

III. Puritans, Laudians and the Great Civil War

When James I came to the throne many puritans hoped that this devoutly Protestant monarch would be willing to listen to their pleas for further reformation of the English Church. With this in view, throughout the summer of 1603 godly ministers and laymen in divers English shires were hard at work drawing up petitions to be presented to the king. In Sussex the ministers' petition was drafted by Samuel Norden, whose house at Offham just outside Lewes became the headquarters for the operation. One of the two named as 'penners' of the gentry's petition was his kinsman William Newton, a lawyer noted for his piety and the owner of a fine house in Southover which his father had built out of Lewes priory stone. And one of those responsible for obtaining signatures to a third petition drawn up on behalf of the 'commonalty' of Sussex was a Lewes tradesman named William Pemell. All the petitioners urged the king to establish 'a learned, resident and godly ministry', while the ministers requested that he would also remove the burden of 'those ceremonies which press the conscience of many of God's servants'.¹

Norden led the delegation of four Sussex ministers who went to Hampton Court at the time of the famous Conference, called by the king to consider the puritan demands. But he did not grant the hoped for reforms. No heed was given to the request, dear to the hearts of the more militant puritans who had long been in trouble for nonconformity, that 'ceremonies' such as the wearing of the surplice and the giving of the ring in marriage be deemed unlawful. In fact, after Richard Bancroft became archbishop of Canterbury in 1605 all those ministers who persisted in their nonconformity were deprived of their livings. Among them was the redoubtable Norden who died, a deeply disappointed man, in 1609. In his will, of which his 'loving cousin' William Newton was an overseer, he described himself as 'minister of the gospel, though (to my great grief) debarred to serve the Lord Jesus and his church'. In some respects his death, followed by that of Archbishop Bancroft a year later (and the subsequent elevation to the primacy of the

more moderate George Abbott) marked the end of an era. The non-conforming puritans may have lost a battle but they had won the war. No longer were they to be hauled before the church courts for refusing to observe the rubrics of the Book of Common Prayer. For the next twenty years or so they (and the more moderate puritans who had not made a stand over ceremonies) were to be free to get on with what they regarded as their principal task – that of purifying a society corrupted by sin. To quote the words of the petition signed by nearly 1300 members of the ‘commonalty’ of Sussex, many of whom almost certainly lived in Lewes, what most concerned puritans of every hue was the need to shut up ‘the gulf which was wont to swallow up sin and defile the land with the loathsome smoke thereof’. And this necessitated the planting of a godly minister in every parish in the land.²

It is not always possible to discover the names of the parish clergy of Lewes at this period, but those who were graduates of Cambridge, where the influence of the eminent Elizabethan puritan teacher William Perkins remained strong, may well have been among the ‘hotter sort’ who favoured further reform of the Church. William Innians, who served St Mary Westout from 1598 to 1628 and St John sub Castro from 1602 to 1617, was an MA from an unspecified university, almost certainly Cambridge, where his son James (who was to succeed him as rector of St Mary’s) later graduated. Leonard Stalman, the young Yorkshireman who ministered at St Michael’s from 1622 and at Southover from 1624 until his departure for Steyning in 1630, was also a Cambridge man. When he signed St Michael’s registers he invariably referred to himself as ‘minister’ – the title by which puritan divines always preferred to be known. Others who used this appellation were Alexander Reason (an alumnus of that noted ‘puritan seminary’, Emmanuel College, Cambridge) who succeeded Stalman at Southover, and Richard Russell, who followed him at St Michael’s. Russell in turn was succeeded by another ‘minister’, George Bunyard, a Cambridge graduate, who had previously been rector of Norden’s old parish of Hamsey. In addition to the parish ministers there was also, from the late 1620s onwards, an extra-parochial preacher or ‘lecturer’ in the town. His duty was to supplement the spiritual fare on offer on Sundays with additional sermons on weekdays, when hearers would be drawn not only from the local population but from people coming into town for business or pleasure. Many market towns at this period had such lectureships, which were often established by puritan laymen wanting to maintain a preaching ministry free from episcopal control. In the case of Lewes it was funded by a group of local gentry headed by Sir Thomas Pelham of Halland in East Hoathly (nephew of the Marian exile), who had a house in the town, and Anthony Stapley of Patcham near Brighton. The man appointed to the post was Anthony Laphorne, who apparently held to the doctrine, which must have

been deeply satisfying to someone in his position, that 'preaching was the only means to salvation'. He was evidently a powerful preacher: Richard Baxter, who likened him to Bishop Latimer, was to call him a 'rustic thunderer'. What impression he made and how long he stayed is not known, but it seems that some kind of extra-parochial lectureship was maintained in the town until the late 1650s. Thus Lewes now possessed what it had so long lacked – a 'common preacher' who was able to devote all his energies into turning the place into what could properly be described as a 'puritan town'.³

