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Wales and Religious Reform in the Long Parliament, 1640–42

by Lloyd Bowen, PhD

Although a great deal has been written about the progenitors of the puritan movement in mid-seventeenth century Wales, we know precious little about their activities before the parliamentary victory which placed them at the centre of the country's religious and political affairs. The scattered references to the early puritan activists in the principality before the mid-1640s offer tantalising glimpses of an interconnected set of individuals who were to seize power in Wales after the defeat of King Charles I.¹ This essay seeks to explore the connections between the members of this small band of activists and their associations with like-minded puritans in England. It considers how men like Walter Cradock, William Erbery and Henry Walter looked to the Long Parliament in 1640–42 to endorse and support their agenda for reforming and purifying religion in Wales, a country they saw as inured in a mire of semi-popery. The paper also considers the attitudes towards religious reform expressed by the principality's parliamentary representatives, and discusses the hostile reception the new evangelists received in some parts of Wales before they were scattered from the country in a 'disapora' after the outbreak of war and the upsurge of popular royalist – and anti-puritan – feeling there.

I

The Church of England had become the subject of bitter dispute by the time the Long Parliament assembled in November 1640. The principal reason for this was the contentious policies adopted during the 1630s by Charles I in alliance with the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud, policies which many viewed as ushering in an insidious form of popery. Many members of the Commons, often responding to the desires of large numbers of their constituents, endeavoured to eradicate the traces of Laudian innovations from the Church. A significant proportion of MPs also sought to take these reforms a stage further, purifying the Church of the ambiguities left by the Elizabethan

Settlement and realising a more reformed, more puritan institution. From early on, then, the Church of England faced an attack from reforming elements in the Commons, and in the provinces more generally, which came to encompass such radical measures as the 'root and branch' abolition of episcopacy.² In the clamour against the Laudian Church and the calls for 'further reformation', the voices of the radicals were heeded more readily than those in favour of moderation. For many, it seemed that the agenda of religious reform pursued by parliament presaged a new era of liberation and freedom of worship, of finally realising the true Reformation which had stalled in England and Wales in the mid-sixteenth century.

In Wales, however, these voices of reform were muted and restricted to a small group of activists operating in the lowland eastern fringes of the country. The limited nature of the reform movement in Wales does not seem to have been the product of any particularly oppressive campaign by Laudian divines, but rather was a reflection of the fact that most people were satisfied with the Church of England in Wales. Even the Laudian programme had elicited no great reaction from the vast majority of the Welsh, perhaps because it appealed to a symbolo-centric tendency in Welsh religion which seems to have encouraged a conservative attachment to crosses, ceremonies and visual elements in worship – the stuff of Laudianism.³ A minority of worshipers in Wales, however, viewed this situation with despair, believing their countrymen and women were being excluded from the truth of God's Word. They considered Wales to be languishing in spiritual darkness, the souls of its inhabitants lost to the corruptions of Rome.

Significantly, these godly enclaves in Wales were often found in areas with easy access to England, or which had significant English-speaking populations. The puritan ideas which had circulated for decades in England had not been disseminated in Welsh texts, while the puritan sermon seems to have been a rarity in early Stuart Wales. This language barrier appears significant in accounting for the nature and distribution of Welsh puritanism in the immediate pre-Civil War era. Access to godly preaching in English, or intercourse with godly communities in England and the continent, seem to have restricted the influence of puritanism in Wales to places like Cardiff and Wrexham, both near the border and both supporting substantial English-speaking or bilingual populations. It was in these areas that we see the emergence by the late 1630s of a group of godly clergymen who had suffered at the hands of William Laud, and who formed the vanguard of the puritan

The place of publication is London unless otherwise specified.

¹ R. Geraint Gruffydd, *"In That Gentile Country ...": The Beginnings of Puritan Nonconformity in Wales* (Bridgend, 1976); G.F. Nuttall, *The Welsh Saints, 1640–1660* (Cardiff, 1957), chs. 1–2.

² John Morrill, 'The Religious Context of the English Civil War', and 'The Attack on the Church of England in the Long Parliament', in his *The Nature of the English Revolution* (1993), 45–90; Anthony Fletcher, *The Outbreak of the English Civil War* (1981), ch. 3; David Cressy, *England on Edge* (Oxford, 2006), chs. 6–11.

³ Lloyd Bowen, *The Politics of the Principality: Wales, c.1603–42* (forthcoming, 2006), ch. 5.

cause in Wales and advanced its agenda through the parliamentary lobbying which constitutes a principal focus of this essay.

These early Welsh puritans formed a circle whose interconnections provided a strong institutional structure for the godly cause in Wales until the split engendered by Vavasor Powell's pamphlet attacking the Protectorate, *A Word for God*, in 1655–6. Their close relationships, however, also indicate the circumscribed nature of puritanism in Wales before the Civil War. The most important Welsh figures in this group were William Wroth, Walter Cradock and William Erbery.⁴ Wroth was the minister of Llanfaches in Monmouthshire who opposed the Caroline Book of Sports and was brought before the Court of High Commission in 1638.⁵ Leaving his living shortly after this, Wroth began forming the first independent church in Wales at Llanfaches, something which has ensured his reputation down to the present day. Walter Cradock was associated with Wroth in helping to establish the Llanfaches congregation.⁶ A native of Llangwm, Monmouthshire, Cradock served as curate in Cardiff to the radical William Erbery in the early 1630s. Like Wroth, he too fell into disfavour with the Laudian authorities for refusing to read the Book of Sports and was suspended in 1633, although he subsequently managed to acquire the curacy of Wrexham. Erbery himself hailed from Roath Dogfield in the vicinity of Cardiff, and although he claimed to understand Welsh he could not speak the language.⁷ Erbery came under the influence of Wroth after a clerical appointment at Newport, Monmouthshire, and was instituted as vicar of Cardiff in 1633 by Sir Thomas Lewis of Y Fan, a family also associated with Wroth. He was reported to the authorities along with Cradock for having 'preached very schismatically and dangerously to the people'.⁸ Resigning his Cardiff living in 1638, he too came into contact with the Llanfaches congregation and became an unlicensed preacher in Somerset immediately prior to the calling of the Long Parliament.⁹

⁴ These three figures have been considered in a series of accessible and scholarly pieces by Stephen Roberts in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB] (Oxford, 2004).

⁵ Wroth is the principal focus of Gruffydd, 'In That Gentile Country ...'. See also Thomas Richards, 'Eglwys Llanfaches', *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Cymmrodorion* [THSC] (1941), 150–84.

⁶ For Cradock, see Nuttall, *The Welsh Saints*, passim; M. Wynn Thomas, 'Disgybl a'i Athro: Morgan Llwyd a Walter Cradoc', in J.G. Jones (ed.), *Agweddau ar Dwf Piwritaniaeth yng Nghymru yn yr Ail Ganrif ar Bymtheg* (Lampeter, 1992), 111–27.

⁷ On Erbery, see B. Ll. James, 'The Evolution of a Radical: The Life and Career of William Erbery (1604–54)', *The Journal of Welsh Ecclesiastical History*, 3 (1986), 36–41; idem, 'William Erbery (1604–54): Ceisiwr Cymreig', in Jones, *Agweddau ar Dwf Piwritaniaeth*, 63–92.

⁸ Thomas Rees, *History of Protestant Nonconformity in Wales* (1883), 36.

⁹ Cressy, *England on Edge*, 164–6.

