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The Worlds of Arthur Hildersham (1563-1632)

by

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degree of
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My family has been extremely long-suffering and supportive throughout this project, and I will always be indebted to them.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted for a degree at another university. None of the material in this thesis has been published prior to the date of submission. Some of the material included in Chapter 6 was used in a Master's essay submitted in 2003: it has now been reviewed and updated in the light of subsequent research, and is identified in the text.

ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to explore the various worlds of early modern spirituality through the lens of one important and influential figure, Arthur Hildersham. Using diocesan, parish, and national records, and a close study of Hildersham's printed works, it traces the story of one strand of England's parallel Reformations. Hildersham's long association with the parish of Ashby-de-la-Zouch provides the opportunity to examine the progress of the puritan Reformation in a particular locality over an extended period. His role as a godly pastor, and the message he delivered to his people, are considered. The thesis attempts to show that the effect of puritanism within a parish community was not necessarily divisive or unpopular, particularly when it was promulgated for many years and supported by a godly patron. Hildersham's participation in networks of godly sociability and movements for further reformation illustrate how powerful and wide-reaching such associations could be.

As an archetype of 'Jacobethan' nonseparating nonconformity, Hildersham's career supplies a focus for looking at shifting configurations of conformity and orthodoxy. His ambivalent relationship with the ecclesiastical establishment, it is argued, demonstrates that even the most principled nonconformists had more agency than is sometimes allowed. How Hildersham was able to maintain a position of influence despite his frequent suspensions is examined. Recent studies of puritan culture have challenged a familiar radical/moderate paradigm, and this thesis supports the argument that the boundaries between mainstream puritans like Hildersham and those on the radical fringes were, in practice, blurred. However, it rejects the conclusion that all puritanism was intrinsically radical and that its adherents were incipient heretics. Hildersham's legacy allows us to explore how a later age fashioned and used the memory of the past. It is hoped that this study will contribute to our understanding of the multi-layered experience of post-Reformation English religion.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abridgement</i>	<i>An Abridgement of that Booke which the Ministers of Lincolne Diocesse delivered to his Majestie upon the First of December 1605 (reprinted 1617)</i>
BL	British Library
Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam'	Samuel Clarke, 'The Life of Master Arthur Hildersam', in <i>idem</i> , <i>The Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines</i> (London, 1660)
<i>DNB</i>	L. Stephens and S. Lee (eds.), <i>The Dictionary of National Biography</i> , 63 Vols. (London, 1856-97)
DWL	Dr Williams's Library, London
ERO	Essex Record Office
Hildersham, <i>Lords Supper</i>	Arthur Hildersham, <i>The Doctrine of Communicating Worthily in the Lords Supper</i> (London, 1609)
Hildersham, <i>Lectures upon John</i>	Arthur Hildersham, <i>CVIII Lectures upon the Fourth of John</i> (2 nd edn., London, 1632)
Hildersham, <i>Fasting and Praier</i>	Arthur Hildersham, <i>The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier, and Humiliation for Sinne</i> (London, 1633)
Hildersham, <i>Lectures upon Psalme LI</i>	Arthur Hildersham, <i>CLII Lectures upon Psalme LI</i> (London, 1635)
Johnson, <i>Treatise</i>	Francis Johnson, <i>A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England</i> (Low Countries?, 1595)
<i>JEH</i>	<i>Journal of Ecclesiastical History</i>

JRUL	John Rylands University Library, Manchester
LAO	Lincolnshire Archives Office
LRO	Leicestershire Record Office
NAO	Nottinghamshire Archives Office
ODNB	Brian Harrison (ed.), <i>The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i> (Oxford, 2004-2008, consulted online)
PRO	Public Record Office
SAO	Shropshire Archives Office
Venn	John Venn and J. A. Venn, <i>Alumni Cantabrigienses: A Biographical List of all Known Students, Graduates and Holders of Office at the University of Cambridge, Part I: From the Earliest Times to 1751</i> , 4 Vols. (Cambridge, 1922-1927)
VCH Cambs	A. P. M. Wright (ed.), <i>The Victoria County History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely</i> , Vol. VI (Oxford, 1978)
VCH Essex	W. R. Powell (ed.), <i>The Victoria County History of the County of Essex</i> , Vols. II and IV (London, 1956)
VCH Leics	W. G. Hoskins (ed.), <i>The Victoria County History of the County of Leicester</i> , Vol. II (Oxford, 1969)
Wing	Donald Wing, <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books printed in England, Scotland and Ireland, 1641-1700</i> , 3 Vols. (New York, 1972 edn.)

