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'Weapons of the Strong': Reinforcing Complaints Against the Clergy in Post-Restoration Warwickshire, 1660-1720

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ABSTRACT

Accusations by parishioners against their parish clergyman are common from the medieval period to the present day and they were not infrequent in post-Restoration Warwickshire. Allegations of clerical drunkenness, pastoral neglect, fornication, bastardy and other 'scandalous' behaviour including disputes over tithes and defamation of parishioners regularly reached the church courts of the two dioceses covering the county. This article looks, however, not as the accusations themselves but at the methods parishioners used to express their dissatisfaction with an unpopular parson and to reinforce the case against him. Their actions are examined in terms of James C Scott's theory, particularly in his volume 'Weapons of the Weak', of 'everyday resistance' to authority using both 'hidden' and 'public' means and recourse to the law. They reveal that 'weak' parishioners often showed surprising strength, resilience and sophistication in the methods they used to humiliate the clergy and undermine ecclesiastical authority in the parish.

KEYWORDS

Warwickshire; clergy; 'scandalous' behaviour; church courts; James C. Scott; 'everyday resistance'

In 2010 *The Times* reported that 150 religious leaders, mainly Anglican clergymen, had sought protection from the trade union Unite as a result of 'a culture of bullying in the established church', citing victimization, harassment and humiliation by disgruntled parishioners.[1] There is, of course, abundant evidence of troubled relationships between clergymen and their parishioners from at least the medieval period to the present day. Examples from popular literature include the anticlericalism of William Langland's late fourteenth-century *Piers Plowman*, the witty anti-episcopal satire of the 'Martin Marprelate' tracts in the late 1580s and Shakespeare's mockery of ill-educated and inept clergymen like Sir Nathaniel in *Love's Labour's Lost* or Sir Oliver Mar-Text in *As You Like It*. Christopher Haigh revealed many early seventeenth-century examples of parishioners' accusations against the clergy in *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven* while Fiona McCall's *Baal's Priests* focused on accusations against the royalist clergy denounced as 'malignants' by their own parishioners during the civil wars and Interregnum.[2]

Examination of the church court papers of post-Restoration Warwickshire reveals that disputes with parishioners in both non-tithe and tithe cases involved at least 238

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[1] *The Times*, 5 January, 2010.

[2] C. Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven: Kinds of Christianity in Post-Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); F. McCall, *Baal's Priests: the Loyalist Clergy and the English Revolution* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013).

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clergymen in 123 of its 219 parishes between the re-establishment of the courts in 1661–62 and the beginning of the Hanoverian period.[3] The misdemeanours of which they were accused ranged from incidents of drunkenness, blasphemy and verbal abuse of parishioners to serious pastoral neglect, dilapidations, simony, damage to church or churchyard, fornication, adultery, bastardy and wife-beating. In the most serious cases clergymen might be accused of a catalogue of complaints simultaneously, while in some parishes a succession of its clergy appeared before the church courts accused of a variety of moral crimes.[4]

This article examines not the complaints against the clergy but the methods employed by parishioners to reinforce those complaints, using what social anthropologist, James C. Scott, in his work on Malaysian peasant culture, called 'everyday forms of resistance' to authority. In his volumes *Weapons of the Weak* and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* Scott found evidence of behaviour such as foot-dragging, non-cooperation, dissimulation and occasional sabotage used by those of low status to negotiate better terms of existence with a powerful elite.[5] He believed resistance could be found on two levels: in the 'public transcript' of deferential behaviour to superiors that bordered on insubordination, such as giving an almost insultingly small gift at a superior's party, or proffering the curtest of greetings when passing a superior in the street. It was also found in the private world of 'hidden transcripts', where, behind the backs of the elite, the 'weak' engaged in subversive resistance to undermine their superiors.

Michael Braddick and John Walter applied Scott's theories to the early modern period. Their volume, *Negotiating Power*, explored 'the weapons with which subordinated groups in their everyday lives could moderate the exercise of power over them', and they showed how different relationships of domination and subordination contributed to the creation of social and political order.[6] Their volume included essays about those traditionally seen as 'weak': Steve Hindle examined how the poor negotiated with 'relief' officers, Laura Gowing looked at women's authority in cases of illegitimate pregnancy and childbirth and Champion and McNulty focused, unusually for social historians, on a member of the clergy, the dissident Anglican cleric, Edmund Hickeringill who undermined ecclesiastical authority through the 'everyday resistance' of misusing bells and refusing to remove his hat during his trial at Doctors' Commons.[7] Braddick and Walter's volume concluded that one of Scott's main findings was of a 'knowing and manipulative consciousness' behind the 'public transcript' of compliance

[3]M.E. Harris, '"Schismatical people": conflict between clergy and laity in Warwickshire, 1660-1720' (PhD thesis, University of Leicester, 2015), pp. 5, 253–67, 269. A total of 161 clergy were affected by non-tithe disputes only.

[4]There were multiple accusations against a single clergyman in Alderminster, Arley, Birmingham, Monks Kirby, Warwick St Mary, Whitchurch and Wixford and complaints against a succession of clergymen in the same parish in Aston Cantlow, Coughton, Haseley, Lapworth, Pillerton Hersey, Salford Priors, Shipston-on-Stour, Stratford-upon-Avon and Wootton Wawen.

[5]J.C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn.: London: Yale University Press, 1985) and *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: London: Yale University Press, 1990).

[6]M.J. Braddick and J. Walter eds, *Negotiating Power in Early Modern Society: Order, Hierarchy and Subordination in Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 16.

[7]S. Hindle, 'Exhortation and entitlement: negotiating inequality in English rural communities, 1550-1650'; L. Gowing, 'Ordering the body: illegitimacy and female authority in seventeenth-century England'; J. Champion and L. McNulty, 'Making orthodoxy in late Restoration England: the trials of Edmund Hickeringill, 1662-1710', all in *Negotiating Power,* ed. by Braddick and Walter.

and deference, suggesting that subordinate groups, or individuals like Hickeringill, were well-versed in manipulating the social order to their own advantage.[8]

This article examines Scott's theories, developed by Braddick and Walter, in relation to the methods Warwickshire parishioners used to undermine the authority of their clergymen and to 'moderate the exercise of [spiritual] power over them'. The county was divided between the two dioceses of Lichfield and Coventry to the north and Worcester to the south, but despite the friction noted in over half its parishes, none experienced conflict as extreme as Donald Spaeth's frustrated Wiltshire residents who smeared human excrement over Hilperton church porch in anger against their quarrelsome minister.[9] The church court records for the two dioceses reveal, however, that Warwickshire parishioners used both the 'public transcripts' of open confrontation, accusation, blackmail and occasionally violence, and 'hidden transcripts' of theft, sabotage and non-cooperation against the symbols of Anglican ritual and the person of the minister to express their dissatisfaction with the spiritual care they were offered. Parishioners also revealed a sophisticated use of the law, in both the ecclesiastical and the secular courts, to modify their parson's ministry or sometimes to bring about his removal. With these examples in mind it seems appropriate to describe these methods of manipulation not, in James C. Scott's words, as 'Weapons of the Weak', but as 'Weapons of the Strong', indicating the relative power of the post-Restoration laity in a re-established church doomed, John Spurr suggests, because it tried to 're-impose religious uniformity on a nation which had tasted liberty and licence'.[10]

The first section examines parishioners' use of Scott's hidden transcripts of everyday forms of resistance in the subtle undermining of clerical authority by covert subversive behaviour against the clergy or the Church. The second section focuses on more overt ecclesiastical disobedience, particularly the misuse of symbols of Anglican worship such as church bells and churchyard trees, but also discussing cases of direct accusation, verbal abuse and defamation. Finally the article examines the sophisticated use by the laity of both the ecclesiastical and the secular courts to weaken the minister's authority.