Perhaps the most influential figure in early Welsh puritanism, however, was not a Welshman at all but rather the godly knight of Brampton Bryan, Herefordshire, Sir Robert Harley. Harley, a moderate puritan and vehement anti-Laudian, was known as a man who offered protection and sponsorship to the godly in the Welsh Marches, an area proverbially hostile to puritans.¹⁰ Harley established important contacts with the small band of Welsh puritans, sheltering Cradock in 1639, who later took up with a separatist group at nearby Llanfair Waterdine. Accompanying Cradock was Morgan Llwyd, who had been converted by Cradock while he was in Wrexham.¹¹ Harley's crucial role in supporting puritan preaching and godly ministers in the Welsh Marches was made clear in his funeral oration of 1656, when Thomas Froyssell, minister of Clun, recalled how the country around Brampton Bryan 'lay under a vaile of darknesse till he [Harley] began to shine'. He extolled Harley's sponsorship of godly ministers: 'he was their sanctuary in evill times', and noted how his house was 'the center where the saints met to seek God'.¹² This final phrase was particularly relevant for the key figures in early Welsh nonconformity, and Harley was keen to support their mission and to advance the cause of godliness in Wales when the opportunity arose.

Some evidence for Sir Robert's interests in this regard can be found in a survey of the Herefordshire clergy compiled for Harley as a member of the committee for scandalous ministers in the Long Parliament, probably in early 1641, by the rector of Brampton Bryan, Stanley Gower.¹³ This survey recorded the incumbents of the parishes within Herefordshire and also offered some commentary on their character and the frequency of their preaching. A number of Welsh-speaking parishes lay within the county, and this may have encouraged Gower to comment on the state of religion in Wales and, more significantly for our purposes, some possible remedies for the defects found there. The survey claimed that there were scarcely twenty 'constant and conscionable preachers' in Herefordshire, but noted that 'it is to be feared that there are more in this county then are to be found in all the 13 shires of Wales upon which it bordereth'.¹⁴ The dearth of preaching ministers in Wales was to become a recurrent refrain of the reform proposals made by men like

¹⁰ An exemplary account of Harley can be found in Jacqueline Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads: The Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Outbreak of the English Civil War* (Cambridge, 1990).

¹¹ Nuttall, *Welsh Saints*, 1–17.

¹² Thomas Froyssell, *Yedidiah, Or, The Beloved Disciple* (1658), 100, 104, 102.

¹³ Hereford Cathedral Library [HCL], 6450/6, this is a transcript of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MS 206. Gower reflected the concern with the godly cause in Wales that was an important element within the Harley circle, lamenting in a letter to Harley of 9 August 1641 that 'in Wales scarce the gospell of Jesus Christ is knowne': *Historical Manuscripts Commission* [HMC], *Portland MSS*, iii. 79.

¹⁴ HCL, 6450/6, p. 23.

Cradock in their representations to the Long Parliament, while the phraseology employed to describe the shortage of ministers here would resurface in the Welsh puritans' petitions. This suggests how these proposals emerged from a close-knit circle subscribing to a particular agenda and employing a similar rhetorical vocabulary. The survey went on to attack the 'trash and trumpery of massing ceremonies' which had so damaged the Church under Laud, and dwelled on the need for a preaching ministry to help remedy the harm done. It again mentioned Wales in this regard, making a striking proposal for combating the spiritual degeneracy there which is worth quoting at length. Gower advocated that two of the Welsh cathedrals be converted into

school[s] of artes ... for the instruction and education of natives in Wales, for the ministry and plantation of the country; the want wherof amongst themselves and their great distance from our universities in England together with the charge of living here out of their owne country, I suppose hath bin one cause of the scarcity of good and able ministers in that country; then but 2 of these uselesse cathedralls in either Wales north and south converted into such schooles of the prophetts they might become usefull, and that country bless you [i.e. Harley] for reducing them out of barbarism into Christian religion.¹⁵

This proposal draws heavily on well-known parallels many puritans made between Wales's lack of spiritual and educational enlightenment and the Welsh people's social backwardness, their 'barbarism'.¹⁶ Such ideas would constitute an important element in the discourses underwriting the experiment for propagating the gospel in Wales in the 1650s.¹⁷

It is also worth noting that the proposal for establishing universities or colleges in Wales to train worthy ministers and spread the puritan message was to re-emerge in the publications and correspondence of the Presbyterian John Lewis of Glasgrug, Cardiganshire, during the Civil War and after.¹⁸ It may be significant, then, that Lewis dedicated his 1646 work, *The Parliament*

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 32.

¹⁶ Christopher Hill, 'Puritans and "The Dark Corners of the Land"', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th series, 13 (1963), 77–102; Peter Roberts, 'Precedents for Autonomous Welsh Government, 1536–1653', in *Literature and Politics in the Celtic World*, ed. Pamela O'Neill and Jonathan M. Wooding (Sydney, 2000), 8–10.

¹⁷ On this, see Christopher Hill, 'Propagating the Gospel', in *Historical Essays, 1600–1750, Presented to David Ogg*, ed. H.E. Bell and R.L. Ollard (1963), 36–43; Lloyd Bowen, 'Representations of Wales and the Welsh during the Civil Wars and Interregnum', *Historical Research*, 77 (2004), 358–76.

¹⁸ An important discussion of this is Roberts, 'Precedents for Autonomous Welsh Government', 10–13.

Explained to Wales, to Sir Robert Harley, describing the Herefordshire knight as one of 'Gods champions ... and instruments of his glory' in Wales, and asking for his commendation and protection.¹⁹ The 1641 survey is an important indication of the concern of Harley and his circle with the religious condition of Wales. It also demonstrates the significance of figures from Herefordshire in helping to shape and reflect the agenda of puritan reform in Wales for the next two decades. The Herefordshire survey was a response to the new initiatives for addressing the problems of the Church set in train by members like Harley in the Long Parliament. The group of Welsh radicals who had come together in the late 1630s under Harley's protection recognized the potential of the parliament to tackle their grievances, and it is to the initiatives they sponsored in 1640–2 that we now turn.

II

The first indication of the Welsh radicals pressing their case for reform came in December 1640, when William Erbery submitted a petition to the Commons. Erbery had not been as prominent in the Harley circle as Cradock, but he was clearly deeply involved in the activities of the Welsh puritan group and was closely associated with the independent church at Llanfaches. The surviving copy of this petition shows that he offered it on behalf of himself '& the whole Principality of Wales, especially of Glamorgan shire'.²⁰ Erbery, therefore, was not simply making presentations against Laudian clergy or clerical innovation as was the case with many of the other petitions submitted to parliament. From this early juncture he, and the clique of puritan ministers associated with him, saw his role to be that of a spokesman for the whole of Wales. Clearly the Welsh puritans felt that the entire country was suffering from a common spiritual malaise, and believed that specific remedial measures were required. The petition opened with a formula which was to become a commonplace in Welsh puritan writing (and which also echoed the Gower survey), that there were over 1,000 parishes in the principality, but fewer than '13 constant preachers, that preach morning & evening or expound the catechisme every Lords day in the Welch tongue'.²¹ Issues of preaching and language lay at the heart of the Welsh puritans' programme from the outset.

To bolster his petition with some evidence, Erbery turned to the case of Glamorgan, supposedly 'counted the chieftest for preaching', where he

¹⁹ John Lewis, *The Parliament Explained to Wales* (1646), sig. A3.

²⁰ British Library [BL], Harleian [Harl.] MS 4,931, fo. 90.

²¹ This formula was recalled during the Protectorate by Alexander Griffith as having been particularly effective in advancing the puritans' cause in Wales: [Alexander Griffith,] *Gemitus Ecclesiae Cambro-Britannicae* (1654), 3. The abbreviations 'ye' (the) and 'yt' (that) have been expanded in this and all other quotations.

claimed only five preachers were to be found among 118 parishes. He stated that the rest of the county's clergy were 'all either pluralists, non-resident, slothfull, or scandalous persons, preaching somtimes some of them, some never'. Erbery asserted that the product of such neglect was that

in that land, but gross ignorance, idolatry, superstition, and all manner of sins abound every where; the people led by blind guides & the sheepe having dumb doggs to be their shepheards, so that the blood of soules which hath long cried up to heaven, call now aloud to this honourable house that in yor godly wisdome & zeale to Gods glory & eternall good of man you wold be pleased timely to remove the causes of these grave evils.

