies for further reform under Elizabeth all but dissipated.*

There are but few signs that the sleepy town of Hadleigh in Suffolk, nestled in a valley north of the river Stour, was once the twenty-fourth wealthiest town in England.¹ Few now journey to Hadleigh. The old railway line was taken up years ago and the modern highway disdains to dally as it cuts a swathe north of the town and hurries on to Ipswich. Matters were not always so. In 1530, Hadleigh was an unincorporate market town of middling rank whose prosperous economy was dominated by the cloth trade. A triad of structures located in the heart of the town still stand as testaments to its past importance. The parish church of St Mary with its lead spire that soars to a height of 135 feet, built and embellished by the profits of her native clothiers, dominates this square. Slightly west of the church is the Deanery tower, a surviving gatehouse of an archdeacon's palace and a former seat of ecclesiastical authority in Hadleigh. Completing the triad is the fifteenth-century guildhall lying just south of the church, the physical symbol of the cloth trade that determined Hadleigh's economic health for generations. The square itself is the churchyard with its tombstones, a fitting stage for an examination of the townsmen of four centuries past, who worshipped in the parish church, decided issues of civic and

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economic importance in the guildhall, and who were conscious of their privileges as a peculiar of the archbishop of Canterbury.²

But the historian who begins an account of the Reformation in Hadleigh churchyard surrounded by these public symbols of church and borough with their familiar elements of ecclesiastical injunctions, the cloth trade, and the role of the guilds may be led astray. A better starting point may be found some distance north of the town on a small piece of unploughed land. There, dwarfed and railed in by the nineteenth-century monument raised by subscription, lies a rough hewn stone with a carved inscription which reads ‘1555 D. Tayler in defending that was good at this plas left his blode’.³ This clumsy couplet is a useful reminder of the sharpness of the religious struggle waged in this cloth town.

It is all too easy, however, to leap from Taylor’s monument to the remarkable account of both Hadleigh and Taylor given by the compiler and historian of the martyrs, John Foxe.⁴ The town of Hadleigh has come to possess a special place in the history of the Reformation in England, made famous by Foxe’s description of this ‘Universitie of the learned’, and echoed by more modern historians.⁵ Foxe wrote,

The towne of Hadley was one of the fyrst that received the woord of God in all England, at the preaching of Maister Thomas Bilney: by whose industry the Gospell of Christ had such gracious successe, and tooke such roote there, that a great number of that parish became exceeding well learned in the holy scriptures, as well women as men: so that a man myght have found among them many that had often read the whole Bible thorow, and that could have sayd a great part of S. Paules Epistles by hart, and very well and readely have geven a godly learned sentence in any matter of controversie. Their children and servauntes were also brought up and trayned so diligently in the right knowledge of Gods word, that the whole towne seemed rather an Universitie of the learned, then a towne of Clothmaking, or laboryng people: and that most is to be commended, they were for the more part faithful folowers of Gods word in their livyng.⁶

Hadleigh’s status as a peculiar of the archbishop of Canterbury and a benefice of refuge for some of Cranmer’s protégés and early reformers such as Thomas Rose, Nicholas Shaxton, and most notably Rowland Taylor has lent credence to Foxe’s description. Nevertheless, whilst there is no doubting the presence and industry of reformers such as Taylor in Hadleigh, the ‘gracious success’ of their message is less certain. Foxe was not unaware of troubles in Hadleigh but

² N. Pevsner, *The buildings of England, Suffolk* (2nd edn, rev. by E. Radcliffe, London, 1974), pp. 243–7.

³ Based on a personal visit on a bicycle in the summer of 1990.

⁴ John Foxe, *Acts and monuments* (London, 1570), pp. 1693–705. The account of Hadleigh appeared first in the 1563 edition, pp. 1065–80. Additional material was incorporated into the 1570 edition. I have quoted from the 1570 edition except where otherwise indicated.

⁵ John Strype, *Memorials of Thomas Cranmer* (2 vols., Oxford, 1840), 1, pp. 603–6; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation* (London, 1964), pp. 269–70; P. Collinson, ‘Godly preachers and zealous magistrates in Elizabethan East Anglia: the roots of dissent’, in E. S. Leedham-Green, ed., *Religious dissent in East Anglia* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 13.

⁶ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1693.

he generally chose to emphasize the triumphant progress of Protestantism and to gloss over less favourable events. Yet the surviving evidence from Hadleigh town records, accounts, wills,⁷ and even Foxe's own evidence indicate that from 1530 to 1560, the town was bitterly divided over religious issues.

This is grist to the mill of historians interested in the issue of social conflict and its relationship to the process of religious change brought by the sixteenth century. Yet the subject is not without a polemical edge. It has become orthodox among Reformation revisionists to view social relations before the Reformation as essentially harmonious, cemented together by the reconciling activities of the parish priest and institutions such as guilds and fraternities and demonstrated in the festive and charitable rituals of rogationtide processions, church ales, the distribution of holy bread, and kissing the pax. This is held in stark contrast to the divisiveness of Protestantism, an unattractively complex creed that abolished these rituals as tainted by superstition, contributed to conflicts and disputes in towns and villages, and that carried the seeds of its own destruction in the implicit notion of a gathered church and the explicit presence of precisians and puritans.⁸

Such arguments raise larger questions than can be dealt with here. Until more work is done on the incidence, role, and function of conflict in the late medieval period, we have no way of telling whether the sixteenth century saw a rise in the cases of conflict and the part played by the new theology. Parishioners in 1520 may not have been arguing over sermons preached on predestination but some can be found vigorously contesting the very symbols and rituals that emphasized the harmony of Catholic Christendom. In 1522 a parishioner of Theydon-Gernon in Essex smashed the pax over the head of the offending clerk who had dared to offer it to another man first.⁹ Sir Thomas More, in a similar vein, could speak of 'how men fell at varyaunce for kissing

⁷ Hadleigh records are currently retained by the town in the guildhall in Hadleigh. I am grateful to the late Mr W. A. B. Jones and Mr Cyril Cook for making the records available to me. Most Hadleigh wills are kept at the Public Record Office or at the Essex Record Office. I am grateful to Peter Northeast and Marjorie McIntosh for letting me read their transcriptions of earlier and later Hadleigh wills respectively.

⁸ These sentiments are explicit in J. J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English people* (Oxford, 1984); Scarisbrick's review of Collinson, *The birthpangs of Protestant England* (London, 1989), *Times Literary Supplement*, 28 July – 3 August 1989, p. 829; C. Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', in C. Haigh, ed., *The English Reformation revised* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 56–74; C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the people', in C. Haigh, ed., *The reign of Elizabeth I* (London, 1984), pp. 195–219; and, to a lesser extent, implicit in Susan Brigden, *London and the Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), esp. pp. 628–39. For this interpretation from the late medieval perspective, see C. Harper-Bill, *The pre-Reformation church in England, 1400–1530* (London, 1989).

⁹ The altercation took place on 'Allhallows day, after the elevation of the Host' when the parish clerk, Richard Pond, 'presented the pax to Mr Francis Hampden, patron of the church, and Margery, his wife and then to Mr John Browne, gent., who took it, kissed it and then broke it in two pieces over the head of the said Richard Pond, causing streams of blood to run to the ground. On the previous Sunday Browne had said, "Clerke, if thow here after gevist not me the pax first I shall breke it on thy hedd.'" W. C. Waller, ed., 'Some additions to Newcourt's *Repertorium*, vol. II, being notes made by J. C. Challenor Smith', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 7 (1902), p. 175. I owe this reference to Mr M. O'Boy.

of the pax, or goyng before in procession or setting of their wives pewes in the church'.¹⁰ Rituals such as the distribution of holy bread or the kissing of the pax were not simply moments of Christian charity but also important reflections and reinforcements of the social hierarchy and thus moments of exclusivity as well as inclusivity.¹¹ Rogationtide processions may have been an expression of parochial harmony but the practice also ensured that the boundaries of the parish were remembered and retained, practical considerations that possessed important and potentially divisive implications for the payment of tithes.¹² Clearly, there is much that is unbalanced and naive in a stark contrast between late medieval unity and early modern fragmentation.