Hidden Transcripts

Covert attacks on artefacts associated with the Anglican liturgy proved disturbing to parish ministers since their secretive nature aroused unease, mistrust and frustration while undermining not just the man himself but the institution which he represented. The pulpit cushion, for instance, supported that object symbolic of Protestant, and particularly of radical Protestant, worship, the Bible. The cushions and other church furnishings were often fine decorative items, sometimes stolen for gain. For instance at Binton the church inspectors in 1674 recorded the presence of 'a rich cushion' while 'the pulpit cloth answerable to it was stolen in the [civil] war'.[11] The cushion's aesthetic value was presumably why the litigious Nathaniel Swanne, vicar of Alderminster, took it

[8]Braddick and Walter, *Negotiating Power*, Frontispiece, p. 5.
[9]D. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740*, 2005 edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2000), p. 14.
[10]J. Spurr, *The Restoration Church of England, 1646-1689* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 1991), p. xiv.
[11]P. Morgan, ed., *Inspections of Churches and Parsonage Houses in the Diocese of Worcester in 1674, 1676, 1684 and 1687*, Worcestershire Historical Society, New Series, 12 (Leeds: The Worcestershire Historical Society, 1986), pp. 46, 47.

home though his refusal to return it was chiefly to frustrate his churchwarden with whom he was in acrimonious dispute for nearly twenty years.[12] However, the theft of the pulpit cushion from St James's church in the hamlet of Weethley in south-west Warwickshire in late February, 1685/6, perplexed the local curate who reported that John Ferris, a Weethley 'papist', had taken the cushion

> and hath detained it ever since but upon what account we know not unless to put tricks and affronts upon us …. He I am informed makes a Scoff at the thing and it hath occasioned a great many of strange reports in the Country.[13]

This subversive act was undoubtedly related to the local, and national, political situation. The Catholic king, James II, had succeeded his brother Charles II in February 1685 with the support of conservative Anglicans and the positive expectations of Catholics,[14] but his pursuit of a pro-Catholic agenda had begun to alarm the Anglican church and the Protestant magistracy. Weethley consisted of only fifteen households in an estate of the Catholic Fortescues of Cookhill, and many of the parishioners were Catholic. The theft of the cushion implied that under a newly-ascendant Catholic king, local Catholics would be empowered to worship as freely as Anglicans and the choice of stolen object, the symbolic 'support' for the English Bible with all its Reformation overtones, was unlikely to be accidental. The manner of the theft raised fears of religious unrest and 'papist' rebellion, sensitive issues in south-west Warwickshire with its high proportion of Catholic landowners and tenants in a location notorious as the centre of the Gunpowder Plot eighty years before, an event still regularly commemorated by the ringing of church bells every 5 November.

In the adjacent parish of Wixford local Catholics undermined the authority of the 'godly' rector, Timothy Kirke and his successor, by retaining the parish register which they mutilated, removing pages and making multiple insertions of Catholics baptisms and marriages for the 1670s and 1680s(see Figure 1). It provoked someone to write on one such page: 'All papists and inserted by themselves by whom I suppose this book was cut and mangled when they were tenants of Parson Wright', Kirke's successor, a remark which was crossed out later.[15]

The mutilation of the parish register was just one of the acts of humiliation performed against Kirke during his incumbency, and his prolonged conflict with his mainly Catholic parishioners is discussed in greater detail below. At Atherstone-on-Stour in 1671 the rector, Samuel Wilkes, used the parish register to record a hostile act against him by one of his parishioners which obviously unnerved him. At ten o'clock one February night 'Rachael Tysoe was taken eavesdropping my house', presumably to gain incriminating or useful information on him or his family.[16] The offence was not actionable in the church or civil courts but Wilkes was sufficiently alarmed to record it publicly in the register as a 'perpetual memory' of the event.

[12]A green velvet pulpit cushion was given to Halford church by the rector's brother in 1673, Warwickshire County Record Office (WaCRO): DR362/1, and quoted in M.D. Harris, *Unknown Warwickshire* (London: John Lane and the Bodley Head, 1924), p. 35; Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service (WAAS): 795.02/BA2302/ Box17/4118.
[13]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box40/8606.
[14]J. Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration in Protestant England, 1558-1689* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2000), p. 187.
[15]WaCRO: DR17/1. See M. Harris, 'The "Captain of Oliver's Army" and the Wixford Catholics: Clerical/Lay Conflict in South Warwickshire, 1640-1674', *Warwickshire History*, XVI: 4 (Winter 2015/2016), pp. 170–86.
[16]WaCRO: DR240/1. Information from Jane Beevers.