He further claimed that 'if the bishop & the book [of Common Prayer]' were removed, these 'reading priests' would be silenced, and the people would 'seeke out for a preaching ministry [as] the meanes of their salvacon'. Thus would a 'seconde reformacon' be effected in Wales.

This powerful language was moulded from some well-established puritan images of the ignorant and simple Welsh abandoned by their pastors, and recalls John Penry's earlier criticisms of the state of religion in the country.²² Like Penry, Erbery counselled that the remedy for this deplorable condition was the erecting of a preaching pastorate, and he called for the Commons to 'give liberty to those who are willing & honest ... to preach in any parish where there is want of preaching', and also allow parishioners to venture from their own parishes to hear godly preaching elsewhere. The crucial difference between Penry's and Erbery's representations to parliament, however, was context. Whereas Penry's criticisms and reform plans had been directed to a largely hostile and unreceptive Elizabethan Commons and flew in the teeth of government policy, the tide of feeling in December 1640 was with Erbery, and the authority of the king and his ministers was largely in abeyance.

Ebery further informed the Commons that some such willing, godly preachers were 'here present to offer their service for this worke'. This, then, was no individual initiative. Rather it appears that the Welsh puritan group had mobilised quickly to take advantage of the crisis in royal government and the reformist inclinations of parliament, and were in London to assist the lobbying campaign. It was noted on the surviving copy of this petition that it was granted on 12 January 1641, and liberty was given by the Commons to a closely-associated group of Welsh radicals – quite possibly those mentioned as attending on parliament – to preach throughout Wales. They were Erbery himself, Walter Cradock, Henry Walter, Ambrose Mostyn and Richard Symonds.

²² See, for example, John Penry, *Three Treatises Concerning Wales*, ed. D. Williams (Cardiff, 1960), 62.

This order endorsed the plan of an itinerant preaching ministry in Wales, something which was to lie at the centre of puritan and parliamentary initiatives for the country down to the establishing of the Commission for the Propagation of the Gospel in 1650 and beyond.²³ An introduction to the three men named in the Commons order in addition to Erbery and Cradock is appropriate at this point. Henry Walter hailed from Piercefield, St Arvans, in Monmouthshire. Although he held the curacy of Mounton in the county, Walter was firmly placed in the circle of the gathered congregation at Llanfaches, and was named as one of the chief executors of William Wroth's will of 1641. He was also associated with the independent church at Broadmead in Bristol, which had close links with Wroth and Llanfaches.²⁴ Richard Symonds was a native of Abergavenny who apparently held a cure in north Wales from which he was suspended in the late 1630s. He then became a schoolmaster in Shrewsbury, tutoring the great puritan divine, Richard Baxter. He was said to have sheltered Cradock after the latter's flight from Wrexham, and probably accompanied him to Brampton Bryan, where he was a tutor to the Harley children by 1638.²⁵ Ambrose Mostyn, meanwhile, was the son of a chancellor of Bangor Cathedral but demonstrated more 'godly' inclinations than his father. His connection with the other Welsh puritans is uncertain, but he was named as an overseer to Walter Cradock's will, apparently preached in the vicinity of Montgomery with Vavasor Powell, and received a letter of consolation from William Erbery after his wife's death. It seems that by the early 1640s Mostyn was in south Wales, being known to the godly parishioners of Pennard on the Gower, who, in April 1642, successfully petitioned the Commons to have Mostyn instituted as their pastor, remarking 'to o[u]r knowledge [Mostyn] doth behave hym self in a godly sorte and doth preach in the Welch and English tongues'.²⁶

III

These figures, then, had coalesced in the late 1630s around Brampton Bryan and the Llanfaches congregation, and had formulated a strategy for religious reform in Wales which centred on itinerant puritan preaching to address the pitiful level of godly instruction. Their approach bore early fruit with the Commons order of 12 January, but it was clearly only a beginning towards

²³ Stephen Roberts, 'Propagating the Gospel in Wales: The Making of the 1650 Act', *THSC*, n.s. 10 (2004), 64.

²⁴ NLW, LL1641/40; *Dictionary of Welsh Biography* [DWB] (1959), 1010–11; *ODNB*, s.n. 'Henry Walter'.

²⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1637–8*, 249; Nuttall, *Welsh Saints*, 9–11.

²⁶ House of Lords Record Office, Main Papers, 30 April 1642. A Commons order described Mostyn as 'a godly and faithful preacher': *Commons Journals* [CJ], ii. 551.

redressing the endemic problems of supporting puritan preaching (particularly in Welsh) in the principality. If further progress was to be made, the country's plight needed to be kept on the Long Parliament's crowded reform agenda; this appears to have been the impetus behind another initiative by the same group only two months later. This took the form of a much larger petition which was delivered to the Commons on 16 February 1641.²⁷ It was submitted in the name of 'many subiects in the principality of Wales', and was headed by the subscriptions of seven 'preachers of the Word of God' and just over three hundred others.²⁸ The seven preachers were William Wroth, William Erbery, Walter Cradock, Henry Walter, Richard Symonds, Ambrose Mostyn and Robert Hart. These figures have been encountered earlier in this narrative, with the exception of Hart. He appears to have been the curate of Moccas which lies between Hay-on-Wye and Hereford on the Wales-England border, around twelve miles south of Brampton Bryan. In the Gower survey it was noted that the incumbent of Moccas, Mr. Taylor, was a pluralist and non-resident, but that his curate, Hart, was 'a constant pr[e]acher'.²⁹ It further recorded that Hart's patron was Henry Vaughan, almost certainly the squire of Moccas, who was one of the few Herefordshire gentlemen – along with Sir Robert Harley of course – to support parliament and the godly cause in the early stages of civil war.³⁰ A further piece of evidence tying Hart to the Welsh puritan agitators is a later reference that Vavasor Powell and his wife were married on 2 February 1642 by 'Mr. Hart, a godly minister of Herefordshire'.³¹ We shall return to the three hundred other subscriptions presently.

The dynamic core of Welsh puritanism, centred on Llanfaches and the Harley enclave, was evidently operating here as a quite sophisticated lobbying group. The petition itself communicated a similar message to Erbery's December submission, though it was much larger and had some noteworthy additions. The timing of its presentation is also significant, and suggests how the Welsh ministers were seeking to make capital from the wider agitation for religious change which was focused on parliament. The petition was presented during a countrywide petitioning campaign supporting London's Root and Branch Petition which had demanded the abolition of episcopacy.³² Like

²⁷ BL, Additional [Add.] MS 70,109, no. 69. In 1661, Vavasor Powell placed this petition as the starting point for his discussion of the puritans' efforts to evangelise Wales: *Tsofer Bepah, or, The Bird in the Cage Chirping* (1661), sig. A7^v.

²⁸ CJ, ii. 87.

²⁹ HCL, MS 6450/3, p. 9. It is possible that he was the 'Mr. Hart' referred to by Brilliana Harley in a letter of July 1642. Her comments suggest that he was dead by this time, although no will or administration has been traced: *HMC, Portland MSS*, iii. 93.

³⁰ Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, 161, 164; Ian Atherton (ed.), 'An Account of Herefordshire in the First Civil War', *Midland History*, 21 (1996), 141.

³¹ Edward Allen, *et al*, *Vavasoris Examen & Purgamen* (1654), 9.

³² Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 91–6.

Erbery's earlier representation, the February petition reflected the strident anti-episcopal tone of the Root and Branch petitions. The connections between the Welsh petition and the wider debates over church government can be seen in the fact that it was referred by the Commons to the committee dealing with the Ministers' Remonstrance, a document against Laudian leadership in the Church subscribed by 750 clergy. Although not specifically a Root and Branch measure, this was part of the broader anti-clerical front being opened in the Commons and the country at large. Importantly, the Ministers' Remonstrance was presented on 25 January by Sir Robert Harley. It seems reasonable, then, to see the petition as a contribution to this anti-episcopal drive from the Welsh puritan community, working in concert with the godly party associated with Harley.³³

The Welsh petition survives as a copy among Harley's papers, and indicates again his pivotal role in organizing and assisting the Welsh puritan campaign.³⁴ At this point, he clearly provided the vital link between activism on the Wales-England border and action at Westminster. The petition itself reiterated Erbery's lament about the number of worthy ministers in Wales, once more employing the formula of there being fewer than thirteen preachers in the thirteen (*sic*) shires of Wales, suggesting perhaps that Erbery was again the principal author. It also resonated with the language of Gower's ecclesiastical survey, noting that the absence of preaching was unfortunate because 'the people are ingenious, devout & as ready to receive the gospell soundly preached with all alacritie & zeale as any nation (we have heard off) in Christendome'. This was an attempt to portray Wales as a region worthy of parliament's consideration rather than a lost cause. The petition also dwelled on the damaging effects of Laudian practices in the principality. In a clause close to the heart of someone like Erbery or Symonds who had suffered at the hands of the Laudian hierarchy, it was maintained that those godly Welsh ministers who had attempted to preach had been suspended, excommunicated or 'exiled' from their ministry. It was further claimed that those who desired to 'live honestly' were oppressed by the authorities, and that in Wales 'there is more safety & quietnes by farre for papists then earnest & faithfull Protestants'.

As with Erbery's earlier representation, this petition was damning in its assessment of the Welsh clergy. They were characterised as debauched and drunken, unlearned and idle. Further, it was claimed that they were frequently

³³ Although highly critical of episcopacy, Harley was not simply a Root and Branch advocate and his position radicalised on this issue as the parliament progressed: Eales, *Puritans and Roundheads*, 110–14.

³⁴ Also found among his papers is a set of notes endorsed 'The scarcity of preache[r]s in Wales 1640[?]1', which appear to relate to this petition, possibly at its presentation in the Commons: BL, Add. MS 70,002, fo. 367.

pluralists and non-residents, 'unable to preach or els if learned, for the most part preach little to the capacity of the people & usuallie in English'. The Welsh curates came in for particular criticism, being described as 'dumbe, drunken fellowes & the very scumme & refuse of the countrey'. The poverty of the Welsh clergy was also highlighted. It was said that the meagre living standards of the clergy enforced many to keep alehouses to make ends meet; some were common relators, others survived by being paid to officiate at clandestine marriages.³⁵ In a striking phrase, the petition averred that some clergymen 'goe like rogues from doore to doore readinge the gospell for bread & cheese'.

The February 1641 petition differed most significantly from that of the previous December in its rabidly anti-episcopal (rather than simply anti-clerical) tone. The petitioners claimed that 'the true causes of all these miseries doth arise chiefly from Lord Bishops (as wee conceive)'. They were said to have suppressed all godliness 'as farre as they bee able' through suspensions and excommunication and a strict enforcement of crypto-popish Laudian ceremonies. By their 'urging of the service booke soe slightly' they had laboured 'to shoulder out all sound & sincere preaching by boulstering & abetting the ... domineering clergie & upholding them in all their cruelty & persecutions of poore Christians and their neighbor godly ministers'. The petition thus reflected and endorsed the fervent anti-episcopalianism articulated by the Root and Branch supporters in the Commons and the country at large. Erbery's petition had saved some damning words for the prelate, and indeed had called for their removal, but the February petition was of a different character, locating the centre for all recent abuses and oppressions in the persons of the bishops.

After the criticism came the programme for reform. The petitioners requested that the Commons find 'some comfortable redresse for full removal of all greevances ... and that there may be a freedome without any molestation for any whom the Lord hath fitted with gifts and graces to imploy their paines' in preaching, so that 'the whole countrey shall have cause to praise the Lord for you'. This petition, therefore, had a similar emphasis to Erbery's earlier representation, but was more ambitious in scope and more forceful in its language. Its presentation suggests a desire to keep religious reform in Wales before the eyes of the Commons, but also a wish to take advantage of the escalating agitation against the bishops and to contribute to the debate over the government of the Church. The petition also testifies to the organised mobilisation of the puritan community in Wales, possibly spurred on by the positive response given to Erbery's December petition. This is clearly seen in the most significant difference between the December and February petitions: the subscription of three hundred names in support of the latter.

³⁵ Common relators were informants who supplied the material to bring suits to court, receiving money for their services.

IV

Who were the subscribers? Unfortunately their original signatures do not survive, and we are only presented with a later copy among the Harley papers which does not provide any further details of social rank or place of residence. Vavasor Powell recalled that the petition was presented 'by many credible persons', although he is not the most impartial of commentators.³⁶ There may also be doubts as to the accuracy and validity of some of the subscriptions for there are many repetitions, even of less common names, which may indicate a less-than-perfect transcription. Analysis is also bedevilled by commonness of many Welsh names: the near impossibility of distinguishing between six men named William John (or Jones), for example. A full analysis of all the signatories is beyond the scope of the present paper and could form the basis of a further prosopographical study. Only a few suggestions will be made here as to the nature and background of the signatories which may suggest lines for future enquiry.

The most obvious entry point for discussing these signatories is to consider some of the less common names which may be traced more readily; these provide some revealing evidence for the nature of the petition's supporters. It would seem that many hailed from the Monmouthshire region and became supporters of the parliamentary government of the area in the later 1640s and the 1650s. One subscriber was William Blethin, mentioned in a history of Monmouthshire published half a century later as having resisted the enclosures of the Catholic earl of Worcester in close alliance with William Wroth. The account also mentions that he and Wroth were harried by the bishop's court and the High Commission, suggesting his nonconformity in the 1630s.³⁷ In the later 1640s, Blethin became a commissioner for assessment and sequestration in Monmouthshire. He was also made a commissioner for ejecting scandalous ministers in the county during the early Protectorate and appointed steward of sequestered estates there.³⁸ He was nominated as a commissioner for the propagation of the gospel in Wales in the 1650 act, and farmed the tithes at Undy in the south west of the county during the propagation period. Blethin himself gathered a separatist congregation, and kept a conventicle at Dinham near Chepstow in the late-1660s.³⁹ Another subscriber who can be identified with comparative ease is Christopher

³⁶ Powell, *Bird in the Cage*, sig. A7^v.

³⁷ Nathan Rogers, *Memoirs of Monmouth-shire* (1708), 94.

³⁸ C.H. Firth and R.S. Rait (eds), *Acts and Ordinances of the Interregnum* [A&O] (2 vols., 1911), ii. 973; Bodleian Library, Walker MS, c.13, fo. 43; M.A.E. Green (ed.), *Calendar of the Committee for Compounding with Delinquents, 1643–60* (5 vols., 1882–92), i. 727.

³⁹ The National Archives [TNA], E112/481/2, fo. 6; PROB11/352, fos. 77^v–78^v; Richards, *Puritan Movement*, p. 95; idem, *Wales Under the Penal Code, 1662–1687* (1925), 97.