Nor was it the case, in towns and villages across the country, as the structures of penance and purgatory confronted ideas of imputed righteousness and the activities of iconoclasts, that the *necessary* result was social conflict. Determining the religious persuasion of a town certainly could be a cause of conflict but perhaps no more so than the contentious issues of municipal office holding or town finance. Professor MacCaffrey has argued that in spite of widely divergent religious opinions among the ruling elite in Exeter, they were 'not an occasion for major social disagreement'. The town of Bury St Edmunds actually functioned quietly throughout the turbulent years of mid-Tudor change. It was not until the combined pressure of Bishop Freke's anti-puritan policy, and the aggressive tactics of a group of radical Brownists, that divisions in the town broke out in the early 1580s. And despite the undoubted conservatism of most aldermen in York, clashes among the councillors seem to have been limited to squabbles over the staging of morality plays in the 1570s.¹³ The experience of Hadleigh, however, was quite different. Cranmer's policy of using this peculiar as a refuge for reforming preachers aroused strong opposition from some of the inhabitants. And their opposition was not without success. Of the four men known to have laboured in Hadleigh – Bilney, Rose, Shaxton and Taylor – two were burnt, one arrested and prohibited from the town, and one recanted. Eventually Protestantism triumphed, but the bitter struggle in Hadleigh

¹⁰ W. E. Campbell, ed., *The English works of Sir Thomas More* (2 vols., London, 1931), p. 88. Cf. H. Maynard Smith, *Pre-Reformation England* (London, 1963), pp. 96–8; J. Bossy, 'Blood and baptism, kinship, community and Christianity in Western Europe from the fourteenth to the seventeenth centuries', in D. Baker, ed., *Sanctity and secularity: the church and the world* (Oxford, 1973), pp. 129–43.

¹¹ Cf. the orders for deacons in Holy Trinity church, Coventry, 1462, 'ye sayd dekyn schall se ye woly [holy] cake every sonday be kyte a quordyng [cut according] for every mans degre'. *British Magazine*, 6 (1834), p. 262.

¹² This practice may have been more divisive in urban rather than rural parishes. Cf. the case brought by the parish of All Saints, Canterbury, against Mr Henry Lawse, who claimed that his house attached to the hospital of Eastbridge alias Kingsbridge was exempt from the payment of tithes. During rogationtide processions, parishioners from All Saints marked his house with 'a great letter Roman A' which Lawse promptly rubbed out. Canterbury Cathedral Archives, x. ii. ii. fos. 17v–26v. I owe this reference to Patrick Collinson.

¹³ W. MacCaffrey, *Exeter, 1540–1640* (London, 1975), pp. 174–202; J. S. Craig, 'Reformation, politics and polemics in sixteenth century East Anglian market towns' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1992), ch. 4; D. Palliser, *Tudor York* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 226–59.

between the advocates of reform and a group of conservatives was a central feature of the town's life for three decades. This is important for at least two reasons. The first is that, thanks largely to Foxe, Hadleigh is often idealized as the archetype of the Protestant town, a cloth town that embraced Protestantism apparently effortlessly. Secondly, the evidence for religious conflict in Hadleigh, spotty though it is, allows the historian to trace the story a step further and to ask how matters were resolved and what effect the experience of conflict had upon the religious life of the town.

I

Particular consideration of the labours of the four notable reformers in Hadleigh provides a useful structure for the first part of this essay. The first of these, Thomas Bilney, of Norfolk stock and Cambridge educated, is, without doubt, the most elusive. Neither Lutheran, nor Catholic, recent appraisals have labelled him an Evangelical.¹⁴ It is clear that his most astringent criticisms were directed against pilgrimages and images and his emphasis was upon the sufficiency of Christ's work of redemption, a high view of scripture and of preaching. It was whilst engaged on his first preaching tour of 1526–7 that concentrated upon eastern Suffolk, and Ipswich in particular, that Bilney first came to Hadleigh. Knowledge of Bilney's activities in Hadleigh is scant, derived entirely from Foxe and a single statement in an Act Book of the diocese of Norwich. Foxe implies that Bilney enjoyed more than a passing moment in Hadleigh and this is perhaps corroborated by the testimony of Guye Glason, a shoemaker from Eye, who, caught up in court proceedings against him for speaking against images in 1533, confessed to having learnt his opinions from a sermon that Bilney had preached in Hadleigh in 1527.¹⁵ It is possible that Bilney's influence in Hadleigh was of a formative character and that he built upon existing clandestine groups of Lollards known to have been active in the Stour valley, but there is no surviving evidence for this supposition.¹⁶ It is more likely that Bilney took advantage of Hadleigh's peculiar status in order to work outside the jurisdiction of the disapproving bishop of Norwich. Bilney may well have preached in Hadleigh on his final and fateful preaching tour 'up to Jerusalem' that ended in his execution at Norwich.

¹⁴ J. F. Davis, 'The trials of Thomas Bylney and the English Reformation', *Historical Journal*, 24 (1981), pp. 775–90; G. Walker, 'Saint or schemer? The 1527 heresy trial of Thomas Bilney reconsidered', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), pp. 219–38.

¹⁵ Norfolk Record Office, Act 4/4b, fos. 33v–7r. Glason confessed that he 'wolde not wurship the Crosse ner the crucifyxe And if that I hade the Rode that stondest in the monasterye of Eye in my yerde I wolde brenne it And shyte upon it hed to make it a foote hyegher then it is.' The clerk recorded that Glason '*dicit quod dedint huius opiniones ex sermone Bilneye habuit apud Hadley septemio abhunc*'.

¹⁶ Cf. Alan Pennie, 'The evolution of Puritan mentality in an Essex cloth town: Dedham and the Stour valley, 1560–1640' (Ph.D. dissertation, Sheffield, 1989); Anne Hudson, *The premature Reformation* (Oxford, 1989), pp. 456–83; J. A. F. Thomson, *The later Lollards* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 137–8.

Although the precise details of Bilney's residence in Hadleigh must remain a matter of conjecture, his preaching, particularly against images, was not without fruit. The most convincing evidence of Bilney's influence in the region of Hadleigh can be seen in the wave of iconoclasm which spread across the Stour valley in the early 1530s.¹⁷ The most notable incident in this wave of protest was the burning of the famed rood of Dovercourt which, as Diarmaid MacCulloch has convincingly argued, was probably carried out as a response to the flames that consumed Bilney the previous summer in Norwich. In 1532, four men, three from the town of Dedham, Robert King, Nicholas Marsh, and Robert Gardner, along with Robert Debnam of East Bergholt, walked ten miles to Dovercourt on a frosty moonlit night where they removed the rood and burnt it a quarter of a mile from the church, 'who burned out so brymme, that he lighted them homewarde one good mile of the ten'.¹⁸ Their action was not without retribution; King, Debnam, and Marsh were all hanged for felony, whilst Robert Gardner escaped to tell the tale.¹⁹

'Little' Bilney was dead by the winter of 1531. But Foxe and more recent historians²⁰ have argued that the work of reform was vigorously continued in Hadleigh by the curate, Thomas Rose.²¹ Rose, who gave an account of his life to Foxe when he was seventy-six years old and a preacher of the town of Luton in Bedfordshire, came to Hadleigh in 1529, perhaps earlier.²² It was while he was at Hadleigh that he first came to 'some knowledge of the gospel' and, according to Foxe, began to 'take occasion to inveigh against purgatory, praying to saints and images'. There seems little doubt about Rose's position against images. He claimed to have counselled the four men who burnt the rood of Dovercourt, and his complicity in the deed was both suspected by men in Hadleigh and corroborated by his receipt of the rood's coat which he burnt. The charge of being privy to the burning of the rood of Dovercourt, although never proven, resulted in his arrest and confinement in Bishop Longland's prison in Holborn and brought an end to his work in Hadleigh.

¹⁷ D. MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 154–5. Foxe records that in 1532, 'there were many Images cast downe and destroyed in many places: as the Image of the Crucifix in the highway by Cogshall, the image of S. Petronill in the church of great Horksleigh, the Image of S. Christopher by Sudburye, and another Image of S. Petronill in a chapel by Ipswich. Also John Seward of Dedham overthrew a crosse, in Stoke Parke, and took ii images out of a chapell in the same Parke and cast them into the water.' Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1173.

¹⁸ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1173.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, pp. 155, 161, 163. R. A. Houlbrooke, 'Persecution of heresy and Protestantism in the diocese of Norwich under Henry VIII', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 25 (1972), pp. 314, 318.

²¹ MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 155, implies that Bilney and Rose worked together, but this seems dubious and based upon a conflation of passages from Foxe. There is no specific evidence to support the assertion that Rose was 'one of Bilney's associates working at Hadleigh'. It is possible and perhaps even likely if Bilney returned to Hadleigh as part of his last preaching tour of East Anglia, he had occasion to meet Rose but this too is conjectural.

²² Foxe, *Acts and monuments* (1576), pp. 1977–81. Rose's account appears for the first time in the 1576 edition and is clearly written to emphasize his Protestant credentials as it glosses over his abjuration of his beliefs during the reign of Mary. I owe this point to Dr Tom Freeman.