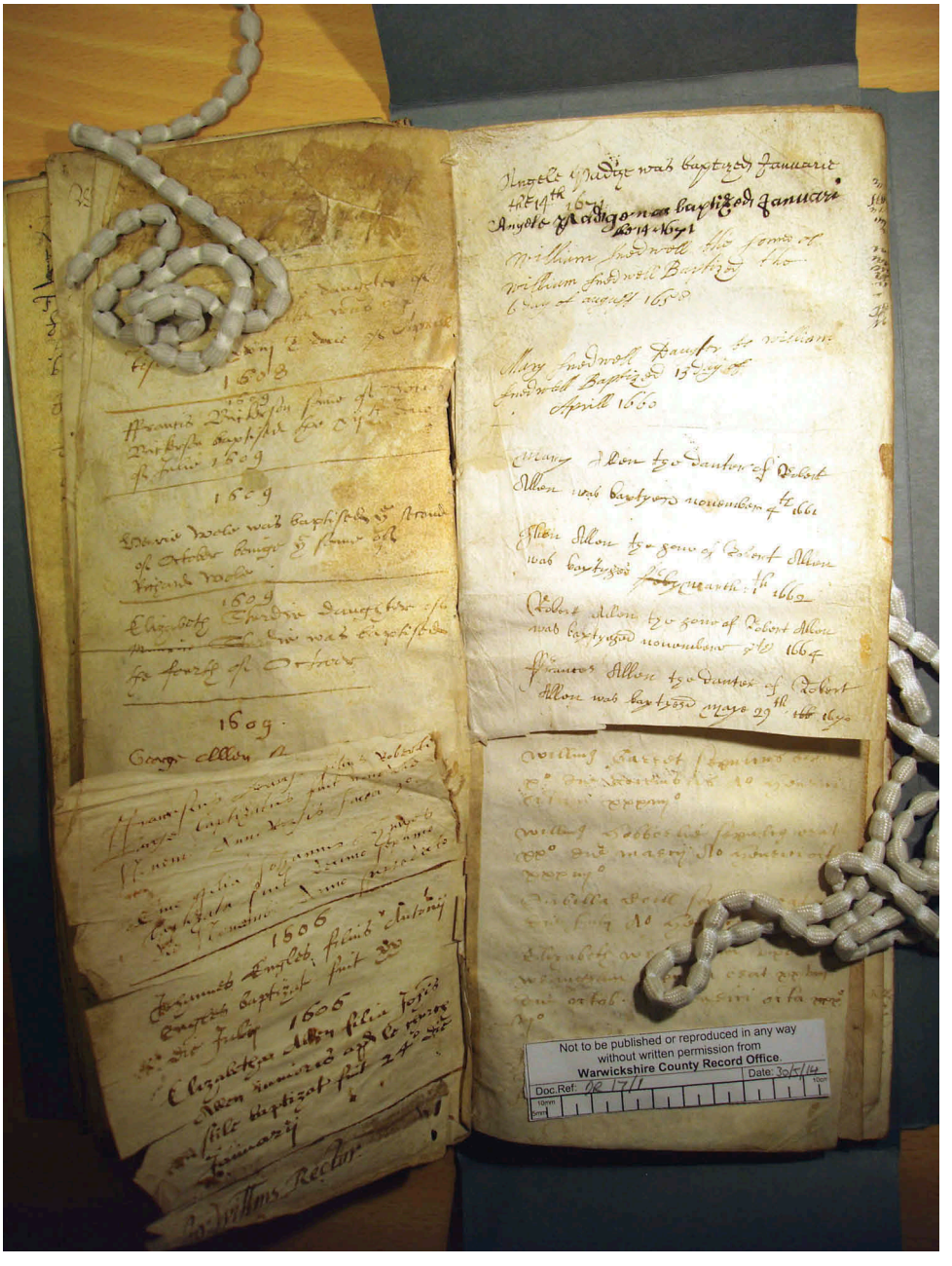


Figure 1. The Wixford parish register, 'cut and mangled' by 'papists' during Timothy Kirke's incumbency, Warwickshire County Record Office: DR17/1.

The parish register, normally completed by the clergyman, witnessed by the churchwarden and kept in the parish chest, represented the rites of passage of nominally the whole parish community and those who entered into and departed from it. Its purpose was mainly administrative, but even as first conceived in 1538 the registers were a response to a religio-political event, the Henrician break with Rome, and as such had a

symbolic significance in uniting parishioners within a protective, and at least partially enforced, universal Anglican communion. Only fervent Catholics and radical Protestants used their own priests and meetings to conduct baptisms and marriages, and there were few burial grounds for dissenting groups until at least the end of the century. However, the Act of August 1653 ordering ministers to relinquish the register to the hands of a locally-elected, lay official, confusingly called a Register, disrupted this link between the register-book and the Anglican clergy and community and this link was not always fully restored in 1660.

In Burton Dassett, the retention of the parish-register by the 'Register' after the re-establishment of the Anglican church undermined the authority of the Anglican and ultimately nonjuring vicar, Chamberlaine Hamersely.[17] The parish contained a strong group of Nonconformists of whom the 'Register', Thomas Basse, was almost certainly one. It was served spiritually during the civil wars by a former parliamentarian army officer, Richard Mansell, who refused to subscribe to the Act of Uniformity and was replaced by Hamersley in 1662 though his congregation still worshipped at a conventicle in the house of one of the parish's chief inhabitants.[18] Basse, the former parish clerk, was elected 'Register' in March 1655/1656 and kept the parish register in a clear and confident hand but when Mansell vacated the living Basse retained the register-book. It was only in December 1665, when Basse was on his death-bed, that the register was handed over to Hamersley through a third party. Basse signed his agreement to the transfer, not with his usual bold signature but with a mark, indicating illness, and he died the following month.[19]

Parish registers were quite commonly falsified by parishioners to give themselves an advantage in inheritance and marital disputes. An altered baptism entry to prove a son's majority at Nether Whitacre was noted at the church court in 1684,[20] and a marriage entry at Morton Bagot was used as a 'weapon' against the rector, John Goodwin, accused of performing an 'incestuous' marriage of one parishioner to his brother's widow. The churchwarden, who was also the groom's father, 'borrowed' the register and tore out the original marriage entry, claiming Goodwin had been too drunk to perform the ceremony and it had never taken place. However, he had forgotten that register copies were sent annually to the bishop. This proved that not only had Goodwin performed the original marriage, but also that the couple had a child the following year.[21] Parish registers were therefore much more than records of rites of passage. They could be used as instruments of humiliation and power over unwelcome or unpopular parsons by uncooperative individuals and communities as well as being used by clergy and community to record notable events.

Lack of cooperation with the minister undermined a fundamental function of his role as Anglican spiritual leader in his community, to maintain 'quietness, peace and

[17]Non-jurors were clergy and others who refused to swear allegiance to William III having already sworn the same to the exiled James II who fled after William's invasion in 1688.
[18]The Act of Uniformity of 1662 required all Anglican clergy to adhere to the rites and ceremonies of the new Prayer Book. About 2000 clergy refused and were ejected from their parishes.
[19]E. C. Westacott, 'Some Account of the Parish of Burton Dassett, Warwickshire, from Nov. 1660-Jan. 1665', *Transactions of the Birmingham Archaeological Society*, 60 (1940), 96–111; WaCRO, Burton Dassett parish register, DR 292/1.
[20]Lichfield Record Office (LRO): B/C/5/1684/397.
[21]SSAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box4; b736/BA2006/33/116-152. The act of sexual relations with the brother or sister of a dead spouse was termed 'incest' and was relatively common.

love' in and with his congregation, revealing an unsound relationship with his parishioners. This non-cooperation was sometimes exposed over the provision of communion wine. At this period, Anglican Holy Communion was generally held three times a year, at Christmas, Palm Sunday or Easter Sunday and Whitsun, and the wine was usually provided by the churchwardens and listed in their accounts. In the church courts the churchwardens' omission of communion wine was noted at Dunchurch at Palm Sunday or Easter, 1668 and 1669 and at Tredington in 1673, although the reason for omission in these cases was not mentioned.[22] The case of Thomas Whitehead, the Haseley churchwarden's refusal to co-operate over the provision of wine is evident from his acrimonious dispute with his rector, Samuel Ainge. Ainge asked Whitehead to provide two quarts of wine for Easter communion, but according to Ainge he provided only one and then over-charged for it.[23] Although this may look like Whitehead's attempt to reduce the cost, it was in fact part of a disagreement over religious differences. Whitehead was a nonconformist and Ainge claimed he had undermined his minister with sabotage and verbal abuse ever since he had arrived in Haseley in 1686. Whitehead accused Ainge of incurring unnecessary expense in administering the sacrament too often. More significantly Ainge accused Whitehead of false accounting, being 'rude and insolent', calling the Christmas Day sacrament 'a new trick' and referring to the wine as 'Porridge'.[24] He also described how Whitehead passed the church door during Sunday services to attend his own church, 'endeavouring to draw others along with him, to make a faction against the Minister of his own parish'.[25] Despite regularly acting as churchwarden, Whitehead had no compunction in using his role to undermine his minister with subversive actions in a parish where nonconformists were powerful enough to defy the ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Equally uncooperative nonconformist churchwardens defied their rector, Richard Saunders, at what he termed the 'very troublesome parish' of Atherstone-on-Stour, by refusing to buy the bread and wine for communion, an omission that reflected their differing confessional beliefs and Saunders' unpopularity.[26] Two wardens refused to buy the items in 1688, when Saunders had specifically requested it, 'so that many good Christians which had prepared themselves to receive [communion] were frustrated'. The furious Saunders saw this as a direct attack on the established Church and accused one warden of attending conventicles instead of the parish church, and undervaluing 'the Sacraments which [if they] are dear and precious to all good men are so inconsiderable to such a licentious Apostate and if he shall escape without punishment, I say "Farewell Christianity"'. Saunders' dispute with another churchwarden in 1694 erupted over unfulfilled church repairs, a missing 'communion table' and again, the absence of communion bread and wine which Saunders was forced to provide himself. He warned the diocesan officers that if nothing was done 'it will be a thing of fatal Consequence to