Catchmay of Trelleck. He supported parliament during the Civil War, acquiring a lease of part of the earl of Worcester's sequestered lands in Monmouthshire. He was also concerned with religious affairs, like Blethin becoming a propagation commissioner and then a commissioner for ejecting scandalous ministers in Monmouthshire before his death in 1655.⁴⁰ The subscriber George Edward (or Edwards) of Llanwern was recorded as an itinerant preacher operating in the Monmouthshire area in the 1650s, and was also an agent of the commission for ejecting scandalous ministers under the Protectorate. He farmed the tithes of Llanwern under the Commonwealth and was later found teaching school in the south of the county.⁴¹ Edward Hollister of Shirenewton, meanwhile, became a commissioner for the survey of Worcester's lands in Monmouthshire in 1651–2, and petitioned the Commons in favour of preaching ministers in the county in February 1642.⁴² A number of other names can be identified positively as having an association with Monmouthshire and the puritan governments of the 1650s.

Some of the other subscribers may be tentatively associated with radical elements in counties neighbouring Monmouthshire.⁴³ The John James who subscribed the petition was probably the Herefordshire man from Leintwardine in the Brampton Bryan enclave who became a propagation commissioner and sat for Worcester in the Barebones Parliament. He became a Fifth Monarchist and was among the signatories of a letter to Cromwell in 1653 from Morgan Llwyd's congregation in north Wales. He also subscribed Vavasor Powell's tract against the Protectorate, *A Word for God*, in 1655.⁴⁴ The subscriber 'John Browne' is likely to have been the squire from Little Ness, Shropshire. A propagation commissioner, he was also one of the six members nominated for Wales to the Barebones Parliament in 1653. Like John James, he was a Fifth Monarchist sympathiser, was to be found in Llwyd's Wrexham congregation in the early 1650s, and signed *A Word for*

⁴⁰ *A&O*, ii. 973; Richards, *Puritan Movement*, pp. 82, 94, 98; J.A. Bradney, *A History of Monmouthshire* (4 vols., 1904–33), i. 469, ii. 139, 214–15; TNA, SP23/96/827, 841; PROB11/251, fo. 256^v.

⁴¹ TNA, E112/481/2, fo. 4; Richards *Puritan Movement*, 149, 216; idem, *Religious Developments in Wales, 1654–1662* (1923), 197, 200.

⁴² NLW, Badminton Manorial MSS 1623–4, 1627–8; W.H. Coates, A.S. Young and V.F. Snow (eds), *The Private Journals of the Long Parliament [PJ]* (3 vols., New Haven, 1982–92), ii. 302; *CJ*, ii. 419, and see below 55.

⁴³ William Erbery confirms the presence of individuals from counties near Monmouthshire in the Llanfaches group in his later recollection of 'how many saints from Somerset, Gloucestershire, Herefordshire, Radnor, Glamorgan-shire came in multitudes with delight to Lanvagh's': William Erbery, *Apocrypha* (1652), 8.

⁴⁴ J. Nickolls, *Original Letters and Papers of State* (1743), 120–1; Bernard Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (1972), 64, 68, 252–3; Austin Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate* (Oxford, 1982), 212–13, 420–1.

God.⁴⁵ The 'John Ashe' who endorsed the petition could well be the Long Parliament member for Westbury, Wiltshire, who became an elder of Bath and Wrington classis in Somerset – significantly the area in which Erbery was preaching in the months immediately preceding the meeting of the Long Parliament.⁴⁶ In this context, we should also recall the associations between the early puritans of south-east Wales and the independent congregations in the West Country such as the Broadmead assembly at Bristol. If this was indeed the identity of this subscriber, it would suggest contacts being established between the early Welsh puritans, radicals in western England and reformist members of the Long Parliament.

An even more intriguing subscription is that of John ap John. Could this be the member of Morgan Llwyd's Wrexham congregation who is widely believed to have been Wales's first Quaker?⁴⁷ This is quite possible, for we know that Llwyd and Cradock were associates in the 1630s, and it is highly likely that Llwyd was present at Llanfair Waterdine in the pre-war period. Connections between the two poles of Welsh puritanism at Llanfaches and Wrexham can be seen in the 1630s and re-emerged with renewed vigour in the later 1640s. It seems reasonable to postulate, then, that some of the signatories to the February 1641 petition emerged from Llwyd's group in the north.

More research on this document could develop further these kinds of associations and continuities, but it seems that in these three hundred signatures, we are presented with the core of the early Welsh puritan movement before the diaspora of 1642–3. These preliminary findings suggest that the nucleus of this group was located in Monmouthshire, and possibly represented a large proportion of the Llanfaches congregation. This should not surprise us when we recall that William Wroth was the petition's leading signatory, and that his church was the centre to which leading puritan figures like Cradock and Erbery gravitated. The signatures suggest the concentration of puritan opinion in the south-eastern area of Wales which had established lines of communication with like-minded reformers in western England. It may have been this petition which brought the Llanfaches congregation and the Monmouthshire nonconformists into the public gaze, and which encouraged the production in 1641 of a hostile pamphlet by Edward Harris that vilified the 'Brownists', separatists and nonconformists of Monmouthshire.⁴⁸ However, the possible subscription of the petition by members from Llwyd's Wrexham

⁴⁵ Woolrych, *Commonwealth to Protectorate*, 209–10, 213–14, 412–13; T.E. Ellis and J.H. Davies (eds), *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd* (2 vols., Bangor, 1899–1908), ii. 250.

⁴⁶ *ODNB*, s.n. 'John Ashe'.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, s.n. 'John ap John'; William G. Norris, *John ap John, and Early Records of Friends in Wales* (1907).

⁴⁸ Edward Harris, *A True Relation of a Company of Brownists, Separatists, and Nonconformists in Monmouthshire in Wales* (1641).

congregation suggests that we are dealing with a phenomenon which had already developed institutional and associative linkages across Wales which could be marshalled in a common cause when the opportunity arose.⁴⁹

Despite these indications of organisation and influence among the godly in Wales, in many ways the petition also testifies to the circumscribed nature of pre-war Welsh puritanism. Although three hundred signatories represents a considerable constituency, if the resources from puritan networks across Wales and the Marches were being deployed here, it was still a small and isolated community, although it was one which possessed an influence out of all proportion to its numerical weight in 1640–2. It is also noteworthy that if this petition was part of the campaign against the bishops in early 1641, as seems a fair hypothesis, it was not presented in the name of a county or corporation as were most others. It would appear that the Welsh puritans did not enjoy the backing of the magistracy in Wales and could not call upon their resources as could godly communities in a number of English counties. Rather were they forced to organise their plea for further reformation among themselves. Similarly no Welsh member can be associated directly with this petition; it was Harley who was the animating force at Westminster.

V

The lack of sympathy from the majority of Welsh members in parliament is indicated by an important letter from another puritan minister, Oliver Thomas, which gives some indication of the gulf that existed between the radical Protestants in Wales and their representatives in the Commons. Thomas was a resident of West Felton, near Oswestry in Shropshire, where he possibly acted as an unofficial curate to the puritan Samuel Hildersham. Thomas became a part of the preaching network of godly society which circulated among the puritan nodal points of border Welsh society. He had his licence taken away for nonconformity in 1639 after preaching at Holt, Denbighshire. Here he was accompanied by Richard Blinman, one of the witnesses of William Wroth's will.⁵⁰ Thomas was deeply concerned for the spiritual welfare of the Welsh people, and was painfully aware of the difficulties of their accessing godly literature in the vernacular. Styling himself *Car-wr y Cymru* ('The Friend of the Welsh') he composed a Welsh catechism for children in 1630 and a more substantial treatise a year later which implored the Welsh to take advantage of the inexpensive Welsh Bible which had appeared in 1630.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Oliver Thomas later referred to the manner in which ministers from both north and south Wales had attended on the parliament: BL, Add. MS 70,106, fo. 155.

