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The harassment of Isaac Allen: puritanism, parochial politics and Prestwich's troubles during the first English civil war*

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Abstract

This article traces the politics surrounding the ejection of Isaac Allen as rector of Prestwich in Lancashire during the mid sixteen-forties. The political crises of the late sixteen-thirties and the early sixteen-forties, combined with local difficulties, led to strained relations between Allen, a 'moderate' puritan, and some lay puritans within the parish. During the first English civil war, these opponents attempted to secure the rector's removal on the basis of accusations of royalist allegiance. The article examines Allen's reactions to these allegations, as he portrayed himself as a clergyman who craved peace and order.

Puritanism has long been seen as one of the driving forces as England headed towards civil war in the early sixteen-forties, as religious conviction prompted individuals to support parliament in their armed opposition to King Charles I.¹ Yet, many puritans did not make an inevitable journey into parliamentarianism in 1642, but rather, the puritan body (itself far from homogeneous) fractured. This article investigates the case of Isaac Allen, during this troubled period the rector of Prestwich, situated to the north of Manchester in south-eastern Lancashire. A 'moderate' puritan who had his own record of clerical nonconformity during the sixteen-twenties and the early sixteen-thirties, this religious viewpoint was one which he shared with a significant number of his parishioners. However, by 1642 this mutual outlook had been shattered, and during the first civil war (1642–6) several of these parishioners joined parliamentarian forces, while Allen made his own tentative journey into royalism, resulting in his ultimately losing his living.²

In its narrowest sense, 'puritanism' essentially means those who wanted the Church of England to be further reformed, purging it of the popish ceremonies which had survived the sixteenth-century reformations.³ Roger Richardson and Christopher

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¹ Such a view is implicit in, e.g., N. Tyacke, 'The puritan paradigm of English politics, 1558–1642', *Historical Jour.*, liii (2010), 527–50.

² Isaac Allen's case is outlined in A. G. Matthews, *Walker Revised: Being a Revision of John Walker's 'Sufferings of the Clergy during the Grand Rebellion' 1642–60* (Oxford, 1948), p. 228.

³ J. Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603–89* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 29–34.

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Haigh showed for the Elizabethan period how this puritanism took root in the south-eastern corner of Lancashire. Trade links with the south, and particularly with London, combined with an influx of Calvinist ministers recently graduated from Oxford and Cambridge universities, enabled reformed protestant ideas to attract support from those working in the proto-industrial manufacture of cloth, in contrast to the lack of support which such ideas received in remoter parts of the county.⁴

While Richardson and Haigh demonstrated the extent to which puritanism gained support among the populace of south-eastern Lancashire during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, the work of Patrick Collinson transformed historians' understanding of puritans and puritanism. He showed that while the godly may have opposed the use of the sign of the cross at baptism and kneeling to receive communion as popish, and may have gathered together to repeat sermons, to see puritans as committed members of the Church of England rather than as semi-separatists gives a much more accurate impression of the phenomenon. All but the most extreme puritans attended the services appointed by law, and puritan activities such as the founding of lectureships served to supplement the work of the Church of England rather than to challenge it per se. Many puritans remained within the Church of England alongside the ungodly and the reprobate, and supplemented their spirituality via private meetings with like-minded parishioners or with their minister, who, in the face of widespread ungodliness, may well have become allied with the puritans within his congregation. Collinson has also argued that many puritans were deeply concerned about the upholding of order, with the institution of godly living within communities being essential for making humanity pleasing unto God.⁵

Building upon Collinson's work, Peter Lake developed the idea of 'moderate puritans', that is, those who may have liked to have seen the Church purged of popish ceremonies, and who may have attended supplementary meetings and sermons in other churches as well as the required services in their own parish, but who nevertheless remained fundamentally committed to the Church of England. These moderate puritans may not have conformed entirely to the practices required of them by statutes and ecclesiastical canons, but they were often able to present themselves as 'the evangelically zealous and active, the genuinely protestant and therefore genuinely politically loyal, face of the English church'.⁶ Within south-eastern Lancashire, where puritanism was well embedded among many clerics and laity by the time of James I's death in 1625, it is quite possible that many parishioners had never experienced the Prayer Book being read unmodified, and were familiar with ministers not wearing the surplice. In this context, the 'Laudian' drive for full ceremonial conformity in worship during the sixteen-thirties, under the archiepiscopates of William Laud and Richard Neile at Canterbury and York respectively, coupled with the innovatory insistence that the communion table be railed at the east end of churches, and communion received

⁴ R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-West England: a Regional Study of the Diocese of Chester to 1642* (Manchester, 1972), ch. 1; C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), ch. 18.

⁵ A sampling of Collinson's views on puritanism can be obtained via his *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559–1625* (Oxford, 1982); *English Puritanism* (1983); 'The godly: aspects of popular Protestantism', in *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism*, ed. P. Collinson (1983), pp. 1–18; and *The Birthpangs of Protestant England: Religious and Cultural Change in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Basingstoke, 1988).

⁶ P. Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy', and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Manchester, 2001), pp. 12–13. See also P. Lake, 'Defining puritanism – again?', in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a 17th-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. F. J. Bremer (Boston, Mass., 1993), pp. 3–29.

kneeling at the altar rail, may well have seemed to represent more of a lurch towards popery there (where people knew all too well about Catholics living in their midst) than was perhaps the case in areas with a longer tradition of ceremonial conformity, or where religious divisions between protestants and Catholics were less apparent.⁷

The implementation of Laudian ideas within English parishes has often been seen as having caused tensions within local communities.⁸ There is little evidence, though, that Laudianism directly prompted antagonisms within the puritan community in Prestwich, or even within the wider parish body. While the evidence does not survive to indicate whether Prestwich parish church and its chapels at Ringley, Oldham and Shaw ultimately conformed to the drive for railed altars, certainly Isaac Allen never faced accusations of ceremonialism, and indeed, in 1632, the puritan benefactor Nathan Walworth held high hopes of his appointment as rector, perhaps based upon Allen's ministry in the parish over the previous decade. He did pursue an ill-advised tithing suit in 1639 which put him at odds with some of the leading godly within the parish, and which could, to the vengeful eye, have tainted him with the pursuit of clerical rights often associated with Laudianism.⁹ He was also at odds with the godly over his support for the war in Scotland in 1639. Nonetheless, it is noticeable that no accusations against Allen pre-dated the mobilizations leading towards civil war in 1642.¹⁰

The years of the English civil wars and republic were tumultuous ones in which to be a clergyman. Ian Green has estimated that in England during the sixteen-forties and sixteen-fifties, 2,780 clergymen suffered some form of ejection or other harassment.¹¹ Allen may well have joined the ranks of the numerous clerics about whose experiences little or nothing is known were it not for the survival of a remarkable series of documents preserved in the Bodleian Library at Oxford, and in The National Archives at Kew. In contrast to Allen, many of his fellow ejected ministers during the sixteen-forties were accused of scandalous behaviour, or of enthusiasm for Laudian ceremonialism.¹² Regardless of whether or not these allegations contained any truth, the first civil war undoubtedly provided the occasion for those who had experienced difficulties with their minister to capitalize upon parliament's fears about the continuation of royalist ministers in their livings, propagating and sustaining such views among their parishioners. Formal mechanisms for the prosecution of such ministers, coupled with parliament's military success as it gradually gained control of most of England during the course of the first civil war, gave parishioners the opportunity to seek retribution under the auspices of godly reformation. With such a forum available to them, hostile parishioners could construct their minister's alleged royalist allegiance for the benefit of the authorities. But, as will be argued here, these constructions were often born as much out of their own parliamentary allegiances and tensions within

⁷ K. Fincham, 'Clerical conformity from Whitgift to Laud', in *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c.1560–1640*, ed. P. Lake and M. Questier (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 146–51.

⁸ See, e.g., D. C. Beaver, *Parish Communities and Religious Conflict in the Vale of Gloucester 1590–1690* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998), ch. 5.

⁹ A. Foster, 'The clerical estate revitalised', in *The Early Stuart Church, 1603–42*, ed. K. Fincham (Basingstoke, 1993), 139–60, at pp. 151–2.

¹⁰ Contrast this with the accusations which pre-date the outbreak of civil war in 1642 made against many ministers in Suffolk (see *The Suffolk Committee for Scandalous Ministers 1644–6*, ed. C. Holmes (Suffolk Records Soc., xiii, 1970), *passim*).

¹¹ I. M. Green, 'The persecution of "scandalous" and "malignant" parish clergy during the English civil war', *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, xciv (1979), 507–31, at p. 508.

¹² Holmes, pp. 18–19.

the parish as out of any definitively royalist actions undertaken by the cleric of his own free will. Allen, as we shall see, consistently highlighted his role as a peacemaker, forced into active royalism under duress rather than out of conviction.

John Walker's account of Isaac Allen's life shares characteristics with many of his fellow sufferers' lives: his imprisonment at Manchester, the partial demolition of Allen's house at Prestwich by 'the Rebels', and the subsequent time spent ministering at the small chapelry of Ripponden in Yorkshire – quite a fall from grace given that Walker claimed the rectory of Prestwich was worth £400 per annum. Allen did secure his restoration c.1656, returning, as Walker recorded, 'to the Great Satisfaction of his Parishioners', though he did not quite live to see the monarchy restored.¹³ Richard Wroe, the warden of Manchester collegiate church who in 1715 had sent to Walker the papers concerning Allen that are now preserved in the Bodleian Library, agreed with Walker's judgement, telling him that 'I remember him restored to his Parish, to the great joy & satisfaction of all good people there about'.¹⁴ Yet, a brief review of the depositions against Allen dating first from 1643, and then from 1645, reveals a cohort of parishioners who had turned against their rector, and even more tellingly, the 1645 depositions illustrate a parish which had become divided in its attitudes towards him. Recovering the politics of this division within the parish will be at the heart of this article.