If the puritans had things more or less their own way in Lewes proper, the same evidently did not apply over the bridge down in Cliffe. Cliffe, being in South Malling deanery, lay outside the jurisdiction of the Lewes archdeaconry court, where William Innians (like Underdowne before him) frequently sat as surrogate. The man who often presided over the deanery court meeting in St Thomas's church was evidently a person of very different temper – Anthony Hugget, rector of Cliffe from 1611 to 1642. Hugget, who combined the benefice with the vicarage of Glynde, was apparently not a university graduate but, judging by a rather verbose sermon he delivered at St Paul's Cross in 1615, prided himself on being a Greek scholar. And according to one of his friends, he was 'a sincere and painful preacher of the word of God'. Nevertheless he evidently had little sympathy with the 'hotter sort' among his parishioners. In 1623 William Pemell, who was probably the same man who had campaigned so vigorously for ecclesiastical reform 20 years earlier, was hauled before the deanery court 'for most unreverend sitting with his hat upon his head upon Easter Day and before and since in time of divine service'. By failing to take off his hat he was demonstrating the conviction, common among the godly, that a church was no different from any other building, and to treat it as specially sacred smacked of popery. Pemell's defiance was matched by that of another independent-minded Cliffe parishioner Thomas Prior, who took exception to Hugget's habit of haranguing his congregation from the pulpit: in 1623 he was accused of 'laughing at Mr Hugget' and giving him 'unfitting speeches' during the catechism.⁴

In the light of the accusations that were later to be made against him it is likely that one of the things that caused Hugget to harangue his parishioners was their failure to attend church regularly. Some, like the men accused of drinking in Widow Roson's house in Cliffe in service time one Sunday in January 1621, may have had an aversion not only to St Thomas's but to any kind of church-going. But others may have gone off to worship elsewhere in the town where the preaching was more to their liking. Such 'gadding to sermons' was a common puritan practice and it was probably especially so in Lewes, where there were so many churches in close proximity to one another and so many good sermons on offer. In the

absence of churchwardens' presentments for Malling deanery or (prior to 1638) for Lewes archdeaconry it is not known how many were formally charged with non-attendance at their parish churches, but a sampling of the diocesan Act books suggests that those Lewes people who were accused of this offence were not classifiable as puritans. The otherwise unknown Richard Smith of Lewes, who came up before the archdeaconry court in 1608 for 'not coming to church nor receiving holy communion this three or four years', was also in trouble on account of 'other grievous faults that he hath' and does not sound like one of the godly.⁵

Who constituted the 'godly' in Lewes at this time? As Patrick Collinson discovered when asking the same question about Cranbrook, surviving wills provide disappointingly few clues. Only a handful of 175 Lewes wills drawn up between 1600 and 1640 give any indication of the testator's personal beliefs. Most bequeathed their souls simply to 'Almighty God', with only a minority making any reference to Jesus Christ. One who did so was William Pemell's brother John, who used an unusually pious form of words: 'I do willingly and with a free heart render and give again into the hands of my Lord God and Creator my spirit, which he of his fatherly goodness gave unto me when he first fashioned me in my mother's womb, hoping most assuredly through the only merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made partaker of life everlasting.' But further investigation reveals that exactly the same words were used in 17 other Lewes wills and that the formula was supplied by the scribe employed to write it. He was George Seager, a prominent St Michael's parishioner who from 1625 until his death in 1647 was a member of the Fellowship of the Twelve; but it is not clear whether he devised the wording himself or borrowed it from a formulary. Only six Lewes testators entertained the Calvinistic hope that in the afterlife they would be numbered among 'the elect'. And only one, William Hollingdale, gave what appears to have been a strong personal affirmation. He adapted Seager's formula, adding 'love and compassion' to the divine attributes, and concluded with a ringing declaration of faith in the Father and the Son, 'unto whom with the Holy Ghost my Comforter, three persons but one true, eternal and ever-living God, be ascribed all dominion, power and glory now and forever more. Amen.' Since Hollingdale, unlike many testators, was not making his will on his death-bed, he presumably had time to consider carefully what words to use in composing it.⁶