⁵⁰ Merfyn Morgan (ed.), *Gweithiau Oliver Thomas ac Evan Roberts: Dau Biwritan Cynnar* (Cardiff, 1981), xv–xviii.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, xxxiv–liv, 1–154.

On 5 July 1641, Thomas wrote a letter to Sir Robert Harley from West Felton which intimated his frustration that ministers from north and south Wales had waited on parliamentary 'lycence' without any real success. Further initiatives beyond the concession of the Commons order of 12 January appear to have been expected after the presentation of the February petition, but had not been forthcoming. Thomas's letter continued, 'though wee bee out of sight, yeat let us not bee out of mynde, but let Wales spirituall misery bee the obiect of parliamentarie mercye'.⁵² He added that these ministers had great hopes that Wales's 'misery' would be discovered in this parliament, as it had been 'truncked up' in the Short Parliament 'beinge out of season'. This is important evidence which indicates that plans for parliamentary lobbying had been in place in April 1640, which helps explain the rapid mobilisation of the puritan network in Wales with the petitions of December 1640 and February 1641; presumably the substance of these representations had already been discussed and drafted. Thomas went on to plead for action by Harley, for 'if the care of provision for us bee comitted to our Welsh parliamentary knights & burgesses, our hopes are gone'. This is a vital piece of information, indicating that the puritan network of ministers and sympathisers in Wales did not consider that the Welsh representatives shared their religious ideals, and would not be effective agents in pressing for further ecclesiastical reform.

VI

There are indications that it was not only in parliament that the puritan cause was seen to be struggling against Welsh resistance and inertia. There is also some scattered evidence that the ministers licensed by the order of 12 January 1641 to preach itinerantly in Wales encountered opposition among the magistracy. On 26 June 1641, a petition by Walter Cradock and Henry Walter was presented to the Commons by their representative, Sir Robert Harley.⁵³ Cradock and Walter claimed that when they had attempted to preach where sermons were lacking, they and their congregations had been 'molested' by magistrates in the counties of Glamorgan, Brecon and Radnor. They professed that some justices had made the preachers pay for 'goeing from their owne parishes' to preach, and had also imprisoned some individuals, although it is unclear whether this referred to the preachers themselves or to members of their congregations.⁵⁴ It is possible that the royalist poet of Blaenau Gwent, Jenkin Richards, was referring to this opposition in a later composition which mentioned the 'immersing' and 'injuring' done to Cradock in Glamorgan.⁵⁵

⁵² BL, Add. MS 70,106, fo. 155.

⁵³ *CJ*, ii. 189; BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 354v; Harl. MS 479, fo. 1v.

⁵⁴ BL, Harl. MS 479, fo. 1v.

⁵⁵ Richards, *Puritan Movement*, 35, n. 4.

One possible instance of the reaction of the authorities, can be seen in a recognizance of June 1641 at the Breconshire Great Sessions, which bound three individuals to appear at a future sessions. The charge against them was 'for seduceing the people and sayeing that all ministers are dombe dogges and have the devill in their hartes'.⁵⁶ While there is no positive proof that such activities were a product of the evangelising mission authorised by the Commons, the similarity of the message and language employed here and that of the petitions of December 1640 and February 1641 is illuminating. Although perhaps not directly related, it does indicate that the common tropes of puritan anti-clerical discourse and the message of the godly Welsh network were finding resonances at relatively humble social levels.

After Harley had presented the ministers' complaint in the Commons, the burgess for Sudbury and parliamentary diarist, Sir Simonds D'Ewes, rose to his feet, stating 'as wee had a care of the bodies and liberties of men soe wee should for ther soules. That an order of this howse was a sufficient dispensation for these people to do what they had done'.⁵⁷ Revealingly, however, the petition was opposed by Charles Price of Pilleth, member for Radnorshire, and a 'Mr. Herbert', probably William Herbert, burgess for Cardiff, who spoke against the doctrines espoused by Cradock.⁵⁸ In the event, Cradock's and Walter's petition was referred to the committee for scandalous ministers, and the offending magistrates were summoned to appear before the committee.⁵⁹ It is unclear what the ultimate outcome of their complaint proved to be, but it does indicate that such preaching was not welcomed by the authorities in these parts of the principality. It was this section of society which would become increasingly disturbed at the radical tone of the religious debates and resolutions in parliament during 1641, and which looked to the king for order and authority in religion as much as social matters during the breakdown of 1642.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ NLW, Great Sessions 4/348/4/100. Two were yeomen, and one, from Glamorgan, was a 'chapman', or itinerant peddler. The county's court records show something of a proliferation of radical religious and political beliefs from this point: *ibid.* 4/349/1/25, 4/349/1/32, 4/349/2/26, 4/349/4/44.

⁵⁷ BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 354v.

⁵⁸ Of the five potential 'Mr. Herberts' (excluding Philip Lord Herbert), William Herbert of Cogan Pill, near Cardiff, appears the likeliest candidate for the speaker. He would presumably have been aware of Cradock from his time as curate at Cardiff, and Jenkin Richards's poem indicates that Glamorgan was one of the counties where Cradock was active in 1641. This member became a committed royalist, dying on the battlefield at Edgehill.

⁵⁹ *CJ*, ii. 189; BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 354v. See also John Nalson, *An Impartial Collection of the Great Affairs of State* (1682), ii. 317.

⁶⁰ Bowen, *Politics of the Principality*, ch. 6.

VII

This magisterial resistance mirrored Oliver Thomas's lack of confidence in the Welsh representatives at Westminster, but in his letter to Harley he did note a possible exception in the person of Sir Thomas Myddleton, member for Denbighshire and future commander of parliamentary forces in north Wales.⁶¹ Although not wholly certain of Myddleton's position, Thomas believed him to be potentially receptive to such approaches, and perhaps the most godly of the Welsh members. There is evidence to suggest that Myddleton did indeed have sympathy with the godly cause, being appointed to a number of committees dealing with religious reform and apparently collecting information on scandalous ministers in his native Denbighshire.⁶² It does not seem that Myddleton's religious sympathies wholly agreed with those of the Welsh puritan agitators, however. On 23 January 1641, he discussed parliamentary news in a letter to Sir Thomas Salusbury of Llewenni, and noted that there was 'a greate faction against the bishops for to roote them out'.⁶³ His reference to a 'faction' suggests that he himself was no root-and-branch man, and that he considered reform of episcopacy rather than its abolition to be the proper course. Richard Baxter believed Myddleton to be a moderate who was 'conformable to episcopacy and parochial worship', indicating that his attitudes were rather different from those of the Welsh puritan petitioners.⁶⁴

Although Oliver Thomas was despairing of the Welsh members' support of religious change, there are indications that there were two representatives besides Myddleton who were prepared to countenance sweeping reform of the episcopate. These were William Thomas of Aber, burgess for Caernarfon, and John Bodvel, knight of the shire for Anglesey. Thomas spoke on the nature and the role of the episcopate on several occasions, but it is clear from printed reports of his speeches that he was an advocate of reform, not abolition, asserting on one occasion that he was a 'firme friend to episcopacy'.⁶⁵ He acknowledged the difference between himself and more radical members who 'say that my axe hath no edge'. His fear of a 'presbiteriall' government

⁶¹ BL, Add. MS 70,106, fo. 155.

⁶² G.R. Thomas, 'Sir Thomas Myddleton II, 1586–1666' (University of Wales, MA thesis, 1967), 219.

⁶³ NLW, Llewenni MS (Correspondence), no. 175.