Allen was an outsider to the parish, being baptized at Sheldon in Warwickshire on 4 May 1595.¹⁵ He graduated as M.A. from Oriel College, Oxford, in November 1618, having completed his B.A. degree at Queen's College in February 1616.¹⁶ In 1622, he was described in Bishop John Bridgeman's ledger of contributions for the recovery of the palatinate as being a 'lecturer' at Oldham.¹⁷ In the same year, he married Anne Ashton, a member of a prominent local family residing at Chadderton, within Prestwich parish.¹⁸ At the diocesan visitation in October 1625, it was reported that the minister at Oldham, unnamed but presumably Allen, 'doth not usually were the surplesse'.¹⁹ In August 1632, following the death of the rector of Prestwich, John Langley, Allen was instituted as his successor on the presentation of the patron of

¹³ J. Walker, *An Attempt towards recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England, Heads of Colleges, Fellows, Scholars, & c. who were Sequester'd, Harrass'd, & c. in the late Times of the Grand Rebellion* (2 vols., 1714), ii. 183–4. The 1650 church survey valued the profits of Prestwich rectory at £120 p.a., and of Oldham rectory at £140 p.a. (see *Lancashire and Cheshire Commonwealth Church Surveys*, ed. H. Fishwick (Record Soc. for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, 1, 1879), pp. 15, 22). Allen's restoration, and his burial at Prestwich church (2 Feb. 1660), are noted in Matthews, p. 228.

¹⁴ Bodleian Library, MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 290r.

¹⁵ *The Clergy of the Church of England Database 1540–1835* <<http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk>> (hereafter C.C.Ed.), person I.D. 22746 [accessed 29 March 2012]; *Warwickshire, England: Baptisms, Marriages, and Burials, 1535–1812* <<http://www.ancestry.com>> [accessed 29 March 2012].

¹⁶ *Alumni Oxonienses: the Members of the University of Oxford, 1500–1714*, ed. J. Foster (4 vols., Oxford, 1891), i. 16.

¹⁷ 'Loans, contributions, subsidies, and ship money, paid by the clergy of the diocese of Chester, in the years 1620, 1622, 1624, 1634, 1635, 1636 & 1639', ed. G. T. O. Bridgeman, in *Miscellanies, relating to Lancashire and Cheshire*, i (Record Soc. for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, xii, 1885), 43–129, at p. 66.

¹⁸ *Victoria History of Lancashire*, v. 73.

¹⁹ Chester, Cheshire Record Office (hereafter C.R.O.), E. D. V. 1/26 fo. 95r. Invaluable in identifying this source, and other information contained within the diocese of Chester and the province of York's visitation records, is D. Lambert, 'The lower clergy of the Anglican Church in Lancashire, 1558–1642' (unpublished University of Liverpool M.A. dissertation, 1964), app. 3.

the living, his brother-in-law Edmund Ashton.²⁰ Allen was again in trouble for nonconformity at Archbishop Neile's metropolitical visitation in 1633, when he and his assistant, John Pollett, were presented 'for not readinge praier on the eves of Sundays and holidayes; nor catechise on holidayes; & they do omitt sometimes to weare the surplice'.²¹

The names of the incumbents of the parishes surrounding Prestwich in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries read like a roll call of godly, preaching ministers, most of whom were guilty of their fair share of ceremonial nonconformity.²² Prestwich was no different. William Langley, rector between 1569 and 1611, was forced in the summer of 1591 to recant a sermon he had previously given in Prestwich church which had questioned the monarch's prerogative in ecclesiastical matters, and he was instrumental in leading the clergy of the deanery of Manchester in their opposition to wearing the clerical surplice in 1595.²³ While Langley undoubtedly held keenly puritan views, Roger Richardson is clear that it is no coincidence that he was appointed as rector by the Ashton family of Chadderton, whom he identifies as being puritan in their religious attitudes.²⁴ Latterly, as noted above, it was Edmund Ashton who appointed Isaac Allen, a cleric with his own record of nonconformity, as rector of Prestwich. Yet, unlike his predecessor Langley, Allen's puritanism was centred upon ceremonial nonconformity rather than upon more contentious activities.

The moderation of Allen's nonconformity is further appreciated when seen within the context of some of the lay puritanism evident in the parish in the years preceding his arrival, which had become somewhat contentious during James I's reign. In 1607, four inhabitants of Oldham, Thomas Milnes, John Butterworth, Richard Taylor and Abraham Dawson, were presented before the diocese of Chester's consistory court for 'the impeaching and depraving of the doctrine of the Church of England and of the booke of comon praier'. They were also accused of refusing to attend Prayer Book services at Oldham church, of expounding the scriptures to their own interpretation, and of not kneeling to receive communion at the churches of Oldham and Rochdale, 'to the great danger of your owne soules and evill example of others'.²⁵ In 1612, in addition to being accused of not kneeling to receive communion, George Seddon and Henry Seddon, both of Prestwich, were accused of attending Deane church on Sundays and festival days, where they read sermons from their pews, without lawful admission to the ministry.²⁶

Prior to these prosecutions, the parish had witnessed in 1605 the earliest reported instance of lay puritan nonconformity in the diocese of Chester, when 'the inhabitantes within Oldham' were presented before the visitation for not receiving 'the communion kneelinge'.²⁷ The curate of Oldham, Thomas Hunt, was presented at the 1608 visitation for neglecting to wear the surplice, for omitting the sign of the

²⁰ C.C.Ed., person I.D. 22746. An account of the Ashton family of Chadderton is given in *V.C.H. Lancashire*, v. 117.

²¹ York, Borthwick Institute of Historical Research (hereafter B.I.H.R.), V. 1633, court book 2, fo. 58r.

²² Lambert, app. 3.

²³ Haigh, pp. 300–1.

²⁴ Richardson, p. 127.

²⁵ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1607/54.

²⁶ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1612/43.

²⁷ C.R.O., E. D. V. 1/14 fo. 92v; Richardson, p. 76.

cross at baptism, and for not meeting corpses at the churchyard gate at funerals.²⁸ Such forms of moderate puritanism would be witnessed again at Oldham and at Prestwich itself during Isaac Allen's tenures as curate and rector respectively. This puritanism was situated within the worship of the Church of England, and while it signified conscientious scruples with aspects of the liturgy, it did not challenge the Church in the same way as separatism or the lay adoption of the ministerial function, as would be witnessed in the parish in 1607 and in 1612. While this moderate puritanism would quite feasibly have had overlaps with the more contentious nonconformity presented before the church courts from the parish, there are no apparent links between those presented in 1607 and 1612 and those who opposed Allen in the early sixteen-forties. The two Peter Seddons (father and son) would be active in opposing Allen, but there does not seem to have been any nuclear familial relationship, if there was any kin relationship at all, between them and the George and Henry Seddon presented in 1612.²⁹ As will be demonstrated later in this article, Allen and the two Peter Seddons shared a moderate puritanism based upon a commitment to the Church of England, and its basic principles of a united visible church and an ordained ministry, which was fractured during the sixteen-forties. Such moderate puritanism may have been shared by many in a parish which by the sixteen-thirties was accustomed to seeing ceremonial nonconformity in its worship, and Allen's parishioners did not report his nonconformity to the authorities, as happened elsewhere.³⁰ Moderate puritanism essentially respected the integrity, and the episcopal structure, of the Church of England. The actions of Milnes, Butterworth, Taylor and Dawson in 1607, and of George and Henry Seddon in 1612, undermined that integrity, and in many ways, represented a very different kind of puritanism.

In 1642, many puritans threw in their lot with parliament's campaign to mobilize forces to defend militarily the religious settlement of 1641, whereby parliament had given approval to local initiatives to reverse the Laudian innovations, and had curbed episcopal powers.³¹ Nevertheless, the journey from puritanism to parliamentarianism was by no means inevitable. In the absence of any accusations of scandalous behaviour or of ceremonialism in worship, it was Allen's reactions to the rival royalist and parliamentarian mobilizations which came under scrutiny when the witnesses against him were examined before five local parliamentarian gentlemen on 10 November 1643.³²

Richard Wroe, in his testimony against the rector, said that Allen had claimed the religious writers John Dod and William Perkins in support of his decision to take a position 'against that way the parliament goe in'.³³ That Allen should apparently cite these two authors as justification for his attitude towards allegiance perhaps implies what Allen's wider theological beliefs might have been. William Perkins remained, posthumously, an influential figure. He had advanced a Calvinist predestinarian view,

²⁸ C.R.O., E. D.V. 1/15 fo. 136v.

²⁹ The family tree of the two Peter Seddons is found in *The Correspondence of Nathan Walworth and Peter Seddon of Outwood*, ed. J. S. Fletcher (Chetham Soc., cix, 1880) (hereafter *Correspondence*), at pp. 106–7.

³⁰ J. Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998), ch. 2.

³¹ J. Morrill, 'The religious context of the English civil war', in *The Nature of the English Revolution*, ed. J. Morrill (Harlow, 1993), pp. 45–68, at p. 60.

³² Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279r. The date of the document is simply 10 Nov., with no year, but the chronology of events described in other testimonies points to 1643 being the year of the examinations.