Opposing Popery and Prelacy

What is impossible to discover, from wills or any other source, is the strength of people's *negative* religious feelings. In the later years of the sixteenth century Protestants in Lewes, as in other parts of the country faced with the threat of a Spanish attack, had generally been strongly anti-

Catholic in sentiment. But after the 1599 invasion scare had proved to be unfounded such feelings may have abated. In 1600 when an Irish labourer in Cliffe was found guilty of sedition for saying, 'I love not the Queen nor yet her laws, but I love the Pope and his laws with my heart', he was merely ordered to be pilloried and whipped. The authorities could afford to be lenient in a situation where such noxious opinions were unlikely to be infectious. In 1603 the rector of St Mary Westout with St John sub Castro reported that there were no 'papists' in either of his parishes and the same probably applied to other Lewes parishes for which no returns survive. But there were pockets of disaffection in the nearby villages. In that same year Lewis Bennett, a clergyman resident in Barcombe, was indicted for saying that 'Catholics were the true Protestants and that the puritans and Brownists were but dissemblers'. He had gone on to suggest that, in dealing with the ignorant and unlearned, images were preferable to sermons, 'for that sermons went in at one ear and out at the other'. This in fact may have happened to his own words, since no-one seems to have taken them seriously. The only local group of people known to have remained consistently loyal to the old religion was the small community ruled over by the Gages at Firle. It was here in 1619 that a man, who had probably been drinking deeply in the local hostelry, was overheard to say that in the event of a Spanish invasion 'he would sooner take the part of the Pope or the King of Spain than of the King of England'. Subsequent to this a rumour that the Gage family had 'six or seven cartloads of arms in their house in a secret place' was carried along the coast to Hastings by a Lewes butcher, who was promptly arrested and despatched to the Privy Council in London.⁷

Although, after peace was made with Spain in 1604, there may no longer have been real expectations that a foreign force, supported by a Catholic 'fifth column' within the county, would attempt an invasion of Sussex, widespread alarm was caused in the following year by the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot. When news of Guy Fawkes' failure to blow up the Houses of Parliament reached Lewes it would certainly have been received with rejoicing. Townsmen would have agreed with their new diocesan bishop Lancelot Andrewes, who had been consecrated two days previously, that November the Fifth should for ever be observed as a Holy Day. It is not known, however, whether all parishes complied immediately with the statutory requirement that the day should be marked by the ringing of church bells. The first mention in the churchwardens' accounts of St Michael's of a payment (of one shilling) for 'ringing the 5th of November' occurs in 1622; a less generous sum of 4d was expended two years later, but none for many years thereafter. There was evidently more enthusiasm for the commemoration down in Cliffe, where the churchwardens are found paying two shillings to bell-ringers on 5 November each year from 1621, when their surviving accounts begin. In 1634 they bought 'a Book of Prayer for

our great deliverance from the Gunpowder Treason' and in 1653 they recorded that the bells had been rung 'in remembrance of the great deliverance which ought never to be forgotten'. If in Lewes, as in Dorchester at this time, the day was marked by special sermons reminding people of the continuing Catholic menace, it is most likely that they were preached in the principal parish church of St Michael's.⁸