[22]LRO: B/V/1/73, B/V/1/76; WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box22/4981.
[23]SSAS: 807/BA2289/10(xiii).
[24]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box43/9038;807.093/BA2724(i), p. 11; D. J. Appleby, *Black Bartholomew's Day – Preaching, Polemic and Restoration Nonconformity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 42, notes that 'porridge' was a colloquialism for the new Book of Common Prayer and was shouted at intruded ministers in London in 1662.
[25]WAAS: 807/BA2289/10/(xiii); Whitehead probably attended meetings at adjacent Wroxall led by the ejected minister, Thomas Fownes, see J. L. Salter, 'Warwickshire Clergy, 1660-1714', 2 vols (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 1975), 2, pp. 150–51.
[26]As described by the churchwarden in 1682, a year after Saunders' arrival, WAAS: 807/BA2289/1(xv).

this place and encourage others to despise the Authority of the Church as much as [the churchwarden] does'.[27] The difficulties seem to be related as much to Saunders himself and his hard-line attitude to his nonconformist parishioners. However, he remained at Atherstone until his death in 1718, defying ecclesiastical authority himself in 1708 when he was threatened with suspension for failing to attend the Visitation.[28]

Direct accusations against clergymen were relatively common and Donald Spaeth found in Wiltshire that 'The payment of tithes was the issue over which parsons and parishioners quarrelled most often in the century after the Restoration'.[29] The tithe cases brought by Thomas Langley, vicar of Aston Cantlow, resulted in public accusations against him reinforced by hidden pressures placed on his witnesses. Langley had already made himself unpopular in the neighbouring parish of Haselor where he had intruded himself in place of the well-liked, but unlicensed curate, John Shelton thirteen years before. Shelton had retaliated, and assisted by the churchwarden had raised a petition against Langley which included some false signatures, but Langley held on.[30] In 1697 he was accused of fathering an illegitimate child on a dismissed household servant in his main parish of Aston Cantlow. Although the servant's motive was almost certainly revenge, the case offered an opportunity for some of Langley's local Catholic parishioners, headed by the influential Skinner family, to give evidence against him for presenting some of them for tithe-refusal and church non-attendance.[31]

If witnesses can be believed, the local Catholics used covert methods to reinforce their attack on Langley. They summoned the pregnant girl's brother to the recusant Mrs Skinner's house where he was reportedly bribed to give false witness against Langley, although he refused. In an extraordinary battle in the birthing-chamber, a local Catholic midwife reportedly told the servant-girl when she was in the middle of labour that if she wanted 'Salvation' she should name the true father whom she had previously heard the girl say was Mr Langley, while Mrs Langley, who was also present, allegedly told the girl 'there was but a hair's breadth between her and Death' and she should not 'wrong Mr Langley' but father the child on a local millworker.[32] Langley survived the scandal, supported by local JPs who believed the accusations resulted from 'nothing but absolute revenge Promoted and incouraged by the advice of Miscreants and Atheistical persons' (the latter term often being used to refer to Catholics as well as to the irreligious).[33] Another supporter could not stand by 'while [Langley's] malicious Parishioners are indeavouring his Ruin…I understand about 30 of his Parish have agreed to take this Opportunity to out him of his living'. Some he said had signed to Langley's innocence but 'others are Dissenters, others go to no publick worship, the rest because they mayn't have their Tythes at their own Rate are become his Enemies, & I do really believe this last to be the ground of all their Displeasures'.[34]

[27]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box4; 795.02/BA2302/Box45/9391; Box53/10897.
[28]Salter, 2, pp. 353-4; WAAS: 795.093/BA2712.
[29]Spaeth, *Church in Danger*, p. 133.
[30]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/8361-8365.
[31]The Skinners were of Shelfield hamlet in Aston Cantlow. Four sons of Anthony and George Skinner became seventeenth-century Catholic priests, including John, a chaplain to the Catholic Cannings of Foxcote, see G. Anstruther, *The Seminary Priests, A Dictionary of the Secular Clergy of England and Wales 1558-1850*, Vols. 2, 3 (Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon, 1975, 1976).
[32]WAAS: 795.61/BA2638, depositions of William Young, Frances Jones, Catherine Bartlam and Isabella Price.
[33]WAAS: 795.61/BA2638, letter from JPs John Clopton and Thomas Rawlins.
[34]WAAS: 795.61/BA2638, letter from Benjamin Whalley.

Rumours of clerical 'scandal' were powerful 'hidden' weapons in humiliating the clergy and creating friction between them and their parishioners. Like Langley, Roger Hughes, the rector of Bedworth, had been libelled in 1719 by two men with whom he was in dispute over tithes. This may have been behind the rumour spread the following year by two men from the adjacent mining communities of Griff and Chilvers Coton who 'scandalized' Hughes, claiming 'The little parson of Bedworth' had fathered an illegitimate child on his servant and 'was to give her £20 and … keep the child'.[35] The rumour of sexual scandal spread by a resident at Bidford in 1708/9 was not about the vicar, James Robinson, but against his wife, although Robinson's unpopularity was the cause. Since his arrival in 1696 Robinson had harassed his parishioners over tithe payments and in 1702 his three churchwardens presented him at the church court for 'refusing to visit the sick and for not being a sober and peaceable man'. The quarrel was resolved but Robinson's tithe suits resumed and he was also resented for being curate at Temple Grafton so that every fortnight there was only one Sunday service at Bidford instead of the normal two. Robinson may have been seriously ill since on one occasion he was 'sick and fainted in the church' but some of his parishioners were unsympathetic and in 1708, three of them, probably frustrated at his lack of pastoral care, refused to pay his Easter offerings or the clerk's wages.[36]

The following year there was an attack not on Robinson himself but on his wife Anne when George Baylies told his neighbour a lewd story about Anne seducing and having sex with him on their journey to a funeral in Pershore. Although the story was started by Baylies it was the neighbour who spread it around who was prosecuted, performing his penance in church in front of James, Anne and some parishioners.[37] Anne's humiliation was a powerful attack on her husband, and whether the story was true or false, the shame attached to his wife may well have been more difficult for Robinson to bear than a direct attack on him personally and he died the following year. These cases of rumour surrounding clerical misbehaviour illustrate James C. Scott's finding that effective resistance against authority could be collective as well as individual. Rumour involved the covert passing of gossip and the collective sharing of contempt and ridicule, at the same time, as Scott pointed out, minimizing the risks of identification as the 'weak' sought to undermine the 'powerful'.