Other evidence, however, demonstrates a more ambiguous stance by Rose. It is doubtful that Rose ever inveighed against either purgatory or the intercession of saints whilst in Hadleigh. On two occasions, first in August 1529 and again a year later, Rose wrote out the will of Margaret Fynne, a wealthy widow of Hadleigh who left a series of traditional bequests for the health of her soul. Both testaments are entirely conservative, concerned with the pains of purgatory and containing no sign of any reforming tendencies. Another testament, that of the tailor, William Moreton, was written by ‘Sir Thomas Rose, curate of the parish of Hadlegh’ on 28 September 1530, in which Moreton referred to Rose as ‘my ghostly father’ and left the substantial sum of £12 to ‘find a priest for 2 years to pray for my soul and all Christian souls’.²³ More ambiguously, and possibly at odds with Foxe’s chronology, is a letter written by Cranmer to the inhabitants of Hadleigh appealing for them to be reconciled with Rose.²⁴ This letter, probably written in March 1534, shows that Rose had been before Cranmer on a charge of heresy, brought against him by ‘such as have not been his friends and favourers heretofore’ who charged him with having preached that ‘A man’s goods spent for his soul after his death prevaieth him not.’ Other parishioners contested this, arguing that he had only preached that ‘a man’s goods, given out of charity and so the child of damnation, spent after his death shall not prevail his soul’, and Rose himself ‘as soon as he heard that such matters was surmised against him ... went into the pulpit and declared, that he neither said, neither meant those words but of such as died out of charity and was buried in hell, as the rich glutton was in the gospel’. Cranmer accepted Rose’s distinction and rebuked the parishioners of Hadleigh for their ‘lack of charity’, urging those ‘which have not been his friends heretofore to leave your grudges and you all to accept him favourably’. Although Cranmer’s intervention was a setback for the conservatives in Hadleigh, it demonstrates the strength of feeling that existed against reform and the carefulness which which Rose proceeded both up to 1534 and perhaps beyond. Attacking images as stocks and stones was one thing, rejecting the entire structure of penance and purgatory was altogether another, and on this issue Rose moved cautiously.²⁵

Returning to Hadleigh probably in 1534, Rose, ‘by means one was placed in the cure at Hadley, he could not enjoy his office there again, but went to Stratford, three miles off’ where he preached for three years before being

²³ Margaret Fynne: Public Record Office (PRO) PCC 11 Thower and 25 Jankyn; William Moreton: PRO PCC 21 Jankyn.

²⁴ J. E. Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous letters and writings of Thomas Cranmer* (Cambridge, 1846), p. 280.

²⁵ This reflects the relatively unexplored role of equivocation amongst the first generation of reformers that made a distinction between public pronouncements and private scruples. See Susan Wabuda, ‘Equivocation and recantation during the English Reformation: the “subtle shadows” of Dr. Edward Crome’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), pp. 224–42. Rose’s distinctions made on the issue of the efficacy of post obit bequests in 1534 were reflected in his submission on the real presence in 1535: ‘I granted them a presence, but not as they supposed.’ J. F. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation in the south-east of England* (London, 1982), p. 112.

inhibited by the bishop of Norwich and then indicted at the assizes in Bury forcing him to flee the vicinity.²⁶

A loose veil is drawn over the town of Hadleigh from Rose's departure until the 1540s. Thomas Bedyll, a Warham appointee and clerk of the privy council, held the rectory from 1531 to 1534 together with a variety of other posts including the archdeaconries of Cleveland and London. There is no evidence to indicate that Hadleigh weighed heavily upon his mind. It is most likely that under Cranmer's patronage, Hadleigh's rectors were reformers but the most that can be said with certainty is that they tended to be civil lawyers and were invariably pluralists and non-residents. Dr William Ryvett, who served as rector of Hadleigh from 1534 to 1541, also held the rectory of St Martins Ludgate, London, from 1531 to 1542 and served as archdeacon of Suffolk from 1540 until his death in 1542.²⁷ His successor, John Viall, who served from 1542 to 1544, was certainly a reformer who had been disciplined by Longland, the conservative bishop of Lincoln in 1536.²⁸ Of greater importance to the town must have been the work of curates. Throughout the 1530s, Hadleigh was served by a variety of priests including John White, William Reynthorp, John Doggett, and John Bronde, about whom we know next to nothing.²⁹ It is quite clear, however, that not all the preaching in Hadleigh was of the reforming tendency. One of Ryvett's curates, Hugh Payne, was detected to Cranmer in 1537 for preaching that 'one paternoster said by the injunction of a priest was worth a thousand paternosters said of a man's mere voluntary mind'.³⁰ The following decades prove a much richer field for evidence and the two catalysts for change during these years, although in different ways, were the reformers, Nicholas Shaxton and Rowland Taylor.

Nicholas Shaxton was the more publicly eminent of the two, a close friend of Cranmer's rather than a protégé.³¹ One of the early members of the discussions

²⁶ Rose had an eventful life of trials and escapes before ending his days as preacher of Luton. He may have been a visiting preacher in Norwich in the parish of St Andrews in 1532–3 where his preaching irritated conservatives like Herry Swetman, who said he was a 'knave'. Walter Rye, ed., *Depositions taken before the mayor and aldermen of Norwich, 1549–1567* (Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society, Norwich, 1905), pp. 48–9. Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, pp. 111–13.

²⁷ Diarmaid MacCulloch sees a reformer in Ryvett on the basis of being appointed archdeacon of Suffolk by royal letters patent rather than by the conservative Bishop Rugge, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 163. Under Ryvett, process was issued against the rectory of Hadleigh for arrears of two years of clerical tenths and the clerical subsidy for a total of £17 2s 10d. An order for sequestration of the amount was issued but the outcome is unknown. PRO E338/1 unfoliated. I owe this reference to Patrick Carter.

²⁸ Lincolnshire Archives Office, Episcopal Register xxvi, fo. 267r; M. Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 144. I owe this reference to Susan Wabuda.

²⁹ For Bedyll, see *DNB*, II, pp. 120–1. For Ryvett and Viall, see J. and J. A. Venn eds., *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (4 vols., Cambridge, 1922–7). The names of the curates are found in the wills proved in the 1530s.

³⁰ Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous writings of Thomas Cranmer*, pp. 333–4. On Hugh Payne, see G. R. Elton, *Policy and police* (Cambridge, 1972), p. 19.

³¹ In 1535, Cranmer described Shaxton as 'my old acquainted friend' and in a letter written in 1534 to Dr Thirlby, archdeacon of Ely, Cranmer refers Thirlby to 'doctor Shaxton, who knoweth all my whole mind herein.' Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous writings of Thomas Cranmer*, pp. 293, 309.

held at the White Horse tavern in Cambridge and fellow of Gonville Hall, he obtained preferment at court at the time of Anne Boleyn's rise to power. By 1534, he was almoner to Anne Boleyn and a year later was installed as bishop of Salisbury, an office which he held until his resignation on the passing of the Six Articles in 1539.³² From his days in Cambridge, the suspicion of heresy had clung to Shaxton.³³ As early as 1530, the vice chancellor had censured a sermon in which Shaxton had condemned the public denial of purgatory but defended those who thought otherwise in private.³⁴ Few details are known of Shaxton's activities from his resignation in 1539 until his appearance upon the public scene in the summer of 1546, but it is clear that he obtained a curacy in Hadleigh, probably from 1542 if not earlier. When Edmund Davye, a yeoman of Hadleigh, drew up his will on 24 May 1543, it was witnessed by 'Dr Nicholas Shaxton, late Bishop of Sarum' who was requested to assist Davye's executor with 'councell and information'. Davye's testament is full of intriguing connections that existed between Hadleigh, Canterbury, and London, connections that were personified in men like Shaxton. Two Hadleigh men, Thomas Alabaster and Peter Pollerne, both witnesses of the will and wealthy yeomen, were described as 'servants' of Shaxton's, and were each left 40 shillings, whilst Shaxton himself was given the 'leas of the parsonage of Hadleigh'. Davye left 40 shillings to Mistress Bucke of London and a long worsted gown to Master Bucke, as well as his best gown to Master Sandforth, 'clerk of the kechyn with my Lord of Canterbury' and a 'sorrell gelding and a gowne to Frances Calcot, servant with my Lord of Canterbury'.³⁵ Just how influential were the lay connections that existed between Lambeth Palace and Hadleigh is difficult to gauge, but relationships that included members of Cranmer's household must have counted for something. Furthermore, the high regard in which Shaxton was held by some in Hadleigh, seen through the tiny porthole of Davye's testament, helps to explain the reverberations that must have been felt in Hadleigh following the dramatic events of 1546.

Shaxton retained his curacy in Hadleigh until the summer of 1546, when he was summoned to London on charges of heresy. The specific charge was for having openly preached on 1 June in 'Brodestreet ward' in London that, 'concerning the blessed body and blood of our Saviour Christ, mine opinion is that His natural body is not therein but it is a sign and a memorial of His body crucified for us'.³⁶ Events moved quickly for Shaxton from this point. Summoned to London, he was arraigned for heresy on 18 June along with

³² His term as bishop of Salisbury was marked by a bitter quarrel with the borough authorities that brought him into conflict with Thomas Cromwell. R. B. Merriman, *Life and letters of Thomas Cromwell* (2 vols., Oxford, 1902), II, pp. 128–31.