In Lewes as elsewhere anti-Catholic feelings probably became more pronounced after the accession of Charles I in 1625. The new king, who had a Catholic queen and was believed to have Romanist leanings himself, was a supporter of those in the Church of England who, so the puritans believed, were intent on unmaking the English Reformation. Confirmation of their fears came in 1628 when Richard Montagu became bishop of Chichester. He was a man of very different temper from his predecessor George Carleton, who had occupied the see from 1619. Montagu was what contemporaries termed an 'Arminian', one strongly opposed to the Calvinism that had been so prevalent in the Jacobean Church that it had virtually amounted to orthodoxy. He shared the sentiments of the bishop of London, William Laud, who wanted to restore the beauty and dignity that, he believed, had been lost to the church at the Reformation. The impact of the new conservatism, however, was probably not felt in Lewes until 1630 when George Thatcher, a young man recently ordained by Montagu, was instituted as rector of St John sub Castro. He was presented by the patron of the living, Edward Sackville, earl of Dorset, who was Lord Chamberlain to Queen Henrietta Maria and (in contrast to his grandfather Lord Buckurst) was evidently a man of conservative religious views. It is also significant that, unlike all the other university-educated clergy who had come to Lewes since the beginning of the century, Thatcher came not from Cambridge but from Oxford, which had become a bastion of Arminianism. Thatcher died prematurely in 1632 and was succeeded by another Oxford graduate Thomas Russell, who had been ordained by the strongly anti-puritan bishop of Oxford, Richard Corbet. But any attempts he may have made to persuade his parishioners to show reverence towards the 'sacrament of the altar' were evidently not altogether successful. In 1637 one of them, a widow named Devereux, was charged with 'unreverently abusing the holy sacrament' at a service at St John's. On receiving communion she had, 'as common fame and report goeth' exclaimed in a loud voice, 'Here is dry bread indeed!' And, to make it more palatable, she had proceeded to eat it with cheese.⁹

In the 1630s the restoration of the 'sacrament of the altar', which meant moving back the communion tables to their pre-Reformation positions, became a major cause of conflict in the parishes. In Sussex as elsewhere the placing of the communion tables altar-wise, behind rails at the east end of the churches, became what Anthony Fletcher has termed 'the touchstone

of Arminianism'. Inevitably it tended to be the parishes closest to Chichester that were first affected by the new regime and it took time for the tide of change to reach Lewes. Significantly it was Cliffe, which lay within the direct jurisdiction of Laud (now archbishop of Canterbury) that first felt its impact. Like the early Christian missionaries, the Arminian reformers evidently came to Lewes along the ancient corridor from Kent. The standard-bearer was Sir Nathaniel Brent, Laud's vicar-general, who arrived in Cliffe in July 1635 and promptly ordered the communion table to be placed in a north-south position and 'railed in with a decent rail to keep off dogs and to free it from pollutions'. He also ordered the churchwardens in all other parishes to take Cliffe's altar-rails as 'their pattern' and to ensure that parishioners knelt when taking the sacrament. His instructions would doubtless have met with approval from Hugget, who was later to be criticised by his parishioners for making even the lame to kneel at communion. Hugget would also have been pleased by the injunction that priests should henceforth be provided with suitable garb. The Cliffe churchwardens, however, were probably not so happy. Soon after Brent's visitation they were obliged to spend £1 10s for two and a half yards of purple broadcloth for the communion table and £3 4s for a new surplice of 'fine holland' for their rector. Even if they had no conscientious objections to the Laudian reforms they might have jibbed at spending nearly a quarter of their annual income on restoring the 'beauty of holiness' to their church. When compared with the total of 4s paid that year 'to poor travellers at several times', £4 14s would have been considered a very substantial sum.¹⁰

While the Cliffe churchwardens apparently complied with Brent's instructions, it is not known how many of those in other Lewes parishes were prepared to do so. What is clear is that two years later the churchwardens of St Michael's had still not done as they had been bidden. When the archdeaconry court was held in the church on 19 July 1637 William Nevill, the diocesan chancellor, was horrified to see that the table was still in its east-west position and proceeded to move it 'with his own hands' into a north-south one. A week later, however, John Parmely, one of the churchwardens, who doubtless thought that setting the table altar-wise was popish, went into the church one evening and moved it back again. He was promptly summoned to attend the archdeaconry court held at St Michael's on 1 August and in the following month the parish had to pay 7s for his absolution. How many parishioners supported his action it is impossible to say, but it is clear that not everyone approved of Parmely as a person and some were apparently prepared to blacken his reputation. In the following year, after he had ceased to be a churchwarden, he and his wife were accused of something that, among puritans, was regarded as a very serious offence – 'living in incontinency before their marriage'. But since the only evidence offered was the birth of a baby 'within one or two

and thirty weeks next after their marriage' (indicating that it was only about one month premature) the charge was apparently rejected.¹¹