Finally, in another example of a humiliation through private but collective ridicule an anonymous manuscript libel against the vicar, the old 'puritan' Thomas Pilkington, was secretly spread around Claverdon in 1679. The perpetrator was found to be his curate, who

> in an abusive, scandalous and opprobious manner [did] scatter abroade and disperse aboute the parish of Claverdon and other places … a famous and notorious Libel or lampoone written by [his] owne hand wherein [he had] most basely and irreverently reproached, vilified and abused [Pilkington]

on purpose to prejudice him and 'render him an Ill man amongst his Neighbours', even delivering a copy to the vicar himself.[38] The curate's purpose was possibly to highlight

[35]LRO: 1719/150-152; 1720/184-187.
[36]SAAS: BA2707(i); BA2289/3(iii); BA2336/2.
[37]WAAS: BA2336/Box7.
[38]Pilkington was born in 1605 and had been parson of Claverdon since 1629, see P. Styles, 'A seventeenth-century Warwickshire clergyman: Thomas Pilkington, vicar of Claverdon', in *Studies in Seventeenth Century West Midlands History* (eds) D. M. Barratt and P. Morgan (Kineton: The Roundwood Press, 1978), p. 71; WAAS: b795.02/2237/1.

the fact that the elderly Pilkington was, after fifty years of serving the parish, proving to be less effective as a minister. Philip Styles does not mention the lampoon incident but he does refer to the fact that Pilkington's hand in the parish register 'becomes increasingly shaky' after 1676, and the consequences of infirmity and age were not infrequently cited as reasons to condemn Warwickshire ministers.[39]

These examples of secretive resistance by theft, alterations or retention of registers, non-cooperation and the spreading of rumours and gossip were, as James C. Scott suggested, small, subtle gestures. In many cases, like the 'eavesdropping' against Samuel Wilkes and the theft of the pulpit cushion they were perpetrated by individuals. In some, like the non-cooperation of churchwardens at Atherstone-on-Stour and Haseley, other sympathetic parishioners were likely to have supported the chief protagonists which made it less likely the clergyman would retaliate, resulting in deeper humiliation for him. In the examples of Langley, Pilkington and Robinson whole communities were involved in sharing rumours. However, all these cases characteristically meet Scott's belief that 'hidden transcripts' needed little coordination and 'typically avoid[ed] any direct, symbolic confrontation with authority'.[40] They thus seldom aroused a direct and ferocious response, or at least as ferocious a response as the ecclesiastical courts allowed at that period, which was limited. As Scott's 'everyday forms of peasant resistance', they proved extremely effective, undermining the incumbent's position as pastoral leader and spiritual guide and bringing the position of the Church and its more unpopular clergy to the attention of the ecclesiastical courts.

Public Transcripts

We turn now to more public forms of 'everyday resistance' to clerical authority, examining examples of parishioners' misuse of symbolic items of Anglican worship and direct confrontation between clergy and laity. Church bells were a potent symbol in seventeenth-century religious and superstitious pan-European culture, representing Christianized heathen traditions which involved the ringing of church bells to drive out witches, protect communities from storms and warn of danger.[41] They could also be part of the 'rough music' still found in the 'festive culture' of the *charivari* and in the disorderly ringing 'associated with juvenile and drunken excess'.[42] Bells rang out the Anglican message, summoning believers to services and marking rites of passage, but

[39]Styles, 'Thomas Pilkington', p. 88. In the 1690s the Nonconformist Coventry pastor Thomas Shewell (died 1694) was described as 'infirm, deafish, and unacceptable to many of the most judicious hearers', A. Gordon, ed., *Freedom after Ejection, a review (1690-1692) of Presbyterian and Congregational Nonconformity in England and Wales* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1917), p. 118. In 1701 the sprightly seventy-four-year-old Bishop William Lloyd suspended John Goodwin of Morton Bagot, also in his seventies, for drunkenness and other 'irregularities' which must have arisen from local complaints. Lloyd wrote: 'I thank God my old age has not yet disabled me from doing my duty, as [Goodwin's] has unqualified him for a Cure of souls…', D. Robertson, ed., *Diary of Francis Evans, Secretary to Bishop Lloyd 1699-1706*, Worcestershire Historical Society, 45, (Oxford: J. Parker, The Worcestershire Historical Association, 1903), pp. 55, 60–61.

[40]Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, p. xvi.

[41]J. Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1993), pp. 560–61; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971, Penguin, 1991), pp. 34, 56, 59–60.

[42]M. Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and the "Reform of Popular Culture" in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 105 (Nov. 1984), 81. There is evidence of only one Warwickshire *charivari*, held in 1691, H. C. Johnson and N. J. Williams, eds., *Quarter Sessions, 1650-1657*, Warwick County Records, Vol. IX (Warwick: Sir Edgar Stephens, 1964), p. xiii; Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways*, p. 67.

they also celebrated the visits of royalty and other notables and were reminders of important occasions and anniversaries. Sometimes their message had political meaning such as the commemoration of 17 November, Queen Elizabeth's accession day, revived in the 1670s and 1680s for ideological reasons as Whig opponents of the Stuart regime celebrated English Protestantism for propaganda purposes. Ringing on 5 November continued in most parishes and towns throughout the seventeenth century, even during James II's reign.[43] For the godly, 'bell-ringing was superstition' but could be tolerated when bells were rung in celebration of the triumph of Protestantism such as the accession of William III and Mary in February 1689. On the other hand, bells could be rung to celebrate events that supported Catholicism, such as the birth of James, son of James II, in June 1688.

Bells were used then to speak with many voices, but their message was often unclear and could be contested. As David Cressy notes, 'who controlled [the bells] was often as important as the message they proclaimed. … [and] communities were not necessarily united in these festivities'.[44] It is the use of church bells to express anger against the clergy which is of interest here. This was the case in the town of Shipston-on-Stour in 1700 when two sons of the Quaker, John Hart, and others broke into the church 'at an unseasonable time of night, ringing the bells without leave and breaking the Sixth bell'.[45] The incident was part of the on-going dispute between the furious Hart and the Shipston curate, John Thomas, which began over a tithe dispute and deteriorated into corruption allegations in a town where Quakers were relatively numerous and powerful.

At Moreton Morrell during the winter of 1705/6, both the bells and the church keys were used by the churchwarden, a local gentleman, to humiliate the rector, John Parry. Parry had only been admitted as rector a few months before but the churchwarden claimed that he had no right to the rectory and it was his duty to deny him the living and find another minister to serve. The churchwarden took the keys from the parish clerk and 'in a violent and insolent manner' had the bells rung 'in Contempt and open Defiance' of Parry. He locked the church door and for six weeks kept the keys, stopped the parish clerk from tolling the bell and prevented Parry from conducting the service, administering Communion, or having access to his vestments in the parish chest, while he appointed other ministers to preach.[46] The situation became so extreme that two months later the bishop sent Parry to his other living and appointed a local schoolmaster to take over at Moreton 'for the peace and benefit of [the] parish'.[47] The Moreton Morrell bells, and their silence, had loudly proclaimed the humiliation of a minister appointed by the Bishop. It signalled the successful everyday resistance of a parishioner against the ecclesiastical hierarchy at the time when it was particularly vulnerable and the 'Church in Danger' debates were taking place in parliament.[48]

[43]D. Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells: National Memory and the Protestant Calendar in Elizabethan and Stuart England* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989, Stroud, Sutton Publishing Limited, 2004), pp. 50–67.
[44]Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways*, p. 68; Cressy, *Bonfires and Bells*, pp. 71, 79, 68.
[45]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box1.
[46]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box4.
[47]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box5. Salter is incorrect in stating the two John Parry entries (571 and 572) are of different men; they are undoubtedly the same, Salter, 2, p. 311.
[48]'The Church in danger' was a rallying cry of High Church Tories in the reign of Queen Anne. They secured debates in Parliament aimed at curbing increasing Whig power in state and local government following the more lenient treatment of dissenters after the 'Toleration' Act of 1689.