⁶⁴ Richard Baxter, *Richard Baxter's Penitent Confession* (1691), 30. In his will, Myddleton stressed his attachment to 'the three creeds established and professed by the Church of England in the tyme of Elizabeth': TNA, PROB11/323.

⁶⁵ William Thomas, *A Speech of William Thomas, Esquire* (1642); NLW, Llanfair-Brynodol MS C. 32. His other speeches were published as *A Speech of William Thomas in Parliament* (1641) and *Master William Thomas, his Speech in Parliament Concerning Deanes and their Office* (1641). Thomas was misrepresented as a Root and Branch advocate by the royalist Nalson: *Impartial Collection*, ii. 211, 226–8, 282–5.

perhaps helps explain his ultimate choice of the king's party in the civil war. Bodvel, on the other hand, appears to have been the only Welsh supporter of the kind of root-and-branch reforms promoted by Erbery, Cradock and the other puritan petitioners. In the debate on the Root and Branch Bill of 3 April 1641, he endorsed the measure wholeheartedly, stating 'we could not expect any fruit of our endeavours except we first cleanse the house of God'.⁶⁶ He also demonstrated a concern to maintain good relations with the Presbyterian Scots, something which also suggests his anti-episcopal credentials. His recorded speeches and committee appointments indicate that Bodvel's religious attitudes were fired by a suspicion of recusants and popery.⁶⁷ Surprisingly, given his religious attitudes, Bodvel too became a royalist in the civil war, although a rather reticent and reluctant one.⁶⁸ There is no evidence, however, to believe that he was in contact with the Welsh puritan ministers or that he promoted their cause in parliament.

In other instances, Oliver Thomas's reservations regarding the Welsh members were well-founded, and it appears that most of the principality's representatives, like their counterparts on the county benches in Wales, were disquieted by the moves towards religious change. In a debate on whether the Root and Branch Bill should proceed to a second reading on 27 May 1641, for example, although it was conceived that the majority of the House was in favour of the measure, Sir Charles Williams of Llangibby, member for Monmouthshire, 'stoode up & said that if there were but six that were noes, yet he would devide the House'.⁶⁹ This suggests serious misgivings on Williams's part, and he was made to apologise for putting the House to this inconvenience. We should also note that A.H. Dodd's characterisation of Charles Price of Pilleth, member for Radnorshire, as '*mallei episcoporum*', is based upon the *Commons Journal* listing him as a teller for the ayes in the division as to whether this bill should proceed to a second reading.⁷⁰ It seems the *Journal* was mistaken on this occasion, however, as the diarists D'Ewes and John Moore record that Price was in fact a teller for the noes.⁷¹ Price himself spoke against the petition presented on 26 June 1641 by Walter and Cradock, maintaining that Cradock 'had preached strange doctrines, one of which was that Christ died a slave'.⁷² Concern with the forces of further

⁶⁶ Quoted in Fletcher, *Outbreak*, 102.

⁶⁷ BL, Add. MS 14,828, fo. 90; Harl. MS 479, fo. 156; Harl. MS 163, fo. 761v; *CJ*, ii. 113, 205, 238, 257.

⁶⁸ A.H. Dodd, 'The Tragedy of Colonel John Bodvel', *Caernarvonshire Historical Society Transactions*, 6 (1945), 5–8.

⁶⁹ BL, Harl. MS 477, fo. 107; Harl. MS 163, fo. 237v.

⁷⁰ Dodd, 'Wales in the Parliaments of Charles I, 1640–42', *THSC* (1946–7), 70; idem, 'The Pattern of Politics in Stuart Wales', *THSC* (1948), 51; *CJ*, ii. 159.

⁷¹ BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 237v; Harl. MS 477, fo. 107.

⁷² BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 354v. See also Harl. MS 479, fo. 1v.

reformation was also voiced in a debate on the bill for abolishing episcopacy by the burgess for Beaumaris, John Griffith of Cefnamlwch. Griffith claimed 'ytt ys dystastfull to thys House to speake for the government of the churche', and was brought before the bar of the Commons for his conduct.⁷³ He was clearly offended by the very questioning of episcopal government, and voiced a concern over these religious questions which one suspects was shared by a number of his more reticent Welsh colleagues, but which was only mobilized with any coherence in the more extreme circumstances of 1642.

VIII

This cleavage between the ambitions of Welsh puritans and the religious attitudes of their representatives in parliament saw Sir Robert Harley assume centre stage in 1640–1 when efforts were made to advance the cause of Welsh religious reform at Westminster. He was not the only reforming member with whom the Welsh puritans were establishing contacts, however, and they began to explore other avenues as parliament progressed. In July 1641, Oliver Thomas commented that John Crew, chairman of the committee for religion, had promised 'that the parliam[en]t would bee myndfull of us Welsh ministers', and he asked Harley to 'give him [Crew] thanks for his benevolence to us'.⁷⁴ A petition of April 1642 from the parishioners of Pennard requesting that Ambrose Mostyn be appointed as their lecturer, was presented by a prominent opponent of episcopacy, Denzil Holles.⁷⁵ That the godly party in Wales had established connections with members who pressed for far-reaching religious reform can be seen in several instances from early 1642, when one of their key contacts was revealed to be Oliver Cromwell.

On 7 February 1642, it was Cromwell who presented a petition to the Commons from individuals in Monmouthshire who were being harassed by the authorities for their gadding to sermons, as allowed by the Commons order of 13 January 1641.⁷⁶ The petition's subscribers included Edward Hollister of Shirenewton, a man who had endorsed the February 1641 petition. On 29 March it was Cromwell once more who appeared before the Commons, on this occasion presenting a certificate from Richard Symonds and 'three other ministers of Monmouthshire', which communicated their fears about the strength of popery in the vicinity of Monmouth.⁷⁷ He was again in evidence as

⁷³ BL, Add. MS 14,828, fo. 66; Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D.1099, fo. 45v; BL, Harl. MS 163, fo. 279v; Bedfordshire and Luton Archives, St. John MSS J1383.

⁷⁴ BL, Add. MS 70,106, fo. 155.

⁷⁵ *PJ*, ii. 253; House of Lords Record Office, Main Papers, 30 April 1642.

⁷⁶ *PJ*, ii. 302–3; *CJ*, ii. 419.

⁷⁷ *PJ*, ii. 104. The certificate itself is Bodleian Library, MS Dep. C.168, no. 175, and carries the endorsement 'sent to Mr Cromwell'. The identity of the 'three other ministers' is not

spokesman for the puritan cause in Wales on 24 May 1642, when he presented a petition from the godly parishioners of Pennard against their vicar, William Edwards.⁷⁸ This was the parish which had recently petitioned parliament (through Denzil Holles) to complain about Edwards' ministry and to request that Ambrose Mostyn be instituted as a lecturer.

It is not known how Cromwell came to be associated with the godly party in Wales. The Cromwell (*alias* Williams) family traced its descent from southern Welsh gentry, and Oliver acknowledged his Welsh affinities.⁷⁹ In his later career Cromwell also demonstrated a concern for sponsoring godly preaching in the principality.⁸⁰ Perhaps more relevant in the present context, however, was the fact that Cromwell had been involved with Sir Robert Harley in the drafting of the Root and Branch Bill in 1641.⁸¹ It is possible that Harley recommended the Welsh cause to Cromwell, or that he put him in touch with men like Symonds.