³³ Houlbrooke, 'Persecution of heresy', pp. 305–26, esp. pp. 313, 315, 317.

³⁴ Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, p. 67. J. Gairdner and R. S. Brodie, eds., *Letters and papers, foreign and domestic, of the reign of Henry VIII* (21 vols., London, 1862–1932) (hereafter *Letters and papers*), V, p. 297.

³⁵ PRO PCC 21 Spert. Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London, 1996), p. 12.

³⁶ *Letters and papers*, XXI, pt i, p. 684.

Anne Askew and a group of others. The crown clearly intended to make a public example of these men and women for political gain, but the authorities could not have predicted just how successful their efforts with Shaxton would be, who, the day after his arraignment and following lengthy conversations with the bishops of London and Worcester, made a full recantation of his position. Unlike Askew, who remained steadfast to the end and received a full and fulsome account from Foxe, Shaxton's recantation saved his life but damned his name amongst the gospellers.³⁷ This was not Shaxton's first recantation but it proved his last; he never again supported the reformers,³⁸ whilst the government made the most of their coup by printing copies of Shaxton's recantation and ordering Shaxton to preach publicly his abjuration.³⁹ Shaxton preached at Askew's death and again at St Paul's Cross as a penitent, declaring 'how he fell into the heretical opinion of the sacrament of the aluter and of his reconciliation ... with weeping eies, exhorting the people to beware by him and to abolish such hereticall bookes of English which was the occasion of his fall'.⁴⁰ Later that year, or in the beginning of 1547, Shaxton returned to Hadleigh to make a full recantation of his beliefs.

Shaxton's public recantation was an immense blow to the reformed cause in England and especially in Hadleigh. An opening into the consequences of these dramatic events is provided by Robert Crowley's polemical tract, *The confutation of the 13 articles to which Nicholas Shaxton subscribed*, published in 1548.⁴¹ This was a remarkable compilation of a variety of writings, including a 'true copie of Shaxton's beliefe in the sacrament before his recantation' which, Crowley claimed, had been originally written by Shaxton who had torn it up and thrown it in a privy.⁴² Crowley's purpose was not simply or even primarily to confute Shaxton's submission but to urge Shaxton to make a public renunciation of his recantation. Crowley wrote:

Purge yourselfe therefore of all suspicion and put us out of doubtte what your conscience

³⁷ Foxe has little to say of Shaxton's recantation which appears as a detail in the narrative concerning Anne Askew, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1418. Cf. Bale's acid address to Shaxton that begins 'What devil bewitched thee to play this most blasphemous part', in 'The second examination of Anne Askewe', H. Christmas, ed., *Select works of John Bale* (Cambridge, 1849), pp. 218–20. His recantation and dates are all corroborated in Charles Wriothesley, *A chronicle of England during the reigns of the Tudors, 1485–1559* ed. W. D. Hamilton (2 vols., Camden Society, new series, xi, xx, 1875–7), I, pp. 167–8. See also PRO S P 46/5, fo. 165.

³⁸ Shaxton would later sit in judgement on Protestant heretics under Mary, urging them to 'become new men, for I myself was in this fond opinion that you are now in, but I am now become a new man'. Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, ed. S. R. Cattley (8 vols., London, 1837–41), VII, pp. 402, 404; VIII, p. 378. ³⁹ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, ed. Cattley, v, p. 838; appendix no. xvii.

⁴⁰ Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, I, p. 170.

⁴¹ Robert Crowley, *The confutation of xiii articles whereunto Nicholas Shaxton, late bishop of Salisbury subscribed and caused to be set forthe in print the yere of our Lord 1546 when he recanted in Smithfields at London at the burning of mestre Anne Askewe* (London, 1548).

⁴² 'And that you shoulde not marvayle how the copie should come to my hand (knowyng that with your owne handes, you had rented it and caste it into a Jakes) you shall understande that the Jakes was broken up for it, and the pieces layed togyther, it was copied out word for word as here after foloweth.' Crowley, *The confutation of xiii articles*, sig. Cii.

is in thys matter. The law is now dissolved. The penaltye is taken frome it,⁴³ it is fre for you to saye your conscience, so far as the scripture wyl beare you. Take your pen in hand therefore and eyther subscribe unto that ye wrote before whyle you were in prison: or els confute it by the scriptures.

Yet the tenor of Crowley's tract was not hopeful of change in Shaxton, speaking darkly of 'the great number of them that thorowe youre recantation were established in your erroures' and assuring Shaxton that '[i]f you kepe silence and wryte nothyng agayne: then maye ye well thynke that we wyl iudge you obstinate'. Crowley noted that 'many men hange upon youre words' and rebuked Shaxton for his deeds and words since his submission:

I am not ignoraunte of your behaviour sence your recantation, boeth in the citey of London and els where. Your private communication (besydes youre sermons dashed full of sorowful teares and depe syghynges to alure the people to the Romeishe waye agayne) is openly knowen to all men. Men knowe also howe you have upon occasion geven to speake of persecution affirmed the good byshoppes of Wynchester and London and such other to be the onely sufferers of persecution in these days.

But Crowley's efforts to secure a second recantation from Shaxton came to nothing, and his steadfast adherence to Catholicism caused the new rector of Hadleigh, Rowland Taylor, to believe that Shaxton had committed the unpardonable sin against the Holy Ghost.⁴⁴

Of the four reforming clerics most famously associated with Hadleigh, Rowland Taylor has pride of place. Most of what is commonly known about Rowland Taylor comes from the detailed account of his imprisonment and martyrdom recorded in Foxe's *Acts and monuments*,⁴⁵ the pathos of which has proved irresistible. Foxe's description is full of high praise. Taylor is the *pastor pastorum*, a man who left Cranmer's household to reside in Hadleigh where he 'gave himself wholly to the study of Holy Scriptures'. His life was marked by meekness, charity to the poor, and rebuking the sins of the rich, in short he was 'a right and lively image or pattern of all those virtuous qualities described by St Paul in a true bishop'. Weighing the surviving evidence along side this powerful tradition is no easy task.⁴⁶

A Northumberland man by birth, Taylor was educated in the civil law in Cambridge where he proceeded to the degree of LL.B in 1530 and LL.D in 1534. Principal of Borden Hostel from 1531 to 1538, he was won to the side of the reformers through the influence of William Turner and the sermons of

⁴³ It was commonly believed that Shaxton's abjuration stemmed from his fear of death. Cf. Christmas, ed., *Select works of John Bale*, p. 219. Ridley wrote to Latimer, 'Fear of death doth most persuade a great number. Be well aware of that argument; for that persuaded Shaxton, as many men thought, after that he had once made a good profession openly before the judgment seat.' H. Christmas, ed., *Works of Nicholas Ridley* (Cambridge, 1843), p. 115.

⁴⁴ J. S. Craig, 'The marginalia of Dr. Rowland Taylor', *Historical Research*, 64 (1991), p. 414.

⁴⁵ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, pp. 1693–705.

⁴⁶ Cf. the sceptical comments that intersperse lengthy quotations from Foxe's narrative by James Gairdner in *Lollardy and the Reformation in England* (4 vols., London, 1913), IV, pp. 354–69.

Hugh Latimer.⁴⁷ His association with Latimer was particularly strong and he served in the late 1530s as Latimer's chaplain and commissary general of the diocese of Worcester.⁴⁸ In March 1538, Latimer collated him to the parish church of Hanbury, which benefice he appears to have retained until his death in 1555. On Latimer's resignation in 1539, Cranmer took Taylor under his wing, making him one of his chaplains. He was ordained by Cranmer in 1539 and was admitted to the parish church of St Swithins in Worcester in the same year. Taylor was given a royal licence to preach and preached in the diocese of London probably with Latimer. He was presented to the living of Hadleigh on 16 April 1544.⁴⁹

Unlike Rose or Shaxton, there was nothing tentative in Taylor's outlook. Large in stature and salty of speech, his physical presence and personality made for a hard controversialist and a vigorous reformer. It was not for nothing that his conservative opponents spoke of him as a 'very evil man'.⁵⁰ He possessed a reputation as a scholar and was numbered at the convocation of 1542 among those 'skilled in Hebrew, Greek, Latin and English'.⁵¹ Very little material written by Taylor has survived, but what has, together with his recently discovered annotations in his copy of Conrad Pellican's commentary on the Bible, show him to have taken an uncompromisingly reformist position on a number of issues: clerical marriage, justification by faith, the papacy, transubstantiation, and preaching.⁵² Taylor scribbled in his Bible that the Roman church was 'the purpld spirituall hore, the gowldin gilt d harrand drab'. His annotations also show that he sympathized with the concerns raised

⁴⁷ Taylor probably studied at Pembroke Hall, a college with a Northumbrian flavour. William Turner, another Northumbrian and Fellow of Pembroke, wrote to Foxe of Taylor that 'with this man I lived for many years on terms of intimacy and used to exhort him zealously to embrace the evangelical doctrine'. Christmas, ed., *Works of Nicholas Ridley*, p. 494; P. Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal, 1519-1583* (London, 1979), pp. 39-40.