The expression of religious and political views locally was a cause of other contested bell-ringing. In 1690, for instance, a report at the church court referred to 'violent actions in the belfry' in the tall tower of St George's in Brailes, a scattered township in south Warwickshire, when 'some rude people did… demolish the ringing loft' at 'Eventide' on 1 March. The loft had been erected with the permission of the Catholic lord of the manor, but on 3 March the churchwarden, who had Quaker connections, ordered carpenters to remove the damaged loft without the permission of either the vicar or the local lord. There were powerful Catholic and Quaker groups in Brailes and superficially this looks like the result of a quarrel based on confessional differences between parishioners. It is more likely, however, that the attack and subsequent demolition of the loft was associated with the violently contested local parliamentary elections the month before, in February 1690, when Whig candidates were supplanted by Tories. Bells which should have heralded a Whig victory may well have been destroyed rather than ring in a Tory one.[49]

In Worcestershire 'a series of bitterly contested' parliamentary elections since 1690 and the political uncertainties following the death of Queen Anne in August 1714 was probably behind the misuse of the Eckington church bells that October. When a local gentleman 'gave a treat … to Mr Vernon's friends at Eckington', a township with a high proportion of nonconformists, it was presumably in order to win Whig votes prior to the elections the following year.[50] Some young men met to ring for the occasion and were given three shillings but felt this was insufficient payment and alarmed the neighbourhood by ringing the bells backwards. When challenged by a local gentleman they told him 'they had rung for a roundhead's pleasure and were now ringing backwards for their own'. They refused to leave the church, threatened to hang the gentleman and abused him with 'ill language'.[51] The incident raises interesting questions not least about the loaded word 'roundhead' used in connection with the Whig candidate, Vernon.

A similar situation occurred in Newcastle-under-Lyme in Staffordshire. A case of profaning the church by the irregular ringing of the church bells after the election of February 1715 was brought before the church court in 1716. According to a local shoemaker, the bells were rung from six in the morning for several hours, presumably in celebration after Lord Paget (lately turned Whig) and William Ward were elected as Knights of the Shire over Ralph Sneyd and Mr Henry Vernon. The ringers were reported as pointedly ignoring the churchwardens' requests to desist as the noise offended the minister. Ringers were notoriously boisterous and usually physically fit young men but they were unlikely to be voters. These examples from Eckington and Newcastle reveal that open disrespect for the clergy and the Church could be signalled by inappropriate bell-ringing, but they also reveal a level of political sophistication

[49]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box48/9881; A. A. Hanham, 'Constituencies, Warwickshire, 1690-1715', in *The History of Parliament* (HoP) <www.historyofparliamentonline.org> [accessed 30 August 2017].
[50]A. Whiteman, ed., *The Compton Census: A Critical Edition* (London: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1986), p. 181, states there were 44 nonconformists out of a population of 148. S. Hanley, 'Constituencies, Worcestershire, 1690-1715', HoP <www.historyofparliamentonline.org> [accessed 30 August 2017]. 'Mr Vernon' was probably the Whig Thomas Vernon of Hanbury Hall, who won a seat from the Tories in the election of 1715, R. S. Lea, 'Constituencies, Worcestershire, 1715-1754', HoP <www.historyofparliamentonline.org> [accessed 30 August 2017].
[51]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box11.

amongst disenfranchised villagers during the turbulent period after the Hanoverian succession amid fears of a Jacobite rebellion.[52]

Church bells were an obvious symbol for reinforcement of complaint against the clergy since their sound could hardly be more public, but much more humble objects were also used by parishioners as a focus of resistance to clerical power. Between 1669 and 1675 Nathaniel Swanne, vicar of Alderminster, and his churchwarden battled over the church-tower clock, which Swanne wanted to have repaired and two major landowners did not, mainly because the rates would have to be increased to pay for it.[53] This was just one skirmish in Swanne's war with the churchwarden that had begun in 1661. It included accusations of neglect and a presentation against Swanne for not repairing his church 'mounds', verbal abuse, non-payment of tithes and fees and the removal of two family pews (including the churchwarden's) without consultation in order to re-position the reading-desk.[54] In 1995, Eric Carlson noted at Dullingham in Cambridgeshire a similar outcry over the destruction of a family pew without consultation when a new reading desk was erected for the minister. The owner of the pew, built by his father and invested with much family pride and honour, refused to remove his hat and was absent from church services not through nonconformity but because he was out of charity with the minister for treating him with such disrespect.[55] Incumbents, often in post for only a few years, might not appreciate the 'cultural, social and economic currents of [their] parish, and … the confusing and often contradictory patchwork of loyalties, affiliations and rivalries that made up a local community'.[56] Their insensitivity to such issues could easily create animosity leading to accusations of 'scandal' against them.

In 1669 at Wixford in south-west Warwickshire ill-feeling was aroused over the fate of a large yew-tree in the churchyard which was a source of pride to the parishioners and came to symbolize the clash between two cultures: the zealous 'godliness' of the rector, Timothy Kirke, and 'festive' culture in a parish with a high proportion of Catholics. The parishioners valued the tree for its unique size 'the like whereof is not to be found in all the Diocese', and complained to the bishop that 'Mr Kirke is now about to cut it down'. Kirke claimed his 'Papistical and Atheistical parishioners' were lying, since he was only intending to lop it to prevent them from cutting its green boughs for 'superstitious uses'.[57] He described how 'a company of Papists and others, men and women, to the number of ten or eleven,' armed with forks, well-drags and stones, arrived with the churchwarden 'shaking his fork', and threatening to fetch his gun if Kirke's men would not get down from the yew-tree. The warden then struck the ague-ridden Kirke violently on the chest. Confessional differences were at the heart of this animosity. Kirke complained to the diocese that one of the 'chief inhabitants' kept a priest, and most of the parishioners attended mass instead of the parish church but his

[52]SAAS: B/C/5/1716, 54-154; E. Cruickshanks, 'Constituencies, Staffordshire, 1715-1754', HoP <www.historyofparliamentonline.org> [accessed 30 August 2017].
[53]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box16/3794.
[54]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box 4/1032, 12/2834, 10/2364, 24/5365, 24/5510, 25/5656, 27/6096, 16/3794, 17/4118.
[55]E. Carlson, 'The origins, function, and status of the office of churchwarden, with particular reference to the diocese of Ely', in *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725*, ed. by M. Spufford (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 164–207.
[56]Appleby, *Black Bartholomew's Day*, p. 37.
[57]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box16/3807, 3808.This pre-Reformation tradition took place at festivals such as Christmas, Palm Sunday (also called 'Yew Sunday') or May Day, R. Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England, the Ritual Year, 1400-1700*, 2001 edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 20-1.