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

One of the books in Arthur Hildersham's well-stocked library was Petrus de Alliaco's *Imago Mundi*.¹ An interest in cosmology reflected the liberal humanist tradition in education that pervaded so many Western universities in the late-fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and demonstrated that Hildersham was a product of such a cultural milieu. And yet the volume's title – A Picture of the World – provides a metaphor for the central paradox at the heart of any study of Hildersham's life and thought. In what way, or ways, was the world he inhabited to be perceived? On the one hand, his world was that of the learned divine, exploring the widening horizons of scholarly and scientific discovery. But on the other hand, he was equally at home in that rather shadowy world, where religious radicals

¹ Hildersham's copy of this volume, by the French cardinal, philosopher and cosmographer Petrus de Alliaco (or Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420) is now held in Cambridge University Library, see J. C. T. Oates, *A Catalogue of the Fifteenth-Century Printed Books in the University Library, Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1954), no. 3737. Bearing the inscription, 'Nosce teipsum Arthur Hildersam', the library received the book as part of the bequest of Richard Holdsworth (d. 1649), Master of Emmanuel College. Presumably Holdsworth obtained it either directly or indirectly from Samuel Hildersham, Arthur's son, himself an *alumnus* of Emmanuel, who was the main beneficiary of Hildersham's will. This volume is not mentioned specifically, but Samuel was bequeathed the residue of his father's estate, with the exception of named gifts. In Hildersham's inventory, his library was valued at £66 and his 'Pictures and Mappes' at 10s, see LRO PR/1/34 f. 29. The *Imago Mundi* was one of the earliest scientific books, printed in the Netherlands, containing the only map printed there in the fifteenth century. This edition had a profound influence: it was on the basis of d'Ailly's opinion that the world was round and his calculations about the size of the earth that Columbus embarked on his voyage in 1492. Columbus's own copy of the book, with his extensive annotations, is preserved at the Bibliotheca Colombina, Seville. Hildersham's copy is only lightly annotated (in Latin), but reveals a special interest in the constellations, the equinoxes and solstices, and the lunar cycles, see pp. 49v, 61r, 62r, 65r. Recent studies which explore this early modern interest in the physical universe include, D. K. Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2008), and Matthew McLean, *The Cosmographia of Sebastian Munster: Describing the World in the Reformation* (Aldershot, 2007). The definitive work on the history of astronomy and cosmology, recently revised, remains J. D. North, *Cosmos: An Illustrated History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (Chicago, 2008).

rubbed shoulders with their more respectable contemporaries. Although there was a tension between such polarities, these were not separate planets but different facets of a complex and multi-layered world of experience.

Hildersham represents an archetype of ‘Jacobethan’ nonseparating nonconformity and an exemplar of pastoral parish ministry in his long residence at Ashby-de-la-Zouch. Though he is widely recognised as an important and influential figure, there has been no modern biography, a lacuna highlighted by Kenneth Parker and Eric Carlson in their examination of Hildersham’s mentor, Richard Greenham.² Their study, *‘Practical Divinity’*, shows how a detailed investigation of one significant individual’s ministry and writings can help to illuminate our understanding of early modern spirituality. This biographical study of Hildersham is worthwhile in its own right because of his national and local prominence, and by incorporating a close reading of all his published writings will also provide a focus for exploring a range of issues relating to religious continuity and change in this period. It will offer a useful guide to mapping the topography of the shifting English post-Reformation landscape. Rather than the biographical medium serving as a ‘substitute for explanation’, as Nicholas Tyacke has suggested is often the case, it can supply a detailed and coherent tool for constructing and interrogating that explanation.³ An in-depth biographical monograph, anchored in a

² Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *‘Practical Divinity’: The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 32, n. 4.

³ Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1520-1700* (Manchester, 2001), p. 30. Other helpful and relevant studies with a biographical basis, include John Coffey, *John Goodwin and the Puritan Revolution* (Woodbridge, 2006); Claire Cross, *The Puritan Earl: The Life of Henry Hastings Third Earl of Huntingdon 1536-1595* (London, 1966); Patrick Collinson, *Archbishop Grindal 1519-1583: The Struggle for a Reformed Church* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1979); Andrew Foster, ‘A Biography of Archbishop Richard Neile, 1562-1640’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1978); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cranmer* (New Haven and London, 1996); Brett Usher, *William Cecil and Episcopacy, 1559-1577* (Aldershot, 2003); and Louise Campbell, ‘Matthew Parker (1504-1575) and the English Reformation’ (PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2005).

specific context, can provide a necessary counterbalance to more wide-ranging or thematic works.