³³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 282v.

which held that within the church consisting of the whole populace there were a minority who had been elected to attain salvation.³⁴ John Dod was a survivor of Elizabethan presbyterianism, who had suffered spells of suspension from the ministry for his nonconformity.³⁵ In choosing to defend his position by reference to Dod and Perkins, Allen presented himself within a written tradition holding significant appeal for those of that puritan tendency which seems to have held much sway in Prestwich in the early sixteen-forties.³⁶

Allen's reference to Dod and Perkins had come in a private conversation with Richard Wroe. John Taylor told the committeemen 'that hee never heard him [Allen] vse any meanes in his mynistry or otherwise to setle and satisfie his Congregation to what Partie to adhere in the present differences betwixt kinge & Parliament'.³⁷ Four other parishioners, Richard Ogden, Esther Wilson, John Lort and Elizabeth Gaskell, all accused Allen of having failed to instruct his parishioners in his public ministry as to whom to support in the current conflict, though Allen claimed to Gaskell that he had advised them in a sermon and in a homily, and because they had ignored his advice 'he would forbear any further to intermedle'.³⁸

The centrality to these accusations of Allen's failure to preach on the subject of allegiance is striking. Clerical sermons were important in promoting and sustaining lay allegiances during the first civil war.³⁹ Sermons were also a central part of puritan life. Some puritans travelled considerable distances to hear them, and given that the exposition of scripture by the unordained was forbidden, sermons often provided a focal point for discussion in the private gatherings which often served to mark out the godly from those who merely attended the lawfully appointed services in their local church.⁴⁰ Such was the demand for sermons that lectureships were sometimes established to supplement the preaching (or lack of preaching) available in the parish church.⁴¹ If the description of Allen being 'lecturer' at Oldham in 1622 is accurate, it could imply that part of his income derived from the desire of some people to hear him preach, rather than solely reading the approved services, which would otherwise have been the main duty of a minister officiating in a chapelry.⁴² Thus, if one of Allen's early roles in the parish had been as a lecturer funded separately from the historic clerical revenues of the parish, it may be that certain elements within the parish had been keen to support him financially in this role. When, two decades later, a cleric who had previously been esteemed for his preaching, and was now rector of the parish, was reticent about advising his parishioners on the most important issue of the day, Allen may well have proved himself to be a frustration and a disappointment to those who had once employed him specifically for his preaching talents.

³⁴ C. Hill, 'Puritans and the poor', *Past & Present*, ii (1952), 32–50, at pp. 33, 41.

³⁵ Spurr, p. 66.

³⁶ J. Morrill, 'The attack on the Church of England in the Long Parliament', in Morrill, *Nature of the English Revolution*, pp. 69–90.

³⁷ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279r.

³⁸ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fos. 279r–279v, 281v.

³⁹ J. Eales, 'Provincial preaching and allegiance in the first English civil war, 1640–6', in *Politics, Religion and Popularity in Early Modern Britain: Essays in Honour of Conrad Russell*, ed. T. Cogswell, R. Cust and P. Lake (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 185–207.

⁴⁰ Spurr, pp. 36–41.

⁴¹ P. Collinson, 'Lectures by combination: structures and characteristics of Church life in 17th-century England', in Collinson, *Godly People*, pp. 469–70.

⁴² Bridgeman, p. 66.

Yet, even if Allen was shy about making public pronouncements on the subject, he was apparently not afraid of privately discussing his views. Thomas Fletcher testified that he and other neighbours had gone to Allen for advice about the conflict, whereupon he had told them that to fight for parliament was 'absolutely vnlawfull'. Allen went on to say that Manchester should not have opposed the earl of Derby, and that when Fletcher told him 'that hee had heard the lawe was above the kinge, he [Allen] answered noe, the kinge is the lawe'. Fletcher also accused Allen of having admitted contributing £4 towards the royalist cause.⁴³ Richard Barlow's account showed Allen utilizing contemporary political theory to justify his position, the rector arguing 'that this kingdome being conquered the kinges had a monarchicalle power to governe at Pleasure, and therefore what the kinge commandes wee ought either to obey or suffer'.⁴⁴ Richard Ogden, 'a listed soldier vnder Colonell Holland', claimed 'that the said Parson in private hath severall tymes diswaded this examine from beareing Armes, and tould him that his duty was to followe his calling, and if the Enemy should come and plunder to sitt downe and suffer and not resist, or to that effect'.⁴⁵ John Taylor went even further, suggesting 'that before the seige att Manchester this examine being in the said Parsons company the said Parson expressed himselfe to be of opinion that vpon the kinges command hee might lawfully fight against Manchester'.⁴⁶ Ideas of true authority became contested during the civil war years, as the rival administrations issued opposing orders. For Allen, true authority lay with the king, and as Gerald Aylmer observed, many royalists saw the king's authority as being divinely ordained, and thus believed that the rebellion against Charles I was sinful.⁴⁷

Allen's fundamental loyalty to the king is shown in his attitude towards the Vow and Covenant. Introduced by parliament in June 1643, this oath stated explicitly that 'the Forces raised by the two Houses of Parliament, are raised and continued for their just defence, and for the defence of the true protestant religion, and Libertie of the Subject, against the Forces raised by the King'.⁴⁸ On Thursday 3 August 1643, James Wroe of Heaton, one of the churchwardens of Prestwich, visited Allen to discuss with him the publication of the Covenant. According to Wroe, Allen told him that 'he could not take it neither would hee publishe it'. Allen pointed to a clause in the Oath of Allegiance: 'vidz I will beare faith and true allegience to his Maiestie his heires and successors against all conspiracies and attempts whatsoever the said Parson said this Covenant was an attempt as hee thought against his Maiestie, and therefore he could not take it'. The following Saturday, Wroe once again visited Allen, this time accompanied by his fellow churchwarden, the elder Peter Seddon. They both urged Allen to take the Covenant, and to read it to the congregation, but he again refused.⁴⁹ In his own deposition, Seddon claimed that: 'Master Allen readeing over the said vowe and covenant, when he came to this clause vidz And whereas I doe in my conscience

⁴³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 282v. It is unclear whether this refers to the incident in July 1642 or the subsequent siege in Sept. 1642.

⁴⁴ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 281r.

⁴⁵ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279r.

⁴⁶ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279r.

⁴⁷ G. E. Aylmer, 'Collective mentalities in mid 17th-century England, ii: royalist attitudes', *Trans. Royal Hist. Soc.*, 5th ser., xxxvii (1987), 1–30, at p. 8.

⁴⁸ *A sacred Vow and Covenant taken by the Lords and Commons assembled in Parliament (1643)*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 281r.

believe that the forces raised by the two houses of Parliament are raised for theme in defence &c hee said hee did not in conscience believe this to bee true, or that effect'.⁵⁰

However, Wroe stated that Allen did read the Covenant to his congregation, and invited them to subscribe, though he told them 'that for his parte hee could not take it'.⁵¹ Seddon, meanwhile, made no reference to this reading of the Covenant in his testimony, though John Scholes backed Wroe, stating that Allen had 'publicly declared to his hearers that for his parte hee could not take it, & wished them seriously to consider of it, and to doe as god should direct them'.⁵² It was also alleged that 'Whereas there is 92 paricioners who refuse to take the vowe & covenant enioyed by the Parliament It is certainly knowne that many of those have often conversed with him [Allen], and beene resolved by him, and doe all depend much vpon his Iudgment as wee conceave'.⁵³ This numerical claim comes from what appears to be the list of charges against Allen, similar to those levelled against ministers in Suffolk during the first civil war.⁵⁴ Peter Seddon and John Gaskell are named as the witnesses to this charge, but Gaskell's evidence appears to be lost (though a deposition from his wife Elizabeth survives) and Seddon's testimony does not give the figure of ninety-two non-subscribers within the parish.

The composition of the ninety-two non-subscribers to the Vow and Covenant is a tantalizing mystery, and suggests that a significant minority of parishioners, like Allen, had doubts about the oath. Active royalists, of whom there were some within the parish, may have been among the non-subscribers.⁵⁵ John Scholes certainly believed that he had witnessed Allen's royalist credentials. He claimed that on 16 July 1642, the day after James Stanley, Lord Strange (the future seventh earl of Derby) had been forced to flee Manchester following an altercation with a group of inhabitants, 'Master Allen sent a man with a muskett to Ordesall neere Manchester, where the said Earle then was'.⁵⁶ Similarly, Richard Lomax of Bury, the parish adjacent to Prestwich, testified that Allen and Peter Travers, the rector of Bury, had jointly 'hyered' a horse which was used by Strange's forces when besieging Manchester in September 1642.⁵⁷

This group of accusations highlights various outward actions Allen took, or failed to take, which to these parishioners (and a non-parishioner) suggested that he supported the royalist cause. He avoided giving them advice in public, which, if true, and if he was genuinely sympathetic towards the royalist cause, was perhaps an understandable decision given the popular parliamentarianism evident in Salford hundred.⁵⁸ When he spoke to them in private, he attempted to dissuade them from fighting against the king. He had also apparently refused to make a statement of support for parliament by taking the Vow and Covenant, though Richard Whittacre, the parish clerk of Oldham, contradicts some of the other depositions by claiming that after the Solemn League and Covenant had been issued later in 1643, Allen had refused to take it, 'for hee had

⁵⁰ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 281r.

⁵¹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 281v.

⁵² Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 282r.

⁵³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 283r.

⁵⁴ Holmes, *passim*.

⁵⁵ J. M. Gratton, *The Parliamentarian and Royalist War Effort in Lancashire 1642–51* (Chetham Soc., 3rd ser., xlviii, 2010), pp. 163–4.

⁵⁶ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 282r; S. Bull, 'A General Plague of Madness': the Civil Wars in Lancashire 1640–60 (Lancaster, 2009), pp. 88–90.

⁵⁷ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 282r.