parishioners claimed the rector abused and bullied them over 'papist' behaviour such as bowing at the name of Jesus. The parishioners defied Kirke's presentations of them for church non-attendance and unproven marriages and they used the church courts to discredit him. They claimed Kirke was drunk during a burial service, omitted a royal fast, failed to administer communion at Easter or to the dying and extorted huge burial fees from the poor. Former female servants demeaned him with details of his 'vomiting and purging as he lay on his Bed' in a drunken stupor, and his prowling round the house attempting to seduce them 'in his lustful desire'.[58]

There is no reason to believe that all the accusations against Kirke, or many other ministers, were true. At the least, some may have been exaggerated in an attempt by their parishioners to have them suspended or removed. In 1706 the vicar of Warwick wrote that he doubted reports of his fellow-minister's absence from a Worcestershire living,

> because his parishioners are prejudiced, and he hath many dissenters in his Parish, who are his irreconcilable adversaries, and are ready to report more than is true of a Church Minister, when such reports are to his disadvantage.[59]

A minister, set apart from his parishioners through his education and role as spiritual leader, was an easy target for accusations, true and false, and clergy who 'lorded it' over their parishioners, or publicly 'particularized' their sins could quickly find themselves targeted.[60] It was not only the retention of church keys, arguments over the repair of clocks, or the destruction of family pews and churchyard-trees themselves that intensified the battles between clergy and parishioners. The objects were often deliberately chosen or came to form the battle-lines because of the emotional and religious value invested in them, representing access to Christian worship, symbols of personal faith and types of religious practice. The argument then was over who had the power to decide the form of that religious practice, and how a negotiated truce between clergy and parishioners was to be established.

Use of the Law in Everyday Resistance

Parishioners used the law, both ecclesiastical and secular, to reinforce accusations against their ministers. With greater literacy and an increase in printed material, practical knowledge of civil and canon law was no longer restricted to the clergy, gentry and magistrates. Literate but politically subordinate parishioners could use it too. Emma Watson's study of church court cases in Elizabethan Yorkshire found that parishioners and clergy used the system for their own purposes, being 'well aware of what would catch the attention of the authorities'. Watson concludes that parishioners knew the legal process and could make the court work for them and this was equally true in post-Restoration Warwickshire.[61]

[58]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box20/4629; 794.052/BA2102/12(i); Harris, 'The "Captain of Oliver's Army"', pp. 170-186.
[59]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box5/26.
[60]Spaeth, *Church in Danger*, pp. 122, 47-50.
[61]E. Watson, 'Clergy, laity and ecclesiastical discipline in Elizabethan Yorkshire parishes', in *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England – Essays in Honour of Professor W. J. Sheils*, ed. by N. Lewycky and A. Morton (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 97–114.

Parishioners could control parish accounts, leases, terriers and custumals by restricting access to them or making alterations which could weaken clerical rights.[62] Andy Wood found that some Peak District custumals were partly fictitious, continuously 'created' through the 'sophisticated knowledge of legal principle and precedent possessed by many early modern plebians', and this was occasionally so in Warwickshire.[63] In 1672 John Powell, minister of Lapworth, complained that the parishioners 'pretend a Book of Customs against the Rights of the Rector' but there was little he could do about it.[64] In 1700 the Budbrooke churchwarden was presented for 'detaining the Writings and Evidence belonging to the church' and refusing to submit his parish accounts, and in Atherstone-on-Stour one parishioner solved a dispute over customs by simply tearing the page out of the town book.[65]

Women and dissenters, members of the community traditionally seen as lacking political power against the might of the established church, proved in some cases to have a surprising amount of legal control over the clergy. In 1671 the JP Sir John Knightley of Offchurch complained that local dissenters were putting pressure on the informers who denounced them for attending their religious meetings. The dissenters were bringing lawsuits against informers so frequently that Knightley and a fellow-JP intended to seek legislation to protect them.[66] Legally knowledgeable dissenters could equally well pressurise witnesses in cases of accusation against the clergy. In Lapworth in 1664 two young wives claimed to have seen the married rector, William Caudwell, in the act of adultery outside a local mill during a 'merry-making' inside. The women spread rumours around the parish about what they claimed to have seen and said they publicised their accusations 'sadly' and purely for Caudwell's 'reformation'. Opinion was divided on Caudwell's effectiveness as a minister. Some parishioners said he had served the parish well; others accused him of frequenting alehouses and cockfights, rarely administering the sacrament, and causing discord between men and their wives. Caudwell, a moderate Presbyterian who had become rector of Lapworth in 1658, was clearly part of a parish conflict between advocates of 'festive culture' and those who favoured a more 'godly' way of life and the accusations against him reflected the political uncertainties of the immediate post-Restoration period. It appears that Caudwell's two female accusers were bribed to denounce him by two male parishioners who resented the fact that he had subscribed to the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and in a sophisticated legal manoeuvre they even tried to have Caudwell's main witness, the mill-owner, imprisoned on a false charge so he could not provide the minister with an alibi.

Caudwell's case is an example of Braddick and Walter's 'knowing and manipulative consciousness' in action behind the everyday resistance of clerical accusation and humiliation. The two women who accused Caudwell were subordinate to him both by gender, and by social position as parishioners, but they took the moral high ground in seeking Caudwell's reformation from immoral behaviour and were deliberately used

[62]Ecclesiastical, or glebe, 'terriers' were descriptions of the endowments of a parish benefice drawn up by clergy, churchwardens and older parishioners, presented at a visitation and lodged in the diocesan registry. 'Custumals' were the written accounts of the customs of a manor or locality.
[63]A. Wood, *The Politics of Social Conflict, The Peak Country, 1520-1770*, 2007 edn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 135.
[64]WAAS: 794.093/BA2478, p. 105.
[65]WAAS: 795.02/BA2336/Box1; QS VIII, pp. 268-9.
[66]P.C. Heap, 'The Politics of Stuart Warwickshire, an elite study' (PhD thesis, Yale University, 1975), p. 74.

to increase the seriousness of the accusations against him while male parishioners worked covertly to use the law against him. Laura Gowing has written widely on 'the authenticating power bestowed upon the [female] teller' as she took centre-stage in the diocesan court to reveal the details of her story.[67] The law was an instrument of strength for supposedly weak women. They occasionally added their names to petitions, and often appeared as church court witnesses or searchers in bastardy cases.[68] They also had a legal advantage over men, articulated by the women who performed what Haigh describes as superstitious All Hallows bell-ringing in Somerset in 1568. The women involved declared '"they were lawless"', meaning, beyond the law, since a husband could not be held responsible for a wife's criminal acts, although as *pater familias* he was obliged to regulate his wife's behaviour.[69] Wives could not be fined and generally avoided indictment and imprisonment by the courts. Amongst Catholic recusants this allowed women to be left unmolested at home while their 'occasionally conforming' husbands went to church to avoid fines.[70]

A farmer's wife, Mary Ward, seemingly a politically weak Warwickshire woman, was able single-handedly to humiliate her minister in 1689 with little consequence to herself. She publicly defamed William Preston, curate of Hampton Lucy, because she believed he had reported her to the church court for riding 'astride behind old Foster'.[71] In retaliation Mary spread rumours that Preston had publicly urinated in front of an elderly woman at an alehouse and she was taken before the church courts for a lewd repetition of the story to two male visitors.[72] Her provocative accusation echoes Laura Gowing's female parishioner who 'very bouldly and without blushing' publicly accused the parson of immorality.[73] Like her, Mary acted out of frustration and revenge and with a fine grasp of the church court legal system. Believing she was being prosecuted by the diocesan court anyway, her shaming of Preston might well have led him to drop the charges. She was accused of trying 'to disparage and blast [Preston's] reputation' and the repercussions of her humiliating description of his behaviour damaged his reputation far more than her own.