The Laudian insistence upon uniformity in the church also led to a systematic attempt to stamp out nonconformist practices among the clergy. In July 1635, when Brent came to Lewes, Richard Russell (minister at St Michael's) and George Bunyard (minister at Hamsey) were castigated for failing to bow at the name of Jesus and, threatened with suspension, promised that they would henceforth conform to the law of the church. In 1638, following the issue of visitation articles by Brian Duppa, the newly-appointed bishop of Chichester, Bunyard (now minister at St Michael's and Southover) again got into trouble. To the question, 'Doth he use the prescribed form of prayer before his sermon to prevent the indiscreet flying out of some in their extemporary prayers?', the St Michael's churchwardens replied that their minister 'useth an extemporary prayer, as we conceive it to be'. They also reported that 'we never hear him read the canons'. By this time, however, the Arminian offensive was on the wane and, after the calling of the Long Parliament in 1640, it soon came to an end.¹²

With the overthrow of the ecclesiastical hierarchy came the destruction of its judicial machinery, and puritan ministers were no longer to be troubled by the presence of spies in the pews. Now they were free to give up reading from the Prayer Book, to abandon their surplices and to behave as they believed that Scripture directed. Nor would the laity any longer get into trouble if they sat rather than knelt at communion or kept their hats on in church. And the churchwardens of St Michael's, who from 1638 had dutifully recorded their payments for bread for 'the sacrament', could revert to their old practice of describing it as 'the communion'. Now it was the non-puritans who were in trouble with the authorities. In the autumn of 1642, shortly after the outbreak of war between King and Parliament, orders were issued requiring ministers to give or loan money to support the parliamentary cause. Among those sent for by the House of Commons for refusing to do so was Thomas Russell of St John's but, unlike other defaulters, he was quickly discharged. If he did have strong Arminian principles he was evidently unwilling to make an issue of them.¹³

A worse fate befell Anthony Hugget, the rector of Cliffe, a much more controversial figure who never seems to have been popular with his parishioners. Soon after his arrival in Lewes he had been publicly denounced as a 'rascally priest', a 'drunken fellow' and a 'lying knave'. In 1619 he had incurred the wrath of John Holter, a Cliffe butcher, who complained to the Court of Requests that the rector was refusing to pay his meat bills and 'doth threaten and give out speeches' – unjustly, so he contended – that this was in retaliation for the non-payment of tithes. In 1643 the charges against him included 'incontinency', wife-beating and excessive severity

towards those of his parishioners who had been unwilling to kneel at communion or had attended worship in other churches. And, to crown all, it was reported that he had been 'seen in the royal army'. Whatever the truth of the allegations, Hugget was driven from his benefices. According to John Walker, author of *The Sufferings of the Clergy*, the 'puritan party' pursued Hugget 'with the utmost fury and rage' and 'hunted and pressed him so close that he was secured by a neighbour in the next parish who hid him under a bed'. The boot that had for so long been kicking the godly into conformity was now on the other foot and in due course the disgraced rector was formally deprived of his livings and not long afterwards died.¹⁴

The Civil War and its Aftermath

The report that Hugget had been 'seen in the royal army' may have been a fabrication, since no such army ever came within marching distance of Lewes. Throughout the war eastern Sussex witnessed no fighting, although once in 1643 the Parliamentarian general Sir William Waller and his troops passed through the town and the church bells of Cliffe rang out a greeting. The main signs that there was a war on were the victims of the conflict from different parts of the country who came to Lewes in search of succour. In 1644 the churchwardens of Cliffe were kept busy paying out shillings and sixpences to itinerant refugees and, like the good shopkeepers that they were, they recorded their payments with meticulous attention to detail. The recipients of relief included a widow 'whose husband was plundered of £400 in goods near Bristow', a widow and four children from a town near York 'which Sir Thomas Glenham burnt to the ground' and Robert Brasegirdle, 'a plundered man of Ireland who had a certificate from the Speaker of Parliament for relief'. The horrors of war seem to have made the Cliffe wardens, whose predecessors 20 years earlier had been accused of robbing the poor box to pay for the communion wine, more responsive to the needs of the less fortunate members of society.¹⁵