The secondary literature relating to the life of Arthur Hildersham reflects the ambivalence with which he has been perceived. In the years immediately following his death, that perception was largely positive, indeed it demonstrates how a hagiographic literary persona was created. An early but brief biographical reference occurs in Thomas Fuller's *Church History* (1655), some thirteen years after Hildersham's death.⁴ By including a list of the periods when he was silenced and then restored, Fuller was clearly eager to cast Hildersham in heroic mode.⁵ A similar emphasis on both Hildersham's noble birth and his sufferings for the cause of the gospel can be found in Samuel Clarke's thirteen-page biographical study of 1660, which remains the single most important early source for information about his life and ministry.⁶ Hildersham was an ideal vehicle for Clarke's desire to demonstrate (at a time when such a paradigm was again being questioned) that

⁴ Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain; From the Birth of Jesus Christ Untill the Year M.DC.XLVIII* (London, 1655), Book XI, pp. 142-143. See also Fuller, *The History of the Worthies of England* (London, 1662), Cambridgeshire, pp. 158-159.

⁵ Fuller likens Hildersham to the Christian Emperors, Theodosius and Valentinian, and declares that he was 'not like the proud Nobles of Tecoa, who counted themselves too good to put their hands to God's work', see *Church History*, p. 142 and *Worthies*, p. 158. For more on Theodosius, see Patrick Collinson, 'If Constantine, then also Theodosius: St Ambrose and the Integrity of the Elizabethan *Ecclesia Anglicana*', *JEH*, 30:2 (1979), pp. 205-209. For the nobles of Tecoa, who refused to help the people rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, see Nehemiah 3:11.

⁶ Samuel Clarke, 'The Life of Master Arthur Hildersam', which appears in *idem*, *A Generall Martyrologie* (London, 1660). Hildersham's 'Life' also appears in the separately published, *The Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines* (London, 1660), to which all quotations from Clarke in this thesis refer, and in subsequent collections of 'Lives' by Clarke. Clarke states that the source of his information was Hildersham's son, Samuel, who had full access to 'his Father's Papers'. There has also been a suggestion that Hildersham's protégé, Simeon Ashe, may have made some contribution. Subsequent entries on Hildersham in biographical anthologies of puritan and nonconformist worthies are heavily dependent on Clarke and Fuller for details of his life and an assessment of his influence. See, for example, Benjamin Brook, *The Lives of the Puritans* (London, 1813); Erasmus Middleton, *Biographica Evangelica* (London, 1816); and Daniel Neal, *History of the Puritans* (London, 2nd edn., 1732). See also the brief biographical booklet by a later nonconformist minister in Ashby, Joseph Goadby, *Memoirs of the Rev. Arthur Hildersham* (n.p., 1819). For a local view of his ministry, see also John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicestershire* (London, 1804), Vol. III, Part II.

nonconformist clergy could also be faithful ministers of the Church of England.⁷ He is at pains to report Andrew Willet's description of Hildersham as 'The Hammer of Schismatics'.⁸ Clarke portrays Hildersham as a pious, learned and painful preacher, and a helpful writer on issues of practical divinity. He emerges as a man of an 'amiable carriage' and a 'Peace-maker amongst neighbours', noted for his charity to the poor.⁹ His influence within puritan networks of both lay and clerical sociability is stressed through references to his friendship with such godly divines as Thomas Cartwright, John Dod, John Preston, John Cotton, John Ireton, Stephen Egerton, Edward Fleetwood, William Bradshaw, Simeon Ashe and Julines Herring, and also through the patronage of the Hastings and Rediche families. But despite Clarke's irenic evocation of Hildersham as a moderate and generally respected figure, a subtext can be traced relating to the more equivocal aspects of his ministerial career: his passing over for a Fellowship of Christ's College, the displeasure of Judge Edmund Anderson at Hildersham's Leicester Assize sermon of 1596, and his frequent clashes with the High Commission and bishops. Clarke attempts to put a positive gloss on these incidents, by presenting Hildersham as a heroic victim, someone who 'could not live peaceably from men, though he lived quietly with men'.¹⁰ However, what Clarke omits to say is in some ways as significant as what he includes. In his handling of the single most controversial episode in Hildersham's life, his involvement with the heretic Edward Wightman, this is clearly the case. Clarke's designation of Wightman as one 'coming sometimes to the exercise' at Burton on Trent hardly does justice to the

⁷ For a discussion of Clarke's agenda, see Patrick Collinson, "'A Magazine of Religious Patterns'", in *idem*, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 513-519.

⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 151. For more on Willet, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 156-157.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 153, 155.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

problematical relationship that existed between Wightman and Hildersham, stretching back at least fifteen years.¹¹ Clarke's wish to rehabilitate Hildersham's reputation, and to establish him as an orthodox and respectable figure, may have caused him to downplay some of the more radical connections that had undoubtedly existed at a local level.