⁴⁸ Hereford and Worcester Record Office, MS b716.093 BA 2648/9 (ii), fos. 17, 24-5, 30-2. I owe this reference to Susan Wabuda. Taylor also worked as an official of the archdeacon of Ely in the mid 1530s (Cambridgeshire Record Office, archdeaconry of Ely will register, 1, 1529-44, fos. 58v, 69v) and served with Latimer as an executor to the will of Dr William Benson, the last dean of Westminster: PRO C1/1318/19-21. Cf. the caustic comments of a conservative tailor of Kidderminster who heard Taylor in the summer of 1538 preach at the gallows at Whoobroke standing 'upon the vicar's colt (which was a bier) and made a foolish sermon of the New Learning looking over the gallows: I would the colt had winced and cast him down'. *Letters and papers*, xiii, pt i, no. 1509. See also *Letters and papers*, xiv, pt i, no. 638.

⁴⁹ W. J. Brown, *The life of Rowland Taylor* (London, 1959), pp. 8-16. Taylor compounded for the living before he was presented, a not uncommon practice. His payment of first fruits and tenths amounted to £45 2s and Anthony Vaughan, gentleman and Edward Wade, yeoman of Southwark, stood as his sureties. PRO E334/3, fo. 11. I owe this reference to Patrick Carter.

⁵⁰ It was when he was investigating the prebendaries plot in 1543 that one of the prebendaries said of Taylor that 'he was a man of an evil judgement and noseled for and brought up in the same'. *Letters and papers*, xviii, pt ii, pp. 299, 328, 362-3.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xvii, p. 176.

⁵² Craig, 'Marginalia', pp. 411-20. At this process Taylor asserted that 'transubstantiation is a conjuring word, concomitacion another juggling word' and that 'Poope sayth thou shalt make graven and molten images and not onely make them but bowe downe to them and worshippe them and crepe to them one knees and make god of a pece of bread yea bread.' British Library (BL) Harleian MS 421, fos. 40r-4r, Harleian MS 590 fos. 64r-7v.

by the commonwealth men, echoing statements made by Latimer and Crowley, and his view of the role of preachers was typically forthright: 'preachers must be bowld and not mylk mowthed'.⁵³

Nevertheless, it is his very importance, particularly to the Edwardian regime, that undermines the image of Taylor as the good and resident shepherd. Foxe's claim that Taylor ministered the weekly services is impossible to accept. The cure of souls in Hadleigh was clearly a team effort. Richard Yeoman was employed as Taylor's curate from 1544 to 1554, and perhaps as early as 1550, many of his responsibilities were carried out by the little known, but highly respected, reformer David Whitehead.⁵⁴ Throughout his time in Hadleigh, Taylor was entrusted with various offices that necessitated periods of absence. On 15 August 1547, he became a canon of Rochester and the following year he was appointed archdeacon of Bury St Edmunds.⁵⁵ For much of the summer of 1547 Taylor was employed as a preacher for the royal visitation within the dioceses of Lincoln, Peterborough, Oxford, and Lichfield and Coventry. Taylor was in London at Whitsuntide, 1548, preaching at the request of the lord mayor.⁵⁶ In 1550, he was called to serve on a commission against anabaptists and the following year was appointed one of the six preachers of Canterbury and was made archdeacon of Cornwall in the diocese of Exeter.⁵⁷ From 1551 he served on the commission to revise the ecclesiastical laws and helped administer the vacant diocese of Norwich in 1550 and of Worcester in 1552. It is significant that, at least from 1552, Taylor farmed out the rectory to two Hadleigh men, Thomas Alabaster and Steven Gardner,⁵⁸ and also noteworthy that Taylor was never involved in borough affairs in the way that his Elizabethan counterparts, Thomas Spencer and John Still, were.⁵⁹ Clearly, Taylor was no country parson removed from the affairs of the court and convocation, but a cleric for whom national issues always preceded the local. The image of Taylor as the reformed pastor par excellence needs to give way to the image of Taylor as Cranmer's troubleshooter, his wits and bold reforming stance being used to oppose and confute conservatives wherever was

⁵³ Craig, 'Marginalia', pp. 411–20.

⁵⁴ In 1552, Cranmer in writing to Cecil concerning candidates for an Irish archbishopric felt that 'Mr Whitehead of Hadley', was most meet, commending him for his 'good knowledge, special honesty, fervent zeal and politic wisdom'. Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous writings of Thomas Cranmer*, p. 438. Whitehead fled to the continent in 1553 where he took charge of the exile congregation in Frankfurt supporting Cox against Knox in the controversies that ensued. *DNB*, xxi, p. 97. Whitehead served as a scrivener to the Protestant will of the Hadleigh clothier, John Raven, on 1 February 1552. PRO PCC 5 Tashe. See also Christina Garrett, *The Marian exiles* (Cambridge, 1938), pp. 325–7; Strype, *Memorials of Cranmer*, I, pp. 393–4.

⁵⁵ Brown, *The life of Rowland Taylor*, pp. 16, 24–41; *Calendar of patent rolls, 1548–9*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ Wriothesley, *Chronicle*, II, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Strype, *Ecclesiastical memorials*, II, pt I, p. 385; II, pt II, pp. 200, 262, 269.

⁵⁸ PRO REQ 2 18/26. I owe this reference to Diarmaid MacCulloch.

⁵⁹ This observation is based on an analysis of the Market Feoffment Book of Hadleigh with entries from 1534 to 1619. Both Still and Spencer regularly attended meetings of the market feoffment, the ruling body of the town. There is no evidence that Taylor attended any of these meetings. Hadleigh 4/1.

necessary. This is the common thread that runs through and makes sense of Taylor's various activities and appointments from his work investigating the prebendaries plot to his appointments as archdeacon of Cornwall and of Bury St Edmunds.⁶⁰

Despite his many commitments, Taylor's influence was important particularly in Suffolk and the Stour valley. William Boyes, a Cambridge graduate and son of a Halifax clothier, was said to have moved to Nettlestead, hard by Hadleigh, in order to be near Taylor.⁶¹ Men of Essex who were burnt at the stake, such as William Pyggot, Stephen Knight, and John Laurence, confessed that they had been persuaded of their opinions by 'learned men as Dr Tayler of Hadley and such others',⁶² and it was as a visitation preacher in Derby that his sermons converted the blind woman, Joan Waste.⁶³ Others, perhaps inspired by his example, sought to emulate his calling. John Dodman, who fled to the continent and later received preferment from Bishop Grindal, although originally from Norwich, described himself at his ordination in May 1552 as coming from Hadleigh. And Taylor, himself, seems to have taken the unusual step of ordaining Robert Drakes, who served as the curate of Thundersley in Essex.⁶⁴

Although Taylor avoided any serious trouble until his first arrest in 1553, the possibility of a martyr's end was a present reality and Taylor prepared himself for this test. He had a brush with the ecclesiastical authorities on a probable charge of heresy in the same year that witnessed Shaxton's submission. A sermon preached by Taylor in Bury St Edmunds was reported by two former monastics to the privy council, and an ambiguous minute from the council has survived, stating that action be taken with Taylor at this time.⁶⁵ Yet there is no further evidence of disciplinary proceedings on this occasion.

It was Shaxton's collapse, however, which proved such a strong influence upon Taylor. Taylor was the probable author of the 'letter which the faithfull in Suffolke made and gave it unto Nicholas Shaxton when he had recanted in London and came to Hadley to declare the same', printed in Crowley's *Confutation*. As rector of Hadleigh and having known Shaxton, possibly from his time in Cambridge, yet wisely unwilling to append his name to a public statement in 1546/7, Taylor would have been the most logical choice of an

⁶⁰ MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 168; Brown, *Life of Rowland Taylor*, pp. 34–7. For the conflict over the archdeaconry of Cornwall, see J. A. Vage, 'The diocese of Exeter, 1519–1641: a study of church government in the age of reformation' (Ph.D. dissertation, Cambridge, 1991), pp. 49–54, 87–8.

⁶¹ Boyes (Bois) was the father of John Boyes, one of the translators of the Authorized Version. The assertion is made by Anthony Walker whose 'Life of John Bois' is found in F. Peck, *Desiderata curiosa* (London, 1779), pp. 325–42. See Cambridge University Library (CUL) Add MS 3856.

⁶² Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1720.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, ed. Cattley, viii, pp. 247–50.

⁶⁴ Garrett, *The Marian exiles*, p. 145; Davis, *Heresy and Reformation*, p. 135.