⁵⁸ Gratton, pp. 163–4.

taken the oathe of Allegiance and the oathe of Supremacie & the first Covenant, And a three fould cord was not easily broken'.⁵⁹ Aside from whether or not Allen had sworn to the Vow and Covenant (and it seems odd that one deponent should claim that Allen had spoken of taking the oath while others claimed that he had refused to take it), there were also suggestions that he had made practical contributions towards the royalist cause. Yet, it must be remembered that these testimonies came from a group of parishioners who had once shared Allen's moderate puritanism. Though they and Allen had reacted differently towards the civil war, following different paths of allegiance, evident within Allen's alleged actions was a concern about order, a concern which, while not exclusive to puritans, could nevertheless be symbolic of an individual's protestant zeal.⁶⁰

Isaac Allen's defence against these accusations survives, and provides a remarkable testimony as to how he perceived his duties as a parish minister, but also about the evidently strained relationship which he now had with his accusers, and his regrets about how those relationships had brought him into trouble. In his own words, 'his principall care, was to instruct his hearers in those maine & necessary thinges, vizt, repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, & such like'.⁶¹ He believed that he could call upon 'all his constant hearers (of which the Informers are none)' in his defence, and that he had 'frequentlie inculcated, within the tyme articulate, vnto them, the performance of every dewty, as to God soe to men, & especially to their superiors'.⁶² To Allen, it was no coincidence that not only did his accusers absent themselves from church, but they also included 'simple & ignorant persons'.⁶³ Notwithstanding his opinion, an interrogation of the evidence reveals a more complex picture.

Allen portrayed his accusers as an isolated minority within the parish. It was reported that:

this Respondent further saith, that the Parish of Prestwich is a spaciously & large parish, & that there are about three hundred families therein, & he well hopeth that the Informacion of a few persons, ill affected to this Respondent, who haue threatened to oute this Respondent of his place shall not be received for such purpose against him.⁶⁴

He also tackled his accusers individually. Esther Wilson, John Scholes, Thomas Fletcher, Peter Seddon, James Wroe and John Gaskell were all accused of not paying their tithes since the conflict had begun. Richard Ogden, John Lort, Richard Barlow and Thomas Fletcher were 'men of meane capacitye & condicion . . . who are websters & some of them can not write their owne names, & therefore could not so well vnderstande or know what this Respondente meant in some of his speeches'.⁶⁵ He regretted that 'this Respondent might happily speake some thinges by waye of discourse & argument which they could not well vnderstand, much lesse remember to relate after a yeares

⁵⁹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 281v.

⁶⁰ Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 149–53; P. Lake, 'Puritan identities', *Jour. Eccles. Hist.*, xxxv (1984), 112–23, at p. 115.

⁶¹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277v.

⁶² Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277r.

⁶³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 278r.

⁶⁴ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277v.

⁶⁵ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277v.

tyme'.⁶⁶ The churchwarden James Wroe came in for particular criticism. As 'one of the better parte & esteemed amongst the examimates', he 'hath made so loose & senselesse articulation of the clause in the Oath of Allegiance by him mentioned, whene as without doubt, he hath often heard & might haue seene the same to be otherwyse then he hath expressed'.⁶⁷ Eight of Allen's accusers were rebuked by him for untruths or irregularities in their depositions, and he denied specific points in some of the depositions, such as Thomas Fletcher's claim that Allen had told him that 'the King is the lawe', and Richard Barlow's testimony that Allen 'thought that the parliament would gett it as Jacob gott the blessing from Esau'.⁶⁸

If we are to believe Allen's account, he expressed forthright opinions on the deepest domestic political crisis for many years to parishioners who neither attended church nor were capable of fully understanding their conversations with him. In contrast, 'he hath had little converse or acquaintance with many of those that did not take' the Vow and Covenant, but nonetheless, 'he doth indifferently converse with all good men of this parish as occasion is offered, whether they be such as haue taken or not taken the vowe & covenant'.⁶⁹ So, Allen apparently had few discussions with those who did not take the Vow and Covenant, but seems to have been happy to discuss politics with 'all good men of this parish', several of whom were now attempting to secure his ejection from his rectory. The plot thickens when one considers that Esther Wilson reported that when Colonel Holland's troops were training for the parliamentary cause at Heaton, in Prestwich parish, she went to Allen to borrow a musket from him 'for her man to trayne with'.⁷⁰ Although Allen corrected Wilson's account, claiming that it was her son James who had borrowed a musket, the fact remains that when the Wilson family desperately needed a musket, they went to Allen.⁷¹ This action implies some kind of personal relationship between Allen and the Wilson family beyond what one may think to be typical for a relationship between a minister and his parishioners.

The depositions against Allen, and his defence statement, reveal much about this relationship. When Allen was present in Manchester during the incident there on 15 July 1642, his attempts towards 'accommodacion' were emblematic both of a puritan concern for order and of a minister's duty to promote peace.⁷² Lord Strange had, in Allen's view, been invited to the town 'in friendly manner', and he himself 'was lykewyse invited by some of the Towne'. Allen continued, that:

this Respondent was the more willing so to doe, because some difference had formerly bene betwixt the Lord Strange and the Towne, And this Respondent being a neighbour to the said Towne was hopefull that some good accommodacion & agreement might be had & made betweene them, whereof this Respondent should haue bene right gladd.⁷³

While Strange had been implementing Charles I's commission of array for much of the previous month, and Manchester had been secured to defend itself against any force raised in response to the commission, Allen may well have genuinely had hopes

⁶⁶ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 278r.

⁶⁷ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 278r.

⁶⁸ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277v.

⁶⁹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277r.

⁷⁰ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279v.

⁷¹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 278r.

⁷² Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, pp. 149–53; J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 66.

⁷³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277r.

that some sort of accommodation could be reached.⁷⁴ It was not as if there was no potential common ground. Manchester was renowned for being a somewhat puritan town, and while Strange was not popular there in July 1642, barely five months previously, on 5 February 1642, he had voted in favour of the exclusion of the bishops from the house of lords.⁷⁵ Indeed, in his defence Allen quoted from the *Twenty Considerations*, an anonymous pamphlet published in the aftermath of Sir John Hotham's refusal to allow Charles entry into Hull in April 1642. The author takes the view that it was a 'malignant party' which was attempting to sow discord between the king and the parliament, and in several places praises the good which the latter has achieved, such as 'taking away all offensive and superstitious innovations'.⁷⁶ The author fears that the discord is the creation of papists, who, having seen the progress made by parliament in reforming the Church, have combined with an alliance of dependants of the king's court and debauched 'Cavalier' gentlemen to destabilize the state.⁷⁷ The author's solution to this quandary is quoted verbatim by Allen in his defence:

Let every one in his station studie peace & vnion & endeavoure all meanes of pacification, abhorring the verie thought of ever takeing vp Armes against either King or Parliament, but to the vttermost of our powers setting our selves against the Incendiaries betweene them both, that the peace of God & the God of peace may still rule in the midst of vs.⁷⁸

In quoting this author, Allen placed himself in a particular narrative of the conflict: the discord was being stoked by a 'malignant' third party, and it was his duty to avoid being sucked into this plot, and instead to defeat it by labouring for an accommodation between the king and parliament. This kind of attitude may well explain why Allen was present in Manchester on 15 July 1642. Peter Lake has seen the conflict between king and parliament as being viewed by contemporaries in terms of 'popery' versus 'populist Puritanism'.⁷⁹ The *Twenty Considerations* was resolute in its blaming of popery for the crisis. The line it took was heavily critical of the direction in which the Church of England had been taken in the previous decade, decrying the 'superstitious innovations' and the suppression of preaching as evidence of a popish plot.⁸⁰ According to such a reading, the stoking of discord between protestants was part of a popish plot which had to be stopped.⁸¹ Allen, therefore, was not simply a lover of peace and stability, but for him, the securing of peace was imperative if England was to be prevented from meeting a fate far worse than civil war; and even late in 1643, he obviously felt that the image of an indifferent peacemaker still held some currency.⁸²

However, whatever Allen's intentions when he travelled to Manchester that day, in the light of later events, his presence there was open to unfavourable interpretations. His accusers were also prepared to seize on his contributions towards the royalist cause, which seem to have had hints of involuntariness about them. Bartholomew Stones of Bury testified that he had gone with the 'man' of Peter Travers, the rector of Bury, to

⁷⁴ Bull, pp. 86–8.

⁷⁵ Richardson, pp. 8–13; A. Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (1985), p. 243, also app.

⁷⁶ *Some more new Observations concerning the King and Parliament: being Twenty Considerations of the dangerous estate the Kingdome now standeth in by reason of a MALIGNANT Party* (1642) (hereafter *Twenty Considerations*), p. 2.

⁷⁷ *Twenty Considerations*, pp. 6–7.

⁷⁸ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277r; *Twenty Considerations*, p. 7.

⁷⁹ P. Lake, 'Anti-popery: the structure of a prejudice', in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Essays in Religion and Politics 1603–42*, ed. R. Cust and A. Hughes (Harlow, 1989), 72–106, at p. 97.

⁸⁰ *Twenty Considerations*, p. 6.

⁸¹ *Twenty Considerations*, pp. 7–8.

⁸² The author owes this point to Anthony Milton.

collect money from Allen towards a horse for the king's service, to which Allen gave 'some pound', but warned Stones that he had been informed that the clergy were exempt from the commission of array.⁸³ While Allen was never accused of having preached in favour of the royalist cause, which would perhaps have implied at least some enthusiasm for it, a certificate of protection signed by the earl of Derby, dated 10 June 1643, with the earl requesting that 'his maiesties friends . . . use him [Allen] as a true and faithfull subiect', suggests that Allen had been the victim of some harassment by royalists, and had perhaps been forced into making contributions.⁸⁴

Allen clearly had a strained relationship with his opponents within the parish. He tried to portray them as being members of the lower orders, possessing little understanding of their conversations with him, and as absentees from church. The reality is much more complicated. Peter Seddon and James Wroe, as churchwardens, were of some status within the parish, and this seems to form the basis of Allen's evident disappointment with the latter.⁸⁵ As will be shown later in this article, Esther Wilson was a member of an important family within the parish. Several of his accusers were of relatively low status, but as for his allegation that they absented themselves from church, no fewer than four of them, in their depositions, explicitly highlighted their regular attendance at Allen's services, and additionally, Elizabeth Gaskell claimed to have confronted him about his failure publicly to advise his parishioners about the conflict.⁸⁶ Several of his accusers seem to have known Allen well enough to speak with him privately. The picture which the historian gathers is a somewhat confused one, made murkier by the often contradictory evidence presented.