Throughout the Civil War Lewes townsmen appear to have been staunchly Parliamentarian in sympathy. It was here that the Grand Committee, administering the county on Parliament's behalf, held its meetings. After the collapse of the diocesan administration this committee, which was dominated by the puritan magnates Sir Thomas Pelham of Halland and Herbert Morley of Glynde, took control of religious affairs throughout Sussex. In effect Lewes now replaced Chichester as the ecclesiastical capital of the county. In the rapes of Lewes and Pevensey the administration of church affairs was delegated to the 'Committee at Lewes', on which sat lesser gentry like Herbert Hay of Glyndebourne and William Newton of Southover. Newton, living in the house now known as Southover Grange just five minute's walk from the Bull Inn, where the committee's meetings

often seem to have been held, probably did much of the donkey work. This venerable puritan who, as a young man, had witnessed the persecution of godly ministers, now had the task of supervising the removal of ungodly ones. By all accounts Newton was not a vindictive man, but such a remarkable turning of the ecclesiastical tables must have given him a certain amount of quiet satisfaction. After the end of the Civil War the Committee at Lewes continued to play an important part in the religious affairs of eastern Sussex, but it could no longer call on the services of Newton, who died in 1648 at the age of 84. Not long before his death the old man, whom his step-grandson John Evelyn (who had stayed with him while a schoolboy in Southover) remembered as ‘a learned and most religious gentleman’, made this solemn profession of his faith:

There be three things that hath greatly humbled me, first the guilt of my sins, secondly the promise of my nature to commit sin and thirdly the grievances of this life which follow upon the former; but, after my dissolution by God’s mercy in Christ apprehended by faith, I shall be freed from them all, so that the combat between the flesh and the spirit will cease and be no more and all traces shall be wiped from my eyes.¹⁶

Like other puritans Newton hoped that, now that the Civil War – the outward struggle between Christ and Antichrist that mirrored the ‘combat’ within – was successfully over, the outcome would be the complete purification of the Church of England. On a material level this would mean, among other things, the removal of the last vestiges of ‘popery’ from the parish churches. Although the frescoes had been lime-washed over and the statues destroyed in Tudor times there probably still remained in the churches a large amount of stained glass which, because it contained examples of the ‘graven images’ condemned in the Bible, the puritans regarded as idolatrous. At St Michael’s, where some medieval glass is known to have been removed in Henry VIII’s time, there may not have been much left. In 1641 the churchwardens there paid a glazier 5s 3d for ‘mending the windows’, but there is no knowing whether the breakages had been deliberate or accidental; and there is also uncertainty about a further payment of 3s 6d in 1643 for ‘glazing the church’. In the same year £1 14s 1d was paid at St Thomas’s for ‘mending the church windows and the leads’: the size of the sum indicates that a great number of windows had been broken and that as a consequence most of the church had had to be reglazed. This certainly suggests that the destruction was deliberate. It may be significant that this year saw the presence in the town of numerous Parliamentarian soldiers – men notorious for their iconoclasm.¹⁷

The process of purification of the church, of course, meant much more than ridding its buildings of their coloured glass and letting in the clear light of day. The most important task was to get rid of unfit clergymen and

put godly ministers in their place. How far was this achieved in Lewes? Apparently only Hugget, the unsatisfactory rector of Cliffe, had been expelled from his living. Thomas Russell, rector of St John sub Castro, in spite of his Arminian leanings and his initial unwillingness to help finance the Parliamentary army, was not forced out; but he evidently agreed to a transfer to Berwick (eight miles away to the east) in 1647. This happened after the committee responsible for ecclesiastical affairs decided to merge St John sub Castro with St Michael's, a parish then described as 'destitute'. The other ministers in the town, who were probably all men of puritan sympathies, appear to have carried on until death or resignation removed them. In the immediate post-war years, in the absence of ecclesiastical records, it is not always easy to say who came to replace them. But it is known that the minister appointed in 1646 to serve St Mary Westout (which by this date was often referred to as St Anne's) and Southover was Benjamin Pickering, a 'godly, learned and orthodox divine' whose undergraduate studies had overlapped with Oliver Cromwell's at Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. Pickering had previously ministered at East Hoathly, where he had enjoyed the patronage of Sir Thomas Pelham, who had helped to ensure his appointment as a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines set up by Parliament in 1643 to reform the Church of England. It was in this capacity that in the following year he had preached a 'fast sermon' before the House of Commons, in which he spoke of the 'glorious days' that were in store for Christ's church. It would have suited Pelham's book to have his protégé moved from the country to the county town, where his gifts as a preacher could be put to better use. He continued to minister in Lewes, living at Southover until his death in 1657, when he was succeeded by his son-in-law Edward Newton.¹⁸