⁶⁵ *Letters and papers*, xxi, pt i, p. 555. This was probably not Taylor's first encounter with discipline. In the evidence from the prebendaries plot there is a reference to Mr London who apparently had 'taken up your Grace before the Council for Dr Tallor and for your preachers in your churches in London'. *Letters and papers*, xviii, pt ii, p. 328.

anonymous response to Shaxton's public recantation in Hadleigh. It is possible that Crowley, whose writings and concerns often mirror those of Taylor's, received from Taylor a copy of the letter as he prepared his written rejoinder to Shaxton. The letter, which is a mixture of warnings to Shaxton concerning the sin of apostasy and pleading with him to 'praye to oure mercifull God that he maye geve the hys grace againe', is stylistically consistent with Taylor's own writings as is the use of particular words and themes.⁶⁶ In his annotations Taylor made a cryptic reference to 'Tonshax', a transposition of Shaxton, as one whose actions made the Bible a babble, and wrote that he had sinned '*ad mortem contra fraternitatem*'. And Shaxton once again must have been much in Taylor's mind when, from prison, he wrote to Ridley and Latimer at Oxford commending them for their steadfastness and encouraging them with the reminder that 'England hath had few learned bishops that have stuck to Christ *ad ignem* inclusive.'⁶⁷ When cited to appear before Gardiner in the spring of 1554 on charges of heresy, Taylor's determination, against the wishes of his friends who urged him to flee, to go to London and 'do God so good service', must have been formed with the memory of Shaxton's failed determination to do the same eight years earlier.⁶⁸ He would write later in his copy of Pellican's commentary that '*verbum Dei* maid us goo to London',⁶⁹ and when he returned to Hadleigh as a prisoner on his way to the stake, he repeatedly said he was coming to seal with his blood the truth he had preached.

From March 1554, Taylor was kept in the King's Bench prison until his condemnation and transport to Aldham Common just north of Hadleigh where on 9 February 1555, he was burnt for heresy. His cryptic annotations reflecting on courage, death and martyrdom corroborate the lively picture of Taylor found in Foxe's account of his trial, imprisonment, and execution. The enduring image is less the devoted father and husband writing moving letters to his wife and children prior to his death than it is as the joker in the pack of leading reformers who were the first to be burnt under Mary. Determined to stick to Christ, '*ad ignem* inclusive', Taylor used his pregnant wit and great size to mock the proceedings against him. 'My lord, strike him not, for he will sure strike again' pleads a nervous chaplain plucking at Bonner's sleeve during Taylor's degrading which should have finished with a ceremonial blow from

⁶⁶ The author of the letter uses such words as 'unpossible', 'better learned', 'sweet springs', 'crafty juglings', all characteristic expressions in Taylor's vocabulary, and touches on the themes of Christian warfare, the wise man preparing his son for death, and steadfastness in spite of persecution, all of which find a place in his recently discovered annotations. Cf. Craig, 'Marginalia', pp. 411–20. It is noteworthy, however, that the letter does not possess any examples of Taylor's habit of stringing lists of nouns or adjectives together.

⁶⁷ BL Additional MS 19400, fo. 29.

⁶⁸ The letter printed by Crowley included the sentence: 'Alas whi didest thou not perciver, thou saidest at thy departing from us, when thou were sent for to London, that either thou wouldest burne or else forsake Gods trueth. In dede thou prophesiedst truly.' 'The true copie of a letter which the faithfull in Suffolke made and gave it unto Nicolas Shaxton when he had recanted in London and came to Hadley to declare the same', in Crowley, *Confutation of xiii articles*, unpaginated.

⁶⁹ Craig, 'Marginalia', p. 414.

Bonner's crosier upon Taylor's chest, and when Bonner contents himself with a curse instead of a blow, Taylor would later relate with pleasure how he had made the bishop of London fear for his safety. On his way to Aldham Common, Taylor finally acknowledges to those who have been urging him to abjure his beliefs and save his life that he had been deceived and 'am like to deceive a great many of Hadley of their expectations'. It is only when the rejoicing dies down that Taylor explains that not only was he deceived in thinking he might have lived out his days as the rector of Hadleigh and died in his bed, but that the ones most deceived were the worms in Hadley churchyard 'which shoulde have had joly feedyng uppon this carion, which they have looked for many a day. But now I know wee bee deceived, both I and they: for this carkas must be burnt to ashes...'⁷⁰ It was not for nothing that Thomas Fuller said that of all the reformers, Taylor had the 'merriest and pleasantest wit'. Yet there remained a certain distance between Taylor and his parishioners, perhaps born of a forceful personality and his many activities, quite possibly indicating a more fundamental division between Taylor and the more prosperous clothiers of Hadleigh. He could be extremely fierce in his denunciation of wealthy conservatives, describing them as 'prowd, enviowis, slothfull, covetowis, glotenewis, letcherus, carnall and worldly, bestly, epycuys, oppressors, diffeyners, receyvers, tyrandes, hypochrytes, Idolotars'.⁷¹ He is known to have witnessed the wills of only two parishioners, Thomas Brounsmyth, a woadsetter, in 1547 and John Freman, a merchant, in 1551.⁷² He often wrote of Hadleigh in endearing terms, 'my dear Hadley', yet he did not hesitate to predict an outbreak of 'many and wonderful plagues of God' if Hadleigh forsook the truth and 'defile[d] itself with the cake-god'. Perhaps the verses on the second-hand brass bought and placed in the parish church for Taylor some ten years after his death were closer to the truth in stating that he 'kept his flock in feare'.⁷³

II

Analysing the work of Cranmer's clerics is to view but one side of the relationship. What evidence is there of the allegiances and opinions of the cloth-making and labouring folk spoken of in such glowing terms by Foxe? And what part did such people play in the process of reformation in Hadleigh?

One difficulty in deciphering popular sentiments for or against reform in Hadleigh in the 1530s and 1540s rests upon interpreting a number of ambiguous statements made about the town. When Cranmer wrote in 1537 that the conservative priest, Hugh Payne, who had fled to Stoke by Nayland where he persisted in his 'erroneous and seditious preaching', was 'as well liked as he was at Hadley', it is problematic whether he meant this to be taken sarcastically or

⁷⁰ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, p. 1701.

⁷¹ Craig, 'Marginalia', p. 415.

⁷² Essex Record Office, Chelmsford (ERO) D/ABW 3/135; PRO PCC 20 Bucke.

⁷³ H. Pigot, 'Hadleigh: the town, the church and the gentlemen who have been born in or connected with the parish', *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archaeology*, 3 (1859), p. 61.

Table 1 *Hadleigh wills, 1500–1600*

	Traditional	Unknown	Possibly reformist	Protestant
1500–40	18	0	4	0
1540–7	2	4	1	0
1547–53	1	9	7	5
1553–8	3	6	0	1
1558–1600	0	17	3	19

at face value.⁷⁴ When one of the conservative prebendaries of Canterbury said in 1543 that ‘the congregation of Hadley is a worshipfull congregation. If one of them were hanged against another it were not a half penny matter’, was he commenting on the insignificance of the support for the reformers or simply expressing his scorn for the place?⁷⁵ On an earlier occasion, the conservatives, Walter and John Clerk of Hadleigh, argued that not even a hundred men could remove Thomas Rose from Hadleigh such was the support he enjoyed, but it served their purpose to exaggerate the strength of ‘seditious’ feeling. In actual fact it only required one man, Mr Cartwright, to arrest Rose.⁷⁶ Are Foxe’s statements about Hadleigh as a ‘Universitie of the learned’ similarly tainted with hyperbole? Language was, after all, part of the weaponry of both conservatives and reformers, and statements like the ones above need to be treated with the same caution given to a field of land mines.

A more solid basis for assessing beliefs at the popular level is found in an analysis of the surviving wills for the town. Wills can be a notoriously opaque source for historians, possessing their own pitfalls, and the poor survival rate of Hadleigh wills does nothing to lessen the problem.⁷⁷ Not only is this sample extremely slim; it is also systematically skewed towards the wealthier in Hadleigh. Yet it would be a mistake to dismiss this evidence out of hand. From 1500 to 1600, 100 wills survive in the registers of the prerogative court of Canterbury, Lambeth Palace, or as originals proved in the court of Bocking. An analysis of these wills is found in table 1.⁷⁸ The table indicates a widespread

⁷⁴ Cox, ed., *Miscellaneous writings of Thomas Cranmer*, p. 333.

⁷⁵ *Letters and papers*, xviii, pt 2, 546, p. 298.

⁷⁶ Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, ed. Cattley, viii, pp. 581–2.

⁷⁷ See J. Craig and C. J. Litzenger, ‘Wills as religious propaganda: the testament of William Tracy’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 (1993), pp. 415–16, 431.