Isaac Allen's defence was a spirited fight against the accusations of a group whom he depicted as being unrepresentative of his parishioners as a whole. Remarkably, though no judgement survives for this case, it seems that on this occasion, Allen was acquitted. When he came under scrutiny again in 1645, Richard Heyrick, the warden of Manchester collegiate church, giving evidence in Allen's defence, stated that Allen had been 'acquitted' during a previous investigation.⁸⁷ We can only suppose that this refers to the events of 1643. This, though, was not the end of Allen's troubles. In 1645, his possession of the rectory of Prestwich was once again challenged. Many of the 1643 witnesses would reappear, but this time, a new line of accusation would be prominent in their case.

Some of the 1643 allegations were broadly repeated during the five examinations of witnesses which took place over the course of 1645, by which time parliament's military control of Lancashire had nearly been secured.⁸⁸ The testimonies of Richard

⁸³ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 279v.

⁸⁴ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 292r.

⁸⁵ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 278r.

⁸⁶ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fos. 281v–280r.

⁸⁷ The National Archives of the U.K.: Public Record Office, SP 23/158 fo. 339. These depositions are reproduced in *The Royalist Composition Papers, being the proceedings of the Committee for Compounding, A.D. 1643–60, as far as they relate to the County of Lancaster, extracted from the Records preserved in the Public Record Office, London*, ed. J. H. Stanning, then J. Brownbill (7 vols., Record Soc. for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, xxiv, xxvi, xxix, xxxvi, lxxii, xcv, xcvi, 1891–1942) (hereafter *Royalist Composition Papers*), i. 18–31. It should be noted that these depositions are not transcribed verbatim, and as a result the accuracy is compromised in places.

⁸⁸ Bull, ch. 9. The dates of these examinations in 1645 were 21 Jan., 19 Feb., 2 Apr., 2 Dec. and 24 Dec., and all took place before prominent local parliamentarians sitting on the county sequestration committee (see T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fos. 331–50).

Ogden and Esther Wilson shared much substance with their earlier ones.⁸⁹ There were, though, new accusations against Allen, which pointed to his alleged royalist beliefs. John Scholes recalled that on 24 September 1642, Allen had sent one John Holland to stop the bells from being 'rung backwards at Prestwich Church' when Lord Strange was besieging Manchester, 'which John Holland said: his maister said the ringinge wold bee an offence to my lord'.⁹⁰ James Wroe, the churchwarden in 1643, claimed that Allen had not read to his congregation 'a declaracion of the Irish rebellion', despite his having been given a copy by Wroe in December 1643.⁹¹ Some of the new depositions contained evidence against Allen which was frankly circumstantial, such as that of Peter Seddon (the son of the churchwarden Peter Seddon), a captain in the parliamentary forces, who told the committeemen that when he was being held prisoner at Lathom House, the Lancashire home of the earl of Derby, the countess of Derby had taunted him 'that hee had neuer learned from Master Allen . . . to beare armes in that cause that this examine went in, or to rebell against his prince'.⁹² John Lort recalled the seditious words of one of Allen's servants, James Lewis, who boasted that 'he would kill all the Roundheads'.⁹³

Considering the 1645 depositions generally, they differ from the 1643 testimonies in two notable ways. First, depositions survive in Allen's defence. Thomas Scholes, for example, told the committeemen that Allen had loaned him a musket with which to defend the locality from plunder by the earl of Derby's royalist forces.⁹⁴ Second, some of the depositions contain allegations concerning Allen's practices in worship and his ecclesiological beliefs, which are absent in the 1643 depositions. Here, Allen received support from Richard Heyrick, a prominent local cleric who was currently enjoying some favour from the authorities. He protested on 24 December 1645 that Allen's life was 'vnblameable and his doctrine sound', and that in private conversation, Allen had told him that royal commands which were contrary to the law should not be obeyed. Heyrick further deposed that Allen had said that he was 'indifferent' about the matter of episcopal government, and 'that Master Allen acknowledged the parliament to be a true parliament, & that he prayed for the said parliament every day'.⁹⁵

Indeed, at no point were there any allegations made against Allen of scandalous behaviour or ceremony in worship, both of which were common charges against ministers at this time.⁹⁶ On 3 March 1646, in Allen's final months as rector, five local ministers signed a certificate of his orthodoxy, with the signatories including Heyrick, Charles Herle, the rector of Winwick, and Richard Hollinworth, a chaplain at Manchester collegiate church.⁹⁷ As all three were noted presbyterians, with Herle and Heyrick being members of the Westminster assembly, and Hollinworth being keenly opposed to Independency, one wonders if these clerics saw the potential value to the

⁸⁹ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fos. 331–2.

⁹⁰ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 336. *Royalist Composition Papers*, i, 21, paraphrases Scholes's testimony.

⁹¹ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 337.

⁹² T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 349.

⁹³ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 349. *Royalist Composition Papers*, i, 30, mistranscribes this deponent's name as James Lonte.

⁹⁴ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 344.

⁹⁵ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 339.

⁹⁶ Green, pp. 510–12.

⁹⁷ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 285v.

church of Allen's moderately puritan ministry, given Heyrick's claim that Allen was both politically sound and indifferent about episcopacy.⁹⁸

Heyrick's deposition in defence of Allen is particularly interesting given what is known about his attitudes on such matters. Adam Martindale, then minister at Gorton, near Manchester, later wrote that at the time the presbyterian classis was being established (around 1646), Heyrick declared that he was 'so perfect a Latitudinarian as to affirme that the episcopall presbyterians and independents might all practice according to their own judgements, yet each by divine right'.⁹⁹ Allen himself, in a petition to the committee for sequestrations which is undated but probably from around this time, may have realized that there was no reason why, with such godly clerical support, he could not remain as minister at Prestwich if he could free himself from the taint of royalism. He claimed that he had only supported the royalist cause when 'vnder the power of the Commissioners of Arraye', and that he had 'since that tyme, declared his good affection to the Parliament', including having taken the Solemn League and Covenant.¹⁰⁰ In 1643, it had been alleged that Allen had refused to take the Vow and Covenant, and back then, he did not claim compulsion in contributing to the royalist cause. By 1645 and 1646, the local political and religious situation was changing in the light of parliament's military victory in the civil war, and it was within this context that Allen reinvented himself as a loyal, Covenant-swearing supporter of parliament. In doing so, he was not alone: the reasons why George Snell, the ejected archdeacon of Chester, submitted to parliament's committee at Chester and took the Covenant were printed in April 1646.¹⁰¹

Allen's undoing, though, may have been the liturgical dimension of some of the allegations made against him in December 1645, the first time that such charges had surfaced. In January 1645, the presbyterian-based Directory for Public Worship was approved for use in churches, in place of the Book of Common Prayer.¹⁰² At Prestwich, some of the parishioners seem to have taken to this change with enthusiasm, despite John Morrill's belief that the process of adoption was slow.¹⁰³ John Gaskell and Abraham Walworth both testified that when they were removing the font in June 1645, Allen had entered the church and declared 'that there was nothinge in the booke of Commonprayer but what was agreeable to the word of god'. Gaskell further said that Allen then stated his intention to seek an election of the parishioners as to who should be their minister, which suggestion, according to Gaskell, the churchwardens 'refused, thinking it would raise some stirr in the church'. While Walworth's deposition does not share this latter encounter with Gaskell's account, Walworth does say that 'about the same time' Allen engineered an election of parishioners between himself and Toby Furness as to who 'shold bee minister there'.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ V. Larmine, 'Herle, Charles (1597/8–1659)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn., May 2006) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13080>>; M. Mullett, 'Heyrick, Richard (1600–67)', *O.D.N.B.* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13175>>; C. W. Sutton, 'Hollinworth, Richard (bap. 1607, d. 1656)', rev. R. C. Richardson, *O.D.N.B.* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13565>> [all accessed 21 Nov. 2013].

⁹⁹ *The Life of Adam Martindale, Written by Himself*, ed. R. Parkinson (Chetham Soc., iv, 1845), p. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Manchester, Chetham's Library, C.6.63.

¹⁰¹ G. Snell, *A Looking-Glasse for England* (1646), *passim*; Matthews, pp. 93–4.

¹⁰² J. Morrill, 'The Church in England 1642–9', in Morrill, *Nature of the English Revolution*, pp. 148–76, at p. 152.

¹⁰³ Morrill, 'Church in England', p. 153.

¹⁰⁴ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fos. 347–8.

Three points within Gaskell's and Walworth's testimonies are striking. First, many churches in Lancashire seem to have removed their fonts at some point between 1645 and 1660, with several purchasing bowls during this period, presumably for use in baptism ceremonies according to the Directory.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, the Directory was a matter of some contention at Prestwich, with Ralph Briddock testifying that Allen intended to discuss 'putting in execucion the directorie' at the parish meeting.¹⁰⁶ That Gaskell and Walworth took away the font suggests a keenness to push forward liturgical reforms, belatedly implementing the parliamentary ordinance of May 1644 that fonts be removed from use and be 'utterly defaced'.¹⁰⁷ Second, Allen's alleged response about the Prayer Book being agreeable to God's word may seem surprising from a puritan (if true), but as Isaac Stephens has recently demonstrated, puritanism and liturgical conservatism were not necessarily mutually exclusive, though sadly, in Allen's case, the lack of adequate records after 1633 means that we cannot be certain when he came to adopt such a position.¹⁰⁸ Third, Toby Furness, who ultimately succeeded Allen at Prestwich, was already being promoted as his successor in the summer of 1645, even though it would not be until September 1646 that he was allocated the revenues of the rectory.¹⁰⁹ The dynamics of the machinations by which Furness seems to have been rector elect by June 1645 are unclear, and Furness himself is a somewhat shadowy figure. There is a payment to him for preaching at Northenden church in Cheshire in 1643, a parish which had suffered its own loss of a minister when Thomas Mallory was ejected as rector in 1642, according to Mallory's own petition in 1660.¹¹⁰ This slight piece of evidence may suggest that Furness had some connections with the local parliamentary cause, as Northenden lay in an area with some parliamentary gentry support, and in any case, he seems to have proven satisfactory to the godly parliamentarians at Prestwich.¹¹¹ When he faced his own accusations of drunkenness before the Manchester classis at the turn of 1647 and 1648, it is revealing that the deponents against him were different from those who had testified against Allen, and the classis minutes record that Furness 'brought a very large testimony from the inhabitants of Prestwich for his soundnesse in doctrine and integrity of life'.¹¹²

By the time the parish meeting to discuss the incumbency took place on 27 June 1645, the divisions within the parish were very apparent. Thomas Sergeant deposed that he had gone with 'some of the better sorte of the parish' to ask Allen to desist from calling the meeting, but he was not at home, and the meeting went ahead. At this gathering, 'there passed some harsh and vnkind wordes, which this examine knoweth hath set greate diuisions and heart burnings amongst the neighbors in that parish'.¹¹³

¹⁰⁵ A. Craven, "'Contrarie to the Directorie': Presbyterians and people in Lancashire, 1646–53', in *Discipline and Diversity*, ed. K. Cooper and J. Gregory (Studies in Church Hist., xliii, 2007), pp. 331–41, at pp. 336–7.