Prebyterians and Independents *versus* Quakers

The new minister, who was apparently no relation of William Newton of Southover, was a Cambridge man who had later migrated to Oxford, where he had become a Fellow of Balliol. Before coming to Lewes he had ministered for five years at Kingston Buci near Shoreham where, although the parish had only three houses, 'so many attended his ministry from neighbouring parishes that he had a good auditory'. Like his father-in-law he belonged to the majority party within puritanism which by this time had come to be designated Presbyterian – as opposed to those in the next largest party, who were known as Independents. But in Lewes these labels seem to have had little significance, for what united the two groups was more important than what divided them. What united them was a determination to ensure that the practices and structures of the English church conformed as closely as possible to the New Testament model. What divided them

were relatively minor differences of opinion about who precisely should exercise authority in the church. Generally speaking the English Presbyterians, unlike their better-known Scottish counterparts, did not advocate a hierarchy of church courts composed of ministers and lay elders: they believed that authority was vested in local bodies of ministers, such as the 'presbytery of Sarum' that had ordained Newton in 1652. The Independents, on the other hand, had a less exalted view of the ministry, believing in the independence of the local congregation of 'saints' or true believers, who were deemed to constitute the 'visible church of Christ'. They were also more tolerant of diversity, being willing to welcome people to their pulpits whom the Presbyterians would have regarded as extremists.¹⁹

In Lewes the bastion of Independency was St Michael's, that old-established centre of radical religion, where since 1647 the incumbent had been Walter Postlethwaite, a fiery young man who had been Edward Newton's contemporary at Emmanuel College and who seems to have come to Lewes straight from Cambridge. At St Michael's he ministered to a congregation which, by all accounts, was the largest in the town. As with David Thickpenny in Elizabethan times his high standards attracted favourable comments from his contemporaries. He is reported to have been 'a sound preacher, holy liver and strict governor of the flock that was his charge'. Although serving as a parish minister he belonged to an extremist group known as the Fifth Monarchy Men, who were eagerly expecting the Second Coming of Christ. He personally held the view that things were so bad in England that God would soon abandon this country and set up the government of Christ in America or the East Indies. Understandably Cromwell's government distrusted such alarmists and tried to keep a careful eye on them. However, when William Goffe, the Major-General who had been put in charge of Sussex, visited Lewes in November 1655, he heard Postlethwaite preach twice at St Michael's and was impressed by the moderation of his views. This bears out a contemporary testimony that 'his private opinions affected not his ordinary preaching' – which, on the face of it, seems a bit difficult to believe.²⁰

Like all puritan divines Newton and Postlethwaite wished to see the purification not only of the church but of the whole of society. Both were insistent on the necessity of orderliness, sobriety and a strict observance of the sabbath. Postlethwaite would therefore have drawn some solemn conclusions from the 'sad accident' that occurred in the town one Sunday morning not long after his arrival. On 18 April 1648 a group of children and apprentices, fooling around while their parents and masters were in church, started a fire that got out of hand and destroyed nearly a whole street. Significantly the houses that were burnt 'were observed to be the most profane in all the town', whereas a nearby house that was 'very famous for religion' escaped unharmed. The incident was regarded as a 'warning

for all profane and licentious livers to take heed how they profane the Lord's day'. While puritans laid great emphasis on keeping Sundays sacred they insisted that all other days, even those that had traditionally been called 'holy', should be treated like ordinary weekdays. This applied especially to Christmas Day, observance of which in England had been officially abolished by a decree of 1646. While this decree was unpopular and widely disregarded throughout the land it was evidently acceptable in Lewes, where many tradesmen doubtless disliked the disruptions of 'holy days' and welcomed the opportunity to carry on business as usual. Even after 1660, which saw the restoration of this and other popular festivals, Lewes people continued to ignore the traditional holidays. In 1663 a visitor to the town was astonished to find 20 shops open on Christmas Day.²¹