⁷⁸ I have divided these wills into four basic categories based upon the language used and the absence or presence of certain bequests. The categories of ‘unknown’ and ‘possibly reformist’ require some explanation. I have placed in the ‘unknown’ category those wills in which the bequests, language used, or relationships give no clue to defining the testator’s religious opinions. ‘Possibly reformist’ wills include those in which there is a combination of reformist connections (seen in witnesses, executors, supervisors) with the absence of any traditional language or bequests. The will of Henry Blossie (PRO PCC 28 Powell) is such an example. The language used in his soul

belief in purgatory and the penitential system up to 1540. Of the twenty-two testators from 1500 to 1540, thirteen left bequests for intercessory masses, or an annual stipend for a priest to ‘sing for my soul’. The will of John Osburne, a clothier, drawn up in December 1530, was typical of many. He bequeathed 3s 4d to the high altar for his ‘tithes and offerings negligently forgotten or else too little paid’, another 20s for the church repairs and left £6 13s 4d for ‘an honest priest to sing for my soul, for my friends’ souls and for all Christian souls for one whole year within the church of Hadleigh’.⁷⁹ Eighteen of these wills employed traditional phraseology in the bequest of their souls and the remaining four wills possessed a reformist appearance, although none were explicitly Protestant or Evangelical. A solidarity of support for and identification with orthodoxy is the general pattern in Hadleigh and a significant consideration against which the influence of the early reformers, Bilney and Rose, must be placed. It would be a mistake, however, to push the significance of twenty-two wills too far.

What is clear is that bequests for intercessory masses and the language of purgatory evaporate completely after 1538 with the ambiguous exception of William Turnour, a clothier who, in 1545, requested his executors to pay off his debts for ‘the discharge of my soul’.⁸⁰ Perhaps the crucial turning point was the introduction of a service in English. According to Wriotheseley’s *Chronicle*, in 1538 ‘at Hadley in Suffolk and at Stratforde in Essex [sic],⁸¹ the mass and consecration of the sacrament of the aulter was sayd in Englishe by the curats there divers tymes’.⁸² This early innovation, if sustained, perhaps marked the beginning of a new emphasis of a reforming group in the town going beyond iconoclasm to an attack upon transubstantiation and an adherence to justification by faith. Although only six of the thirty-nine surviving wills proved between 1541 and 1558 can be identified positively as reformed, these men and women had clearly internalized the dynamic of Protestantism. A woadsetter, Thomas Brounsmythe, when he wrote his will at the end of December 1547, commended his soul unto ‘Christ Jesus, my maker and redeemer, by whom and by the merits of whose blessed passion is all my whole trust of clean remission and forgiveness of my sins’. Brounsmythe went on to specify that he wanted no dirges to be said or sung at his funeral and directed his wife to find someone to preach a sermon instead ‘to the laud and praise of my lord and saviour Jesus Christ and setting forth of his blessed and holy word and to the

bequest (‘I bequeth my spyrite into thandes [sic] of almightie god my savior and redeemer’) was not expressly Protestant. Yet the absence of any traditional terms or bequests (nothing left for tithes, church repair, burial arrangements, etc.) and the fact that the Protestant merchant John Freman witnessed his will and his executor was another possible reformist, Robert Rolf, qualifies him for inclusion into the ranks of the ‘possibly reformed’.⁷⁹ PRO PCC 3 Thrower.

⁸⁰ PRO PCC 25 Pynnyng.

⁸¹ ‘Stratforde in Essex’ is in fact a reference to Stratford St Mary in Suffolk. See MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 159.

⁸² Wriotheseley, *Chronicle*, I, p. 83.

declaring and testimony of my faith towards the same'.⁸³ The merchant, John Freman, when he drew up his will in May 1551, bequeathed the profits from two parcels of land to the churchwardens with instructions that the money be in part 'bestowed yerely uppon a Sermon to be made on Maundy Thursdaye'.⁸⁴ Six Protestant wills from the thirty-nine proved between 1541 and 1558, however, is a far cry from Foxe's image of Hadleigh as a precociously Protestant 'Universitie of the learned'.

The fact is that in spite of Cranmer's design to make this town a centre of reformed worship, progress was made only slowly. There is no doubting the existence of a group of committed Protestants in Hadleigh, but they probably remained a minority until the settled years and unhindered opportunities afforded by Elizabeth's reign. Nothing more tellingly demonstrates the strength of conservative opinion in the town than the few surviving folios of churchwardens' accounts from the first years of Edward VI's reign. For it was not until the first year of Edward VI that Rowland Taylor, in the atmosphere of the dissolution of the chantries and guilds, dared to effect a wholesale cleaning out of the parish church. Church plate, vestments, 'old baggage', chimes, basins, blue cloths, bells, old iron, and much more were all sold off, with a portion of the proceeds being disbursed to the poor. An unspecified sum of money was spent 'for takyng downyn the ydulse yn the church' and sixteen pence received at their sale. New glass and new lead were bought and more money was spent on cleaning the vestry and the church, mending fourteen holes and buying leather bauldricks.⁸⁵ Much went in this overhaul, but there were some interesting survivals. Unlike the experience of some London parishes, the organ was retained, mended, and used at the Easter celebrations. A sepulchre was erected with a sepulchre light and processions on the gang days included the use of a large cross.⁸⁶ Perhaps the retention of these elements marked a form of compromise between gospellers and conservatives.

For some inhabitants of the town, however, there could be no compromise. Leading the opposition to the reformers were the brothers, John and Walter Clerke. Both men when they drew up their wills bequeathed their souls in traditional fashion to 'almighty god and to his blessed mother seynt marye the virgin and to all thangells and archangells in heaven'. Both had led the opposition to Thomas Rose in the early 1530s and Walter Clerk, as bailiff of the town at Shaxton's arrest, had confiscated all of Shaxton's goods until ordered by the privy council to restore them.⁸⁷ Both men were clothiers of wealth and standing, feuding endemically with the reform-minded gentleman, William Forth, who had acquired Butley Abbey. And both men combined forces with the Ipswich lawyer and magistrate, William Foster, to bring in the parson of Aldham to say mass in Hadleigh church during the Easter celebrations in 1554,

⁸³ ERO D/ABW 3/135.

⁸⁴ PRO PCC 20 Bucke.

⁸⁵ Hadleigh 21/1, fos. 3v–8v; V. B. Redstone, 'Hadleigh guild accounts', *East Anglian Miscellany* (1925), pp. 44, 46, 50, 62.

⁸⁶ Hadleigh 21/1, fo. 8r.

⁸⁷ For their wills: PRO PCC 3 More; PCC 3 Kechyn; *Letters and papers*, XXI, pt i, no. 1332.

the subsequent and predictable confrontation proving the cause of Taylor's arrest. No doubt these men were much in Taylor's mind when, in his annotations on the subject of '*Frater*', he wrote, 'the merchant and cloyther agreis ut *Pilatus et Herodes contra veritatem pro radice malorum*'.⁸⁸

There were others. Henry Constable and John Ellice, both husbandmen, employed traditional phraseology in their wills even though their scrivener was none other than Taylor's curate, Richard Yeoman. Peter Soyce, one of the men who heaped faggots around the stake to burn Taylor was a servant of the conservative John Clerke. Robert King, whom Foxe identified as a 'deviser of interludes', also helped build up the fire and was still living in Hadleigh as a tallow chandler twenty-one years later. And one would wish to know more of the position of Henry Doyle, the conservative magistrate of Pond Hall who took such an interest in borough affairs, or the stance of another gentleman, Thomas Tilney, whose contribution to the sealing of the steeple of neighbouring Shelley church was curtly dismissed by Taylor as '*pro forma tantum*', for the mere sake of appearances. Such details are but the smallest glimpse of a maelstrom of relationships, motivations, prejudices, and opinions that was swirling with force through the town.⁸⁹

Taylor's death marked the opening of the bitterest time in the town. The day following his execution, his successor, John Nowell, preached a sermon in which he tried to limit the effect of Taylor's example, arguing that Taylor had taught erroneously and died out of 'stubbornness'.⁹⁰ Nowell proceeded to initiate a severe policy against Protestants. A literate young shearman, John Alcock, who used to read the service in English before Nowell came to reside in Hadleigh, was spotted for failing to doff his cap as the rector processed to the altar. Alcock was arrested and imprisoned in Newgate where he died. A forty-six-year-old weaver, John Dale, who allegedly shouted out in the middle of a service of mass, 'O miserable and blind guides, will ye ever be blind leaders of the blind? will ye never amend? will ye never see the truth of God's word? will neither God's threats nor promises enter your hearts? will the blood of martyrs nothing mollify you', was also apprehended. His zeal cost him his life, dying

⁸⁸ MacCulloch, *Suffolk and the Tudors*, p. 171. Forth's will is 'neutral' (PRO PCC 7 Mellershe), but his children were given 'godly' names, such as Philologus and Israel. For his ownership of Butley Abbey, see *Letters and papers*, xix, pt i, no. 812(17). His feuding with the Clerkes can be traced in Star Chamber cases: PRO STAC 2 19/109; STAC 10/16/212, 224.