¹⁰⁶ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 347.

¹⁰⁷ J. Spraggon, *Puritan Iconoclasm during the English Civil War* (Woodbridge, 2003), p. 78.

¹⁰⁸ I. Stephens, 'Confessional identity in early Stuart England: the "Prayer Book puritanism" of Elizabeth Isham', *Jour. British Stud.*, 1 (2011), 24–47, at pp. 29, 41–7.

¹⁰⁹ *Minutes of the Committee for the Relief of Plundered Ministers, and of the Trustees for the Maintenance of Ministers, relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, 1643–60*, ed. W. A. Shaw (2 vols., Record Soc. for the Publication of Original Documents relating to Lancashire and Cheshire, xxviii, xxxiv, 1893–6) (hereafter *Plundered Ministers*), i. 36.

¹¹⁰ British Library, Harleian MS. 2130 fo. 209r.; Parliamentary Archives, HLP/PO/JO/10/1/290.

¹¹¹ R. N. Dore, *The Civil Wars in Cheshire* (Chester, 1966), p. 16.

¹¹² *Minutes of the Manchester Presbyterian Classis 1646–60*, ed. W. A. Shaw (3 vols., Chetham Soc., new ser., xx, xxii, xxiv, 1890–1), i. 59. The Richard Barlow who testified against Furness on p. 60 is probably different from the Barlow who testified against Allen, as there was more than one man of that name in Prestwich at this time.

¹¹³ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 350.

Why Allen should have called this meeting is unclear from the sources, though as we shall see in the next section of this article, there were royalist supporters in the parish who may well have been sympathetic towards Allen and on whose support he may have thought he could rely to secure his election. Indeed, Edward Chatterton, a churchwarden and a captain in royalist forces, reported 'That Mr. Allen behaved himselfe well at the meetinge held on the 27 of June then last at Prestwich Church for any thing hee obserued', and he further deposed 'That he thinketh that the greater parte of the parishioners of Prestwich had rather chuse Master Allen for their preacher then another. And being demanded whether the greater parte of the parishioners bee the more religious saith hee knoweth not'.¹¹⁴ Chatterton's avoidance of the question was unlikely to help a minister who was beleaguered by those who were loyally parliamentary, and, in the inquiring committee's mind, were likely to have constituted their ideal of the godly.

Pre-civil war puritanism was often both fluid and contested. Godly activists were rarely consistent in their beliefs, and often mobilized one aspect of 'the puritan synthesis' against others as they sought to define and justify their particular positions.¹¹⁵ Even a focus upon the parish, as pursued by this article, is inherently problematic for the tracing of puritans and puritanism, as the phenomenon and its protagonists often crossed parish boundaries as they sought like-minded people with whom to share their faith.¹¹⁶ In 1638, Peter Shaw, who had been in trouble in London during the late sixteen-twenties for his own idiosyncratically puritan opinions, which had put him at odds with other London puritans, notably Stephen Denison, was appointed as rector of Radcliffe, a parish adjacent to Prestwich.¹¹⁷ In 1639, an unordained minister, James Hall, was prosecuted in the consistory court of the diocese of Chester. Hall admitted preaching 'divers sermons in seuerall churches & chappells', including Prestwich church, but he denied having preached or expounded 'any scripture in any private house or families'.¹¹⁸

Though it is important to acknowledge the trans-parochial nature of puritanism, the parish nevertheless remains a valuable unit for studying the phenomenon. The puritanism visible within Prestwich parish has two main dimensions: first, a moderate puritanism evident among some of the laity, as a few refused to kneel to receive communion, and meetings were held where the sermon was repeated; second, a more deep-seated, even anti-episcopal, puritanism can be seen developing during the sixteen-thirties, at the same time as many bishops were increasingly insisting on the railing of communion tables and other ceremonial innovations within their dioceses. These two puritanisms undoubtedly overlapped in personnel, particularly at Ringley chapel, and in the private meetings associated with that chapel during the ministry of John Angier in the early sixteen-thirties. In terms of particular individuals, though, this distinction is largely invisible. While some puritans already had fundamental concerns about the episcopal nature of the Church of England, which would have set them up for a confrontation with a cleric such as Allen who appeared in 1642 to be more royalist than parliamentary, the same individuals, as well as others, may well have

¹¹⁴ T.N.A.: P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 340. Chatterton is identified as a royalist officer in Gratton, app. 3.

¹¹⁵ Lake, *Boxmaker's Revenge*, p. 409.

¹¹⁶ Lake, *Boxmaker's Revenge*, p. 395.

¹¹⁷ D. Como and P. Lake, 'Puritans, Antinomians and Laudians in Caroline London: the strange case of Peter Shaw and its contexts', *Jour. Eccles. Hist.*, 1 (1999), 684–715; *V.C.H. Lancashire*, v. 66.

¹¹⁸ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1639/3.

become isolated from their rector as a result of his support for the war in Scotland in 1639, and perhaps also by the high-handed manner in which he dealt with the vital matters of allegiance which troubled the consciences of the godly. This combination had the potential to generate what proved to be a potent opposition to him during the years of the first civil war.

As has already been noted, there was a tradition of moderate puritanism within Prestwich parish during the reign of James I, with some individuals being presented before the church courts for more contentious puritan offences, such as the 'depraving' of the Church's 'doctrine' and of the Prayer Book.¹¹⁹ At the diocesan visitation of the deanery of Manchester in October 1625, during the tenure of Allen's predecessor, John Langley, eighteen people were presented at Prestwich for sitting to receive communion. The refusal to kneel to receive communion was frequently symbolic of a conscientious discomfort with the ceremony at which the Lord's Supper was administered within the Church of England, as kneeling to receive the bread and wine was interpreted as being idolatrous.¹²⁰ Those presented included Esther Wilson and her husband William, and Esther Wilson's father Peter Walworth. Two more potential future opponents to Allen are listed, Thomas Fletcher of Unsworth and James Wroe – though shared names in the parish, plus the lack of familial evidence within the presentation (such as that provided for Esther Wilson), prevent a definite identification.¹²¹ The refusal to kneel to receive communion was not new to Prestwich parish, as the same offence had been reported at Oldham chapel in 1605.¹²²

Esther Wilson's father, Peter Walworth, was the brother of Nathan Walworth, who had left Prestwich for London, and had ultimately become steward to the earl of Pembroke.¹²³ Nathan Walworth was the main benefactor of a new chapel at Ringley, in the north-western corner of Prestwich parish, which was erected in 1625 and licensed in 1627.¹²⁴ Piecing together the evidence, Ringley chapel seems to have had a considerable degree of lay involvement in its life. One valuable, if not quite contemporary, account of the chapel and its worshippers is given in Oliver Heywood's life of John Angier, first published in 1685. Angier had been minister at Ringley during the early sixteen-thirties, and if Heywood's account is taken at face value, it reveals much about the dynamics of the congregation there. In 1630, Angier was residing with John Cotton, the vicar of Boston in Lincolnshire, when, on a visit to his wife's family near Wigan, he was invited to preach at Ringley chapel alongside the future New England émigré Richard Mather, then minister at Toxteth Park chapel near Liverpool. Due to 'it being a hot Summer-day, and an exceeding throng, Mr. *Angier* was overcome with heat, and swooned, not being able to proceed, but was cut off about the middle of his Sermon from speaking'. Despite this setback, the congregation were sufficiently impressed to ask Angier to be their minister. He was presented with a paper subscribed with 'the Names of the Heads of the Chappelrie', consisting of all those who were entitled to vote, but he was informed that if he wanted a paper subscribed by the entire chapelry, that 'would readily be had'.¹²⁵

¹¹⁹ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1607/54.

¹²⁰ Spurr, pp. 30–1.

¹²¹ C.R.O., E. D. V. 1/26 fo. 109v; *Correspondence*, p. ix.

¹²² C.R.O., E. D. V. 1/14 fo. 92v.

¹²³ *Correspondence*, pp. v–vi, ix.

¹²⁴ *Correspondence*, p. xxiv.

¹²⁵ *Oliver Heywood's Life of John Angier of Denton*, ed. E. Axon (Chetham Soc., new ser., xcvi, 1937) (hereafter *John Angier*), pp. 55–6.