Among those in Lewes most strongly opposed to Christmas (and indeed to the whole Christian calendar, which they regarded as pagan) were the Friends of Truth, the most vigorous and well-organised of the various sects to emerge in the aftermath of the Civil War. Popularly known as Quakers, because they quaked with fervour as they prayed, the Friends shunned all outward forms of religion and urged people to listen only to 'the Spirit of Truth in the inward parts'. In March 1655 Thomas Robinson of Westmorland, one of the first 'Publishers of Truth', came to the town and visited the house of John Russell in Southover, where he met a group of 'Seekers' – spiritually-minded men and women who had withdrawn from all organised worship. Here the visitor declared the truth 'to the convincement of Ambrose Galloway and Elizabeth his wife and Stephen Eager, who were then members of the said meeting', whereupon the three of them decided to join up with the Friends. Soon afterwards George Fox, the movement's principal founder, came to Lewes and attended a meeting at Southover before walking on to Warbleton, 16 miles away in the Weald. Not everyone in Lewes was receptive to the Friends' message and from 1656 onwards there are numerous reports of people throwing dirt and dung at them and even attempting to set fire to the house where they met. On one occasion the sons of some of the local Independents, armed with swords, guns and pikes, attacked a group of Friends who were holding an open-air meeting on Castle Green. In their turn the Friends, who were much less quiescent than the Quakers of today, sometimes responded vociferously. It was their custom to interrupt the services held in the parish churches, which they referred to contemptuously as 'steeple-houses'. In 1659 one of their number, Mary Akehurst of Cliffe, went into St Michael's at sermon time and put a question to the preacher, who was probably Postlethwaite. Her action infuriated the congregation, who threw her out of the church and made a strong complaint to her husband, a prominent merchant and former churchwarden at Cliffe, who beat her and put her in chains.²²

It is clear that by 1659 the godly party in Lewes had gone a long way towards achieving their aims. Godly ministers occupied the pulpits and exercised godly discipline in their parishes. Men ‘earnestly given to maintain godly orders’ made up the membership of the Fellowship of the Twelve, the self-perpetuating oligarchy that, in the absence of a borough corporation, administered the affairs of the town. The 21 drapers, haberdashers, saddlers, apothecaries and other prosperous tradesmen listed as being ‘of the Twelve’ in 1659 were drawn exclusively from the town’s ‘hotter sort’ of Protestants. This can be said with certainty since all but one of those that lived on long enough to fall foul of the restored ecclesiastical establishment were in due course to be branded ‘Dissenters’. As godly rulers their primary task was to promote good order in the town – which meant dealing first and foremost with the exceptionally disorderly behaviour that occurred in and around the town’s alehouses. In 1651 an earlier order for the ‘repressing of the great number of alehouses in Lewes’ was re-issued by the county magistrates at the request of the Twelve. But this time there was an additional instruction that licences should only be given to those whom ‘the Company of the Twelve or the major part of them shall present and certify to be fit persons’. If Lewes was to be, like Rye, a ‘city set on a hill’ setting a shining example to the surrounding countryside, it clearly had to be a place where godly discipline was strictly enforced, even if this aroused opposition. It has in fact been suggested that in Lewes, Rye, Dorchester, Newbury and other towns where the rulers tried to establish ‘New Jerusalems’ attempts to carry through such a programme of reform ‘invariably proved deeply divisive and met with determined and persistent opposition’. This certainly happened in Rye but, in the absence of meaty municipal records, there is no knowing whether this was also the case in Lewes. All that can be said is that it is *likely* to have been so. The sabbath-breakers and others who were denounced as ‘profane and licentious livers’ on the occasion of the great fire of 1648 and who may have constituted a sizeable proportion of the populace, were probably glad to see the end of the rule of the godly in Lewes. When the Commonwealth collapsed in 1660 and Richard Cromwell escaped to France via Newhaven in a ship provided by a sympathetic Lewes merchant, many in the town were doubtless pleased at the prospect of a restored monarchy and a re-established church.²³