⁸⁹ For Constable and Ellice: ERO D/ABW 8/183, D/ABW 13/38. For Soyce: Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, and PRO STAC 2 19/109. For King: *Acts and monuments* (1563, 1570, 1576, 1583) and PRO REQ 2/75/25. The information about King changed from edition to edition and casts light on the continued ill feeling in Hadleigh surrounding the execution of Taylor. In 1570, Foxe described him as 'one Robert Kyng, who yet to this day playing the vice in Stage playes and Enterludes, ceaseth not to be a common rayler, God graunt him an hart to repent that is past and a tounge to play the part of a good Christian an other while' (p. 1703). By 1583, Foxe stated that King 'was there present and had doying there with the gunpowder, what he meant and did therein (he himself sayth he did it for the best, and for quick dispatch) the Lord knoweth which shal judge al, more of this I have not to say' (p. 1527). I am grateful to Dr Tom Freeman for clarifying this matter with me.

⁹⁰ Strype, *Memorials of Cranmer*, I, pp. 604–6.

in prison in Bury. Richard Yeoman, Taylor's curate, although seventy years of age, fled first to Kent where he sold 'laces, pins and points' and eventually returned to Hadleigh, where his wife kept him secretly in a room in the guildhall. Her secret was eventually discovered and he was arrested and imprisoned first in Bury and later in Norwich where, in 1558, he was burnt at the stake. It is noteworthy that at least three Hadleigh families, all weavers, sought refuge on the continent, staying in the town of Aarau in Switzerland.⁹¹ It was perhaps through these folk that Foxe first received his account of the town which he concluded on the following sober note:

Thus see you what lamentable estate the churche of Hadley was in after the death of D. Taylour: many through weakeness and infirmitie fell to the Poperie; and suche as were more perfect, lyved in great feare and sorowe of hart. Some fled the towne; and wandred from place to place. And some fled beyond the seas, leving all that ever they had to God, and committing them selves rather to banishment and povertie, then they would against their conscience do any thynge that should displeas God, or in any point sound against his holy worde.⁹²

It is not insignificant that Foxe chose to eliminate this depressing conclusion from subsequent editions of his work. It appeared only in the first edition of 1563.

Perhaps it was the experience of this unhappy time that pushed Hadleigh into a state of quiescence. Like a child once burnt and twice shy, religiously, Elizabethan Hadleigh seemed in a state of arrested development. There is much here that remains obscure. It is not known, for example, whether those Protestants who fled Hadleigh during Mary's reign returned there under Elizabeth. What is striking, however, is the extent to which Hadleigh fails to conform to the pattern of the Elizabethan godly town. Unlike so many other towns in Suffolk, it never developed those aspects of urban religious life associated with full blooded English Calvinism. It was a centre neither for prophesyings nor for combination lectures. It had no discernible radical edge, with few or no supporters for the illicit Presbyterian movement or the more radical Brownist cause. It developed no reputation for puritanism, nor did it establish a town preacher. It retained mid-Tudor elements that would have been unthinkable in more 'godly' locations, such as Whitsun plays which were performed until stopped by an order of the privy council in 1597.⁹³ Its quiescence is the more remarkable given its situation within the compass of the godly communities found in Dedham, East Bergholt, Boxford, Bildeston, and Ipswich.⁹⁴ The inhabitants seem to have concentrated their efforts upon their

⁹¹ The stories of John Alcock, John Dale, and Richard Yeoman are all found in Foxe, *Acts and monuments*, ed. Cattle, viii, pp. 486–90, 731–6. Those who sought refuge in Aarau were: William Betts and his wife, William Cheston and his wife, Richard Cook and his wife, Margery, who was an extremely well-connected and important informant for Foxe, and a physician called Playsto. Maud Facon, another exile who married Thomas Bentham, also came from Hadleigh. Garrett, *The Marian exiles, sub nomine*. ⁹² Foxe, *Acts and monuments* (1563), p. 1663.

⁹³ *Acts of the privy council*, xxvii, p. 97.

⁹⁴ P. Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan movement* (London, 1967), pp. 222–39.

grammar school, controlling disorder, and an elaborate and precocious system of poor relief.⁹⁵ It is curious that of the thirty-two testaments to have survived from 1561 to 1600, only one made provision for preachers and preaching, and that was for the preachers of the Dedham Classis. When the same testator, in 1586, bequeathed a copy of ‘the booke of Acts and Monuments of the church of God collected by Mr Foxe’ to the church of Hadleigh, ‘there to remain forever’, did he mean the bequest as a rebuke?⁹⁶ The only scrap of information on preaching in Elizabethan Hadleigh is negative: a censure by the puritan ministers of the Dedham conference of an ‘ungodly sermon preached by the vicar of Hadleigh defacing the men of Antwerp’.⁹⁷ Did this represent a more fundamental parting of the ways between Hadleigh and Dedham than the feelings engendered by their economic rivalry or the clerical critique of clothiers’ practices? And why was it that so many of the later eminent sons of Hadleigh, such as Joseph Beaumont, John Overall, John Bois, William Fuller, and Lawrence Bretton developed such anti-Calvinist stances?⁹⁸ The influence of John Still, the amiable and enigmatic rector of Hadleigh from 1571 to 1592, who also served successively as master of St John’s and Trinity Colleges, Cambridge, and later as the bishop of Bath and Wells, must have been considerable, but the key to Hadleigh’s Elizabethan character perhaps lies most with the minds of those clothiers who were capable of remembering and caring about the daughters of Nicholas Shaxton’s brief marriage forty-five years after its unhappy dissolution.⁹⁹ Had those same minds wearied of reform

⁹⁵ Hadleigh 4/1, fos. 91, 114, 122, 138, 249; Hadleigh Box 11/A3; Hadleigh Loose Accounts 21/1–21/27. See M. K. McIntosh, ‘Networks of care in Elizabethan English towns: the example of Hadleigh, Suffolk’, in *The locus of care*, ed. P. Horden and R. S. Smith (London, 1997), pp. 71–89.

⁹⁶ PRO PCC 1 Spencer. The sole testator was the clothier and former churchwarden, Julian Beaumonde, in 1586. His brother-in-law was Dr Crick to whom he left £20. He also bequeathed £5 each to Dr Chapman, ‘preacher of the church of Dedham’, and Mr John Holden, ‘preacher of the church of Billesdon’. Three years after he gave Foxe’s *Acts and monuments*, the churchwardens spent 3s 4d for ‘coveringe the booke of Martyrs and the paraphrase of Erasmus’. Hadleigh 21/16. fo. 4.

⁹⁷ Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan movement*, p. 227.

⁹⁸ Joseph Beaumont (1616–99), master of Peterhouse, was born in Hadleigh and studied at the grammar school. William Fuller (1580?–1659) was the son of Andrew Fuller, clothier of Hadleigh. Lawrence Bretton went from Hadleigh to Queens’ College, Cambridge, and was ejected in 1643; John Overall (1560–1619), regius professor of divinity at Cambridge, was born and educated in Hadleigh. Both Overall and the Hadleigh cloth family of John Hayward were patrons to the youthful John Cosin. Two cases that need qualification are those of John Bois, one of the translators of the Authorized Version (1560–1643) who went to school in Hadleigh. Whilst at Cambridge, he voted against Whittaker but this was ‘to his later grief’ as he confessed. The strange case of William Alabaster (1567–1640), son of a Hadleigh clothier who converted to Catholicism and then reconverted to Protestantism defies classification. For more on the religious stances of Alabaster, Beaumont, Bois, Cosin, Fuller, and Overall, see *D.N.B.*, *sub nomine*, and N. Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists* (Oxford, 1987), *passim*.

⁹⁹ Shaxton had put away his wife in the aftermath of his recantation in 1546. See his pathetic poem to his wife printed in Crowley’s tract, *Confutation of xiii articles*, which begins ‘Receyve this little ingredience, agaynst the grieffe of incontinence.’ Thomas Alabaster the elder, a wealthy clothier and former servant of Shaxton’s, when he drew up his will in 1591 left £5 each to ‘Elizabeth Shaxton, now wife of Robert Mockett of Thowbye, Kent’ and to ‘Mary Shaxton, now

in part because they could not forget the tumultuous events of three decades in which the religious issues loomed large and became quite literally the burning issues of the day? If this is right, then Elizabethan Hadleigh, akin to the classic account of the religious experience of a triangle of settlements in New York state in the nineteenth century, had become, in the apt terms of its title, a ‘burned over district’.¹⁰⁰

the wife of Robert Carr of London, grocer’ plus 40s to each of their children. PRO PCC 51 Harrington.

¹⁰⁰ W. Cross, *The burned-over district: the social and intellectual history of enthusiastic religion in western New York, 1800–1850* (Ithaca, NY, 1950).