Heywood portrays Angier's ministry at Ringley chapel very favourably, writing that 'the word of God did mightily succeed, and prosper exceedingly, *much people were added to the Lord*', flocking 'thither like Doves to the windows'.¹²⁶ At this time, Nathan Walworth seems to have been optimistic about the future of the Ringley congregation. On 12 November 1632, soon after Isaac Allen's appointment as rector of Prestwich, he wrote from London to Peter Seddon, telling him that 'you can never have a fitter tyme to establish your selves, in as much freedom and libertie, as now whyle Mr. Allen is there'.¹²⁷ It is possible, though, that soon afterwards, tensions were coming to the fore within local puritanism. Allen, who was never presented for the typically puritan offence of omitting the sign of the cross at baptism, may have viewed with distaste the actions of John Taylor, possibly his future opponent of that name, who was presented at the 1633 metropolitanical visitation for 'irreuerent behaiour' at a baptism.¹²⁸ The local godly were also dissatisfied with Allen's curate, John Pollett. When Pollett, then minister at Milnrow, was facing charges of royalism before the Bury presbyterian classis in February 1648, Richard Ogden recalled that when Pollett was at Prestwich, 'this deponent with many other Godly Christians went as oft as they could to other places, especially in the afternoone when Mr. Pollitt was to preach', and Esther Wilson testified that her husband had attempted to persuade Allen to remove Pollett, but he had refused.¹²⁹ Neither did Angier's happy situation at Ringley last. He was frequently summoned to appear before John Bridgeman, the bishop of Chester, to answer for his nonconformity, and would eventually be suspended, after (according to Oliver Heywood) William Laud had intervened.¹³⁰

Indeed, the Ringley congregation had somewhat strained relations with Bishop Bridgeman, to the exasperation of Nathan Walworth. Bridgeman refused to consecrate the chapel until it was given a proper maintenance, and Walworth wrote to Peter Seddon on 26 May 1634, frustrated that 'you are so slacke, and backward in setlinge some mayntenance upon the Chappell'.¹³¹ Soon afterwards, in August 1634, twenty-one individuals each paid £5 for pew rights in the chapel.¹³² Bridgeman consecrated the chapel later that year. Seddon told Walworth on 14 December 1634 that 'I saw nothing but Godly Lawfull and Expedient without any superstition howsoever some Calumniaters have spoken against this way, but I think it is because they Love not Bishops'.¹³³ This observation is striking as, intriguingly, the influence of Laudianism does not seem to have extended to the manner in which the chapel was furnished. Bridgeman is often portrayed as having dutifully enforced railing of communion tables on a north-south axis at the east ends of churches.¹³⁴ However, there is no such mention of a railed altar in Seddon's account, and indeed, he describes Bridgeman as praying, 'kneeling downe at the upper end of the table with his face

¹²⁶ *John Angier*, p. 56 (italics in the original transcription).

¹²⁷ *Correspondence*, p. 18.

¹²⁸ B.I.H.R., V. 1633, C. B. 2 fo. 586r.

¹²⁹ *Minutes of the Bury Presbyterian Classis, 1647-1657*, ed. W. A. Shaw (2 vols., Chetham Soc., new ser., xxxvi, xli, 1896-8), i. 55-6.

¹³⁰ *John Angier*, pp. 56-8. If this account is true, Laud, then bishop of London, was possibly acting in place of the suspended archbishop of Canterbury, George Abbot (see K. Fincham and N. Tyacke, *Altars Restored: the Changing Face of English Religious Worship, 1547-c.1700* (Oxford, 2007), p. 177).

¹³¹ *Correspondence*, p. 24.

¹³² *Correspondence*, p. 91.

¹³³ *Correspondence*, p. 32.

¹³⁴ Fincham and Tyacke, pp. 190-1.

down the Chappel before all the Congregation'.¹³⁵ Does Bridgeman kneeling at 'the upper end of the table', facing the congregation, imply an east-west table-wise axis for the communion table, rather than the north-south altar-wise axis insisted upon by Neile? Indeed, would Seddon have commented upon the lawfulness of the ceremony if Bridgeman had consecrated an innovatory railed altar?

Among the puritan tendency at Ringley, Seddon's account makes clear that there was already, in late 1634, a group attached to Ringley chapel whose religious beliefs were taking an anti-episcopal direction. John Angier had suffered trouble from both Bridgeman and Laud, resulting in his suspension from the ministry at Ringley. Oliver Heywood later recorded that people had thronged to Angier's 'little house' at Ringley for 'Repetition' exercises.¹³⁶ The exact nature of such private meetings is difficult for the historian to discover, but, for many attendees, such religious gatherings often supplemented, rather than supplanted, the official ministrations of the Church of England.¹³⁷ But, were such private meetings, alongside the public ministrations at the chapel, either the source of, or the succour for, a keener puritanism at Ringley? By the late sixteen-thirties, Angier already had a reputation for being opposed to the bishops. Heywood records that around this time, an annotated copy of Archbishop Laud's 1637 speech in star chamber against William Prynne was discovered at Stockport in Cheshire. Angier was suspected as the author of the annotations, and he was 'in danger of being brought into the High-Commission Court', though Heywood noted that Angier protested his innocence in his diary.¹³⁸ Angier may not have encouraged the anti-episcopal attitudes of some at Ringley, but his presence there raises tantalizing possibilities of mutual interaction.

There does appear to be a discernible correlation between Isaac Allen's opponents and the Ringley congregation.¹³⁹ In a list of benefactors to Ringley chapel dated August 1634, only the elder Peter Seddon appears from among Allen's future opponents, though, as has been noted, Esther Wilson was the niece of the major benefactor, Nathan Walworth, and her brother Ellis Walworth was also one of their number.¹⁴⁰ However, when it was ordered in November 1658 that Ringley chapel should become a parish church, among those who 'usually resort' to Ringley chapel for worship were the two Peter Seddons, Abraham Walworth, Thomas Scholes and Thomas Fletcher.¹⁴¹ It may also be concluded that Thomas Seddon was the brother of the elder Peter Seddon;¹⁴² and in Esther Wilson's will, dated 8 May 1654, a John Taylor was bequeathed 5s as her servant, while Thomas Fletcher was one of her witnesses.¹⁴³ Thomas Fletcher of Stonedelf was described in his will, dated 19 March 1665, as a

¹³⁵ *Correspondence*, p. 32.

¹³⁶ *John Angier*, p. 56.

¹³⁷ Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, p. 271.

¹³⁸ *John Angier*, p. 60.

¹³⁹ Invaluable here is *The Registers of the Parish Church of Prestwich: Baptisms, Burials, and Weddings 1603–88*, ed. H. Brierley (Lancashire Parish Register Soc., xxxiv, 1909) (hereafter *Registers*), *passim*.

¹⁴⁰ *Correspondence*, p. 91.

¹⁴¹ *Plundered Ministers*, ii. 255. A Richard Barlow is listed, though Allen's opponent of that name had probably died in 1657 (see *Registers*, p. 128).

¹⁴² Preston, Lancashire Archives (hereafter L.A.), W.C.W., Ralph Seddon of Pilkington, proven 15 May 1612. The will of Peter Seddon's father Ralph shows that Peter had a brother named Thomas, but the name is too common in the parish to allow for a definite identification.

¹⁴³ T.N.A.: P.R.O., PROB 11/238, Esther Wilson of Poppithorne, proven 6 Dec. 1654.

'wollenclothmaker', and in his defence, Isaac Allen described him as a 'webster'.¹⁴⁴ As well as being connected to Esther Wilson, Thomas Fletcher's son Abraham was bequeathed 20s by one William Hulme, a gentleman of Reddish in Manchester parish, in his will dated 10 December 1637.¹⁴⁵ Hulme also bequeathed 20s to William Hulton, the minister at Ringley chapel, and left 'vnto the Chappell of Ringley the Summe of Fyve poundes of good and lawfull money of England to be Employed for the better yearlyly maineteineing of a minister there'.¹⁴⁶

William Hulme had died soon after writing his will in 1637, leaving his son and heir, another William, as a minor, with the elder William's brother John being appointed as his guardian until he came of age.¹⁴⁷ Allen had come to an agreement with the elder William in 1634 for the tithe payments on some newly improved land, and for the year 1639, Allen farmed the tithe rights for that land to Richard Heap and the elder Peter Seddon, both of whom, in 1634, had been benefactors to Ringley chapel.¹⁴⁸ In the event, no tithes were paid, and there is an implication that Heap and Seddon played a role in denying Allen his payment, though they were not themselves sued. It was also alleged that John Hulme resisted the attempts of Allen's brother Samuel, the farmer of the small tithes, to collect his entitlement of two geese.¹⁴⁹

The issue here is why did Heap and Seddon seemingly assist John Hulme in denying Allen his tithe payments? In 1639, there seems to have been a dramatic breach between Allen and some of the godly in Prestwich parish. Allen contributed £12, the biggest contribution of any clergyman in the deanery of Manchester, to the war against the Scottish Covenanters, a group with whom the Prestwich godly may well have felt some affinity.¹⁵⁰ It was the size rather than the fact of the contribution which distinguished Allen: only five clergymen in the diocese of Chester are recorded as having refused to contribute, though others were excused on the grounds of poverty.¹⁵¹ Evidently, relations were becoming strained between Allen and some of his parishioners. On 21 June 1639, Nathan Walworth wrote to the elder Peter Seddon, telling him that 'if the B[ishop] B[ridgeman] and Mr. Allen, contende with you, feight with them, you will be able to make your parte in good, I am sure you are 20, to one'.¹⁵² William Shaw suggested that this dispute was about the contribution to the Scottish war, and the troubles are mentioned elsewhere in Walworth's letter, but it could also refer to one of the periodic difficulties over the funding of Ringley chapel which had previously delayed its consecration, and indeed, the letter does mention that William Hulton, the minister at Ringley, 'wants money'.¹⁵³ Nevertheless, whether chapel funding, the war in Scotland or a combination of both had stoked discord

¹⁴⁴ L.A., W. C. W., Thomas Fletcher of Stonedelph within Whitfield, proven 25 May 1665; Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 277v.

