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Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Hall, George (*bap.* 1613, *d.* 1668), *bishop of Chester*

by John D. Ramsbottom

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Hall, George (*bap.* 1613, *d.* 1668), bishop of Chester, was the third son of Joseph Hall (1574–1656), bishop of Exeter from 1627 to 1641 and of Norwich from 1641 to 1647, and his wife, Elizabeth Winiff (1582/3–1652). George was baptized on 24 August 1613 at Waltham Abbey, Essex, where his father was the rector for many years. He entered Exeter College, Oxford, in 1628, graduated BA in April 1631 and proceeded MA in January 1634 (a degree which was incorporated at Cambridge the following year). From 1632 until his resignation in June 1638 he was a fellow of Exeter College. He became vicar of Menheniot, Cornwall, in October 1637, a prebendary of Exeter Cathedral in December 1639, and archdeacon of Cornwall on the resignation of his eldest brother, Robert, in October 1641. He married Gertrude Meredith (*d.* 1669), daughter of Edward Meredith of Maristow, on 28 June 1641.

During the civil war Hall was sequestered from vicarage, prebend, and archdeaconry and was prevented from keeping a school, but he and his wife both received compensation from parliament. In November 1651 he was chosen as 'minister' at St Bartholomew by the Exchange in London, in spite of opposition from five or six vestrymen who attempted to delay the proceedings in favour of other candidates. On 5 January 1654 the vestry elected Hall as rector, but this was disallowed by the keepers of the great seal, to whom the living belonged. Thereafter he was admitted to the rectory of Berwick, Sussex, and of St Botolph, Aldersgate, London (1654–5). At the Restoration, Hall was created DD and became chaplain to Charles II, then canon of Windsor and archdeacon of Canterbury. He was elected bishop of Chester on 24 April 1662 (consecrated 11 May), serving until his death on 23 August 1668. The oft-repeated story that he was mortally wounded by a knife in his pocket when he fell from his garden mount first appears in Thomas Birch's *Life of... Tillotson* (2nd edn, 1753, 38). He was buried in the chancel of Wigan church, Lancashire.

Hall's position in the Restoration church, like that of many Cromwellian conformists, was ambiguous. On the one hand, he was a pluralist prelate, who resided at the comfortable rectory of Wigan, granted him by Sir Orlando Bridgman, while failing to supervise the routine business of his see, where in his time presentations to livings or subscriptions by clergy were recorded only 'by chance' (bishop's act book, fol. 137). Hall championed conformity to the Anglican liturgy; according to one dissenter 'his letter to the Bp of London was of utmost importance tow[ards] the crossinge of the indulgence' proposed by the king in 1662 (*Diary of the Rev. Henry Newcome*, 119). But Hall also appears to have espoused his father's moderation in devotional matters. During the interregnum he found himself 'ingaged, betweene opposite Parties, which I was to speake unto; the rigid Punctilio-men, both of the right hand, and of the left' (G. Hall, *God's Appearing for the Tribe of Levi*, 1655, sigs. A2v–3). He published a satirical attack on the

common Catholic enemy, *The Triumphs of Rome over Despised Protestantie* (1655, repr. 1667). After the Restoration he was a constant preacher in the neighbourhood of Wigan, his sermons regularly attracting the Presbyterian diarist Robert Lowe and his companions. On one such occasion Hall inveighed 'against atheisticalnes' (*Diary of Roger Lowe*, 105), and he did not hesitate to employ the same theme in the House of Lords (G. Hall, *A Fast Sermon Preached ... on the Day of Solemn Humiliation for the Continuing Pestilence*, 1666). Hall's marriage was childless. Apart from providing for his widow—who was to survive him only by some seven months—during her lifetime, Hall bequeathed his entire landed estate to Exeter College, leaving £100 for the poor of Waltham Abbey and no legacy at all to his relations. His youngest brother, Samuel, felt aggrieved by this will, bringing suit over it in the court of arches in 1671.

JOHN D. RAMSBOTTOM

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Likenesses oils, Exeter College, Oxford · portrait, Emmanuel College, Cambridge

Wealth at death landed estate to Exeter College, Oxford; £100 to poor of Waltham Abbey; provision for widow's lifetime; nothing else to relatives: will, TNA: PRO, PROB 11/328, sig. 164

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