At first sight, Cromwell seems an odd sponsor for the Welsh puritans' cause. He was a relatively obscure backbench member from East Anglia with no landed interests in south Wales. However, it may have been his concerns about popery and the influence of Catholics which moved him to sponsor these representations. The Monmouthshire petitions were formulated against a backdrop of divisions within the county over the influence of recusants in local government and a deep anxiety over the control of the county's military storehouse, the magazine, by Catholic elements in Monmouth.⁸² It is probably not coincidental that on both 7 February and 29 March 1642, Cromwell's presentation of messages from the Monmouthshire puritans followed discussion of reports concerning the county magazine. There was a protracted struggle over the magazine as opposing factions called for its removal from Monmouth, where it was under the influence of the earl of Worcester, to Newport, a borough associated with the earl of Pembroke.⁸³ Cromwell's enthusiasm for discovering and frustrating the designs of Catholics may form

specified, but it seems likely that they included Walter Cradock and Henry Walter, who were active in south-east Wales around this time. The remaining minister was possibly William Erbery.

⁷⁸ *PJ*, ii. 368; *CJ*, ii. 586.

⁷⁹ See, for example, his letter to Bishop John Williams: *The Letters and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell with Elucidations by Thomas Carlyle*, ed. S.C. Lomas (3 vols, 1904), i. 275–6. I am grateful to Peter Roberts for this reference.

⁸⁰ Anthony Fletcher, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Godly Nation', in John Morrill (ed.), *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution* (Harlow, 1990), 224.

⁸¹ J.S.A. Adamson, 'Oliver Cromwell and the Long Parliament', in Morrill, *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, 53.

⁸² Lloyd Bowen, 'Wales in British Politics, c.1603–42', (University of Cardiff, Ph.D. thesis, 1999), 492–504.

⁸³ *CJ*, ii. 415; *PJ*, i. 294.

an important context for his intervention here. This does not explain his association with the Pennard petition, although it may be relevant that Pennard was held by the earl of Worcester as part of his Gower estates.⁸⁴

It seems more likely that a broader ecclesiological congruence lay at the heart of the correspondence between Cromwell and the Welsh puritans, particularly on account of his emerging reputation as a religious radical involved in the campaign to abolish the episcopate.⁸⁵ His position on this key issue synchronised with both of the major Welsh puritan petitions. Cromwell mentioned in parliament that Symonds' petition had been directed to himself, Sir Arthur Haselrig and John Pym, all of whom were prominent anti-episcopalians. Sir Edward Dering later wrote that the bill for abolishing episcopacy, which he introduced on 27 May 1641, had been given to him by Haselrig, who in turn had received it from Cromwell.⁸⁶ The sponsorship of issues concerning the godly cause in Wales by these leaders of the anti-episcopalian campaign points, perhaps, to a shift in the affiliations of the Welsh puritans away from the comparatively moderate Harley towards rather more radical spokesmen in the increasingly polarised political situation following the Irish Rebellion and the popish scares of late 1641.

IX

For all their developing contacts with godly figures at Westminster, however, the reforming efforts of the Welsh puritans were halted in their tracks by the country's descent into civil war and the emergence of a powerful pro-royalist sentiment in most Welsh shires. The leading lights of the puritan impulse within Wales were dispersed in the face of the loyalist wave which swept through the principality.⁸⁷ Writing in the early 1660s, Vavasor Powell recalled the collapse of the Welsh puritans' reform programme in the face of civil conflict: 'the late war coming suddenly on, there could be no redresse obtained [by the Welsh puritans]; but on the contrary most (if not all) of those preachers and professors [in Wales] were forced, through violence of their persecutors, to leave their habitations and country'.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Pennard, as well as a good deal of Worcester's sequestered estates, was given to Cromwell in 1648 as part of a £2,500 p.a. settlement by a grateful parliament: *Journal of the House of Lords*, x. 100, 104–5; David Farr, 'Oliver Cromwell and a 1647 Case in Chancery', *Historical Research*, 71 (1998), 342.

⁸⁵ John Morrill, 'The Making of Oliver Cromwell', in Morrill, *Oliver Cromwell and the English Revolution*, 46–7.

⁸⁶ Edward Dering, *A Collection of Speeches Made by Sir Edward Dering* (1642), 62.

⁸⁷ See William Erbery, *The Wretched People*, bound in *The Babe of Glory* (1653), 108; *Gweithiau Morgan Llwyd*, i. 3; ii. xxv–xxvi.

⁸⁸ Powell, *Bird in the Cage*, sig. A8.

A number of them eventually found their way to London and the parliamentary army where they encountered large and often radical puritan communities which gave them fellowship and support. As the war and wrangling over any eventual church settlement continued, the scheme for itinerant preaching in Wales increasingly became associated with the radical Independent group rather than the more conservative Presbyterians – among whom were numbered Sir Robert Harley and Sir Thomas Myddleton. Theological differences of this kind increasingly came to take on a political significance as the 1640s progressed.⁸⁹ The radicalising process of war and associations with the New Model Army and the Independent churches in London, widened the gulf between many of the leading Welsh puritans and their earlier allies (or prospective allies) such as Harley, Holles and Myddleton.⁹⁰ The direction of religious policy for Wales increasingly came to be associated with the more militant Independents, who won a political victory in 1646–7 by having the itinerant preaching mission into Wales of Cradock, Walter and Symonds approved in the face of Presbyterian resistance and prevarication. Although the preachers were the same as those authorised in 1641, the political context was radically different. It was in alliance with these radical factions rather than moderates like Harley that, as Stephen Roberts has shown, the principle of itinerant preaching in Wales transmuted into the establishment of the Commission for the Propagation of the Gospel in Wales in February 1650.⁹¹ Could it be that this division had been foreshadowed in early 1642 with the emergence of the radical Cromwell rather than the moderate Harley as the promoter of the Welsh puritans' petitions? Unfortunately the available evidence will not bear the full weight of this hypothesis, but it does suggest correlations with later developments which may repay future investigation.

Despite this radicalising process and the shifting political contexts of the 1640s, the germ of the propagation scheme can be seen, albeit in a much more *ad hoc* and piecemeal form, at the very beginning of the Long Parliament. This paper has indicated how these long-cherished ambitions for a preaching ministry and the evangelisation of Wales emerged re-invigorated from the wreckage of the Laudian Church. Puritanism in Wales at the opening of the Long Parliament was still very much a minority movement, small and

⁸⁹ Roberts, 'Propagating the Gospel', 63–8.

⁹⁰ It has been argued earlier that Myddleton was not as radical in his religious beliefs as the petitioners of 1640–1, but it should be noted that Ambrose Mostyn (one of the 1641 petitioners) was Myddleton's chaplain by December 1644. Morgan Llwyd was also directed to join parliament's proselytising mission in north Wales under Myddleton's protection. Myddleton clearly did have ties with the radical wing of Welsh puritanism, but it does not seem that he shared their attitudes towards episcopacy and church reform: TNA, SP28/346, p. 14; NLW, MS 11.439D, fo. 23.

⁹¹ Roberts, 'Propagating the Gospel'.

geographically restricted. Yet it possessed powerful friends and sympathizers in England, particularly Sir Robert Harley. The broad and somewhat undifferentiated reformist agenda of the early Long Parliament allowed the small band of Welsh puritans to promote a doctrine of evangelisation in concert with members like Harley, which was listened to sympathetically, but which failed to gain much in the way of concrete action. This may reflect the divisions within the Commons over the nature and scope of the reforms required, for the Welsh agenda, like the Root and Branch Petition it echoed, was simply too radical for some members to stomach. Nevertheless, the agitation by the Welsh puritans in 1640–2 reveals how this group operated through sympathetic channels in the Commons and established contacts with influential reforming figures at Westminster, bypassing the much more conservative Welsh members. It is also clear from this analysis that the associational structure of a nascent puritan movement in Wales was present in the early 1640s. This structure was robust enough to endure until parliament's victory ushered the rule of the saints into even the darkest corners of the land, allowing the ministers from 1640–1 to assume key roles in the political landscape of Wales as propagators rather than simply as petitioners.