A dispute in Brailes in 1679–80 reveals how parishioners could use the law in ingenious ways to subvert the collection of tithes. A tithe-farmer of Winderton hamlet, acting for the impropriator, had had several 'Quarrels and Controversies' with the inhabitants, including the Brailes incumbent, William Richardson. He had offered to act as mediator and in any case would benefit from his tithe-portion when it was paid.[74] However parishioners took matters into their own hands, spreading rumours of the tithe-farmer's alleged adultery. He was summoned to the diocesan court to face the charges but in retaliation he had one of the tithe-refusers arrested for defamation,

[67]L. Gowing, 'Gender and the language of insult in early modern London', *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (Spring, 1993), p. 5.
[68]Gowing, 'Ordering the body', in Braddick and Walter *Negotiating Power*, pp. 46–48.
[69]Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways*, p. 67.
[70]M. B. Rowlands, 'Recusant Women 1560-1640' in *Women in English Society 1500-1800* ed. by M. Prior (London, Routledge, 1991), pp. 150–53.
[71]This recalls Agnes Beaumont's denunciation by an Anglican minister in 1674, see J. Spurr, 'Religion in Restoration England', in *A Companion to Stuart Britain,* ed. by B. Coward (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 2003), p. 416 and Coffey, *Persecution and Toleration*, p. 177.
[72]WAAS: 794.052/BA2102/14(i), p. 164(v), 174, depositions of Thomas Hill, William Warner, Charles Bullock. There is no evidence that Mary was punished.
[73]Gowing, 'Gender and the language of insult', pp. 6–7.
[74]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box31/6836,6837.

believing the accusations had been made deliberately to disgrace him 'that thereby [the accusers] may bring him to Compound with them at the Lower Rate for their Tithes'.[75] The tithe-impropriator, William Bishop, thought the parishioners were using an even more sophisticated legal ruse by providing 'scandalous Information' against the tithe-farmer 'on purpose to get him thereby Excommunicated and so deprive him of the benefit of the law to prosecute his said Adversaries for detaining their Tithes'.[76] Even if this was not the case, Bishop certainly thought the parishioners, mainly small farmers, were capable of such calculated legal manoeuvres.

In Arley in 1699 two low-status parishioner brothers used more direct tactics against their unpopular rector, William Wight. That year Wight was physically assaulted and locked out of the church for amongst other things, presenting his parishioners for relatively trivial infringements such as sleeping in church. Wight had prosecuted the two brothers for swearing upon which they told him face to face: 'If you inform against us … we'll inform against you', suggesting they had no fear of using the church court against him and revealing how even humble parishioners would stand up to their clergyman when provoked.[77]

Conclusion

It is clear from these examples of power struggles between clergy and parishioners that, in Braddick and Walter's words, 'the weapons with which subordinated groups in their everyday lives could moderate the exercise of power', in this case, over the clergy, were many and varied. Parishioners operated very effectively in the private world of hidden transcripts, where, through the alteration of parish registers, non-cooperation over communion wine or eavesdropping at the thin walls of clergy houses the weak used subversive resistance to undermine their ministers. Public confrontations took place over the misuse of church bells, the refusal to hand over church keys and the public accusation of the clergy for immoral and scandalous behaviour while parishioners often showed a 'knowing and manipulative consciousness' in using the church courts and more covert legal means to defy clerical authority in their parishes. Resistance was both individual and collective and battle-lines were often drawn over items of particular significance to parishioners (such as the Wixford yew-tree and the Alderminster church clock) or potent symbols of Anglican power such as bells or pulpit cushions.

Parishioners did not often succeed in removing a minister, although some were temporarily suspended like John Goodwin of Morton Bagot and John Shelton of Haselor or occasionally deprived like John Parry of Moreton Morrell. A few resigned. Samuel Wilkes of Atherstone-on-Stour left the same year as the eavesdropping incident and Samuel Ainge of Haseley resigned after only two years of acrimonious dispute with his churchwarden. William Caudwell of Lapworth and James Robinson of Bidford died shortly after their cases came to the church court, perhaps as a result of the stress caused, while Nathaniel Swanne of Alderminster, Thomas Langley of Aston Cantlow

[75]Lambeth Palace Library: Court of Arches, Case 5452, D1220, f. 98-101.
[76]WAAS: 795.02/BA2302/Box31/6839. William Gibson has also noted the use of excommunication in the 1680s to deny voters the right to participate in elections, see W. Gibson, 'The limits of the confessional state: electoral religion in the reign of Charles II', *Historical Journal*, 51: 1 (2008), pp. 27-47.
[77]SAAS: B/V/1/92; D30/9/2/3/12, Edward Clark's deposition.

and Timothy Kirke of Wixford made fewer presentments against their parishioners after the incidents described than they had done before. Thus even small gestures of everyday resistance had their effect.

The parishioners who used resistance of this kind were sometimes the chief inhabitants of the community, often churchwardens and frequently dissenters, both radical Protestants and Catholics. However, they were also the 'middling sort' and the labourers, serving maids, widows, young wives, husbandmen and craftsmen of the community who were not afraid to complain directly to their minister or to take him before the church court. James C. Scott's original work on resistant behaviour was entitled *Weapons of the Weak* but this article has sought to show that in many communities it was not the relatively weak parishioners but the clergy and the Church that could be subordinate in clerical/lay relationships. Parishioners' actions reveal a subtle manipulation of social order as covert sabotage and open defiance of the clergy disrupted the smooth running of their ministries. It is evident that the limited punishments available to the church courts were not sufficient deterrents against angry, frustrated and sometimes united parishioners. They were willing and able, in Braddick and Walter's terms, to 'moderate the exercise of [clerical] power over them' in order to negotiate a new religious order accommodating their local needs and their preferred religious practices.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

Dr Maureen Harris was awarded a Ph.D. in 2015 from the University of Leicester for a thesis entitled "Schismatical people': conflict between clergy and laity in Warwickshire, 1660-1720′. Her article 'The 'Captain of Oliver's Army' and the Wixford Catholics: Clerical/Lay Conflict in South Warwickshire, 1640-1674′ was published in *Warwickshire History* in 2015/16 and she contributed to the acclaimed exhibition 'Battle-scarred' at Newark National Civil War Centre in 2015. She is currently completing an article on James Cooke, the Warwick surgeon and pastor, and is leading an HLF-funded educational project for the Friends of Warwickshire County Record Office, exploring with inexperienced volunteers the human cost of the First English Civil War through the transcription of over 200 Warwickshire parliamentarian 'Loss Accounts' to be published by the Dugdale Society.

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