¹⁴⁵ L.A., W. C. W., William Hulme of Reddish, proven 28 Dec. 1637.

¹⁴⁶ L.A., W. C. W., William Hulme, 1637.

¹⁴⁷ L.A., W. C. W., William Hulme, 1637.

¹⁴⁸ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1639/39; *Correspondence*, p. 91. A further case between Allen and Hulme is C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1640/91.

¹⁴⁹ C.R.O., E. D. C. 5/1639/39.

¹⁵⁰ Bridgeman, p. 123.

¹⁵¹ Bridgeman, pp. 119–29. The five clerics who refused to contribute were Richard Wilson, rector of Holy Trinity, Chester; Samuel Torshell, vicar of Bunbury, Cheshire; Robert Fogg, curate of Hoole, Lancashire; John Jackson, rector of Marske, Yorkshire; and Thomas Squire, vicar of Ainderby Steeple, Yorkshire.

¹⁵² *Correspondence*, p. 66.

¹⁵³ *Correspondence*, p. 65; Shaw, *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, i. 403.

between Seddon and Allen, this and the tithing suit suggest that relations between them had deteriorated significantly during 1639.

Allen's relationship with Laudian policies during the sixteen-thirties is difficult to assess: though the railing of the communion table at the east end of churches was enforced in the diocese of Chester during Archbishop Neile's metropolitanical visitation in 1633, the act book is silent on whether Prestwich church or any of its chapels conformed, though a table-wise situation seems to have been in place at Ringley when it was consecrated in late 1634.¹⁵⁴ The lack of any reports during the sixteen-forties of scandalous behaviour or ceremonialism during the preceding years may, though, suggest a lack of enthusiasm for Laudianism on Allen's part which would tie in with his moderately puritan attitudes. Even if the degree of Allen's own personal complicity with Laudianism was minimal, the general behaviour of the bishops during the sixteen-thirties, including Archbishop Laud's pressuring of Bishop Bridgeman to suspend John Angier, was unlikely to have endeared the Church of England to lay puritans during these years, and no doubt the breach between Allen and Seddon in 1639 would have confirmed any feelings of their alienation from the Church of England. Yet, Allen did have supporters within the parish, who, when their pastor came under attack, sought to portray his opponents as a minority. The words of Edward Chatterton, for example, have already been noted. Indeed, Allen's opponents do seem to have been divided from many in the parish by the issue of allegiance during the first civil war. John Morrill has suggested that active parliamentarianism arose out of a perceived need to defend the religious settlement of 1641, whereby the bishops had been impeached, innovations such as altar rails had been ordered to be removed from churches, and the church courts had been rendered ineffective.¹⁵⁵ Allen himself described his opponents as having 'bene ever esteemed well affected to the Parliament'.¹⁵⁶ Richard Ogden and John Lort both declared themselves to be 'listed' soldiers in parliament's forces under Colonel Richard Holland when they testified against Allen in 1643, and the younger Peter Seddon would suffer imprisonment for his parliamentarianism.¹⁵⁷ The elder Peter Seddon's brother, William, a clergyman, lost his living at Eastham in Cheshire to an intruded clergyman.¹⁵⁸ According to a letter sent to John Walker by his son Edward c.1710, when threatened with apprehension after he had fled Eastham, he asked his brother Peter, a 'zealous Presbyterian', for assistance. The latter replied 'that would he conform himself to the Godly party, his own merits would protect & prefer him', and William was 'so insens'd [he] never more held any Correspondence with him'.¹⁵⁹

Conversely, Prestwich parish also witnessed some significant support for the royalist cause, such as the ninety-two parishioners who had refused to take the Vow and Covenant in 1643.¹⁶⁰ While Salford hundred may have generally been a bastion of parliamentarian allegiance, Malcolm Gratton has observed that of the post-Restoration petitions from royalist troops, most of those from the hundred came from the township of Pilkington within Prestwich parish (the township which included Ringley chapel), and from neighbouring Bury. Gratton attributes this support to the influence of the

¹⁵⁴ Fincham and Tyacke, pp. 200–1.

¹⁵⁵ Morrill, 'Religious context', pp. 45–68.

¹⁵⁶ Chetham's Libr., C.6.63.

¹⁵⁷ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fos. 279r–v; T.N.A., P.R.O., SP 23/158 fo. 349.

¹⁵⁸ Matthews, p. 93.

¹⁵⁹ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 217r.

¹⁶⁰ Bodl. Libr., MS. J. Walker c. 5 fo. 283r.

Stanley family, earls of Derby, who held manorial lands in this area.¹⁶¹ Even as late as 1675, six men from Pilkington told the quarter sessions that they had 'beene dangerously wounded & maymed' fighting for Charles I.¹⁶² Popular royalism countered the parliamentarianism evident among Allen's opponents, and there was no guarantee that moderate puritans, of the tradition long evident within the parish, supported a parliamentarian cause which had come to symbolize a radical, anti-episcopal agenda.¹⁶³

The case of Isaac Allen provides an important glimpse of the politics of a parish in northern England during the historically important decades of the sixteen-thirties and sixteen-forties. The opposition towards Allen was a minority affair within the parish, which only seems to have come to the fore during the first civil war. Here, some comparisons with John Walter's study of the opposition to Richard Drake, the rector of Radwinter in Essex, are rewarding. Unlike Allen, Drake was accused of using ceremonial worship in the parish.¹⁶⁴ Yet, despite Essex being famed for its 'godly communities', Walter points out that Drake was able to impose his ideas of worship onto the parish with seemingly little trouble, and that 'even in 1640 Drake's opponents did not yet feel confident that such an open challenge would go unpunished'.¹⁶⁵ Only after the outbreak of civil war, when Drake's opponents' complaints against him 'could be expressed in the terms of a "national" political discourse', did his challengers appeal to outside agencies for his removal.¹⁶⁶

Like Drake's opponents at Radwinter, Allen's adversaries seized the opportunity presented by the national situation to complain against their rector. While the precise course of the deterioration of Allen's relations with lay puritans in his parish is unclear, it is evident that by 1642 a gulf existed between them. Nathan Walworth had held high hopes of Allen when he was appointed as rector in 1632, but his support for the Scottish war in 1639, coupled with his suing of John Hulme for non-payment of tithes in the same year, either represent the beginnings of a significant breach between the rector and some influential godly families, or even the culmination of a breach which is hidden from the surviving records. When civil war, and Allen's apparent lack of enthusiasm for parliament's cause, presented his opponents with the opportunity to oust him, they took it, only to fall at the first hurdle. There may even be some truth in Allen's accusation that his adversaries were inveterately and maliciously against his ministry. The involvement of prominent local gentlemen such as Thomas Birch and John Bradshaw in conducting the examinations in 1643 when Allen was acquitted would suggest that they would have had their own knowledge as to whether or not he was a royalist, and this may explain his acquittal.¹⁶⁷

However, as the national agenda for religious reform became hotter, Allen's opponents' moment would come. Loyalty to the Prayer Book in 1645 – ironic, as failure to conform to its requirements had brought Allen into trouble earlier in his career – ultimately led to his downfall as rector of Prestwich. Even then, that support for the Prayer Book only became evident as two parishioners removed the font from

¹⁶¹ Gratton, p. 163.

¹⁶² L.A., Quarter Sessions Petitions 441/12.

¹⁶³ Fletcher, *Outbreak*, pp. 283–92.

¹⁶⁴ J. Walter, "'Affronts & Insolencies': the voices of Radwinter and popular opposition to Laudianism", *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, cxxii (2007), 35–60, at p. 42.

¹⁶⁵ Walter, pp. 56–7.

¹⁶⁶ Walter, p. 59.

¹⁶⁷ Gratton, app. 3.

Prestwich church, an action not required by law, but with undoubtedly iconoclastic undertones. Indeed, there is a certain irony that Allen, for whom there is no evidence, nor any accusations, of enthusiasm for Laudianism in the sixteen-thirties, should clash with two parishioners in 1645 over an issue of order within the church building, an ideal so cherished by Laudians.¹⁶⁸

Responses to the crises in the state during the early sixteen-forties, undoubtedly conditioned by the religious innovations of the sixteen-thirties and the Scottish war in 1639, had served to fracture puritanism within Prestwich parish, and the sight of the sometime nonconformist Allen defending the Prayer Book in 1645 as two of his parishioners demolished the font in his parish church is highly symbolic of the religious shifts and divides shaped by a succession of confrontations within the British Isles. The Laudian innovations may have been unpopular, but would the destruction of a font have been any more welcome? Puritans of all shades may have opposed the sign of the cross at baptism, but how many moderate puritans wanted the font removed from their church, and their rector ejected? Thus, when, in the late sixteen-forties, some of the parishioners of Prestwich went to the schoolmaster Mr. Birch for private baptisms of their children 'contrary to the Directorie', and when, in May 1649, 'manie of the parishioners' requested that the Manchester classis consider that Isaac Allen return as their minister (prompting a counter-request), it was clear that it would take more than the demolition of a font and the ejection of a minister to enact reformation in Prestwich.¹⁶⁹ This reformation of the church was now very different from that envisaged by moderate puritans in the sixteen-twenties and sixteen-thirties. Some, such as the elder Peter Seddon, James Wroe and John Scholes, who all served as elders of the Prestwich congregation in 1647, made the journey into participation in a fledgling presbyterian church.¹⁷⁰ The problem for successive governments up to the Restoration in 1660 was that many more people did not make that journey.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁸ J. F. Merritt, 'Puritans, Laudians, and the phenomenon of church-building in Jacobean London', *Historical Jour.*, xli (1998), 935–60, at pp. 956–8.

¹⁶⁹ Shaw, *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, i. 46–9, ii. 109.

¹⁷⁰ Shaw, *Manchester Presbyterian Classis*, i. 15–67.

¹⁷¹ Morrill, 'Church in England', pp. 163–75.