By those, then, like Clarke, sympathetic to the puritan or nonconformist tradition, Hildersham is generally portrayed as a hero or martyr figure. Some modern scholars have been rather more inimical. Stuart Barton Babbage's description of Hildersham as a 'loveless and intransigent Puritan' perhaps says as much about the opinions of the author as it does about the vicar of Ashby.¹² Here, the stereotype of the puritan as uncompromising religious extremist is reproduced without any attempt at qualification or empathy. Other more recent works, however, which recognise Hildersham's influence in the English post-Reformation religious scene, have offered a more balanced assessment, though without going into very much detail; it is his organisation of the Millenary Petition, his nonconformity, and his involvement with the Wightman case which have received the most frequent mention.¹³ His writings have also been widely quoted, sometimes

¹¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 147.

¹² Stuart Barton Babbage, *Puritanism and Richard Bancroft* (London, 1962), p. 185.

¹³ These works include Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967); Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990); and Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge, 1997). For Hildersham's influence on petitionary activity, including the Millenary petition, see B. W. Quintrell, 'The Royal Hunt and the Puritans, 1604-1605', *JEH*, 31:1 (1980), pp. 41-58. For writings which incorporate discussion of Hildersham's contribution at a more local level, see Christopher Haigh, 'The Troubles of Thomas Pestell: Parish Squabbles and Ecclesiastical Politics in Caroline England', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (Oct. 2002), pp. 403-428; C. D. Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire, 1558-1633' (MA thesis, University of Leeds, 1962); C. J. M. Moxon, 'Ashby-de-la-Zouch – A Social and Economic Survey of a Market Town – 1570-1720' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1971); and Cross, *Puritan Earl*.

clearly out of context, to support a variety of different arguments.¹⁴ This study aims to provide a fuller and more complex picture of Hildersham's ministry and his significance, including, for the first time, a close and systematic reading of his complete works.

There are several areas of debate in the current historiography of the English Reformation and its aftermath, to which a study of Hildersham's career and writings can make a fruitful contribution and offer a fresh perspective. The role of the godly pastor (both prescribed and perceived) is an issue currently receiving much attention. Historians such as Patrick Collinson, Eric Carlson, Kenneth Parker, and Christopher Haigh have explored the varying ways in which ministerial functions were redefined and exercised after the Reformation.¹⁵ The nature of popular responses to the reformed ministry, and whether these led to anticlericalism or division, have also been debated by scholars.¹⁶ The importance, too, of micro-historical, parish-based studies in assessing the impact of

¹⁴ See, for example, Arnold Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), pp. 39-83. Hunt uses Hildersham's technical concession that, on extraordinary occasions, for *believers* the sacrament was valid without accompanying preaching, to argue that Hildersham believed in general that the sacraments were valid (though hindered) without an attendant sermon. In fact, Hildersham devotes two pages of his treatise on the Lord's Supper to proving that preaching should always accompany the sacrament. For an instance where Hildersham's comments on the poor are likewise taken out of context, see William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 124. A detailed study of Hildersham's sermons shows that Hildersham's attitude to the poor was far more complex than this one quotation might suggest, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 98-99, especially n. 12. For soteriological assertions about Hildersham, based on very selective quotation, see R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), pp. 90-93. This issue will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, below, pp. 113-118.

¹⁵ There is a growing body of writing related to the post-Reformation parish ministry, both prescriptive and local case studies. See, for example, Rosemary O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979); Patrick Collinson, 'Shepherds, Sheepdogs and Hirelings: The Pastoral Ministry in Post-Reformation England', in W. J. Sheils and Diana Wood (eds.), *The Ministry: Clerical and Lay, Studies in Church History*, 26 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 185-220; Neal Enssle, 'Patterns of Godly Life: The Ideal Parish Minister in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Thought', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 28:1(1997), pp. 3-28; Eric J. Carlson, 'Good Pastors or Careless Shepherds? Parish Ministers and the English Reformation', *History*, 88:3 (2003), pp. 423-436; Christopher Haigh, 'The Taming of Reformation: Preachers, Pastors and Parishioners in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England', *History*, 85:4 (2000), pp. 572-588; and, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell'.

¹⁶ Christopher Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and Clericalism, 1580-1640' in Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (eds.), *Anticlericalism in Britain c. 1500-1914* (Stroud, 2001), pp. 18-41.

Protestantism at a local level has been recognised, through work on places such as Terling, Dorchester, Colchester and Shrewsbury.¹⁷ In Chapter 2, a detailed exploration of Hildersham's ministry in Ashby, and an assessment of the responses to it, will add to our understanding of how a godly pastor operated. It will also provide ample scope for investigating the religious and social dynamics of another parish community. Was Ashby indeed the model puritan parish as was so often claimed? Hildersham's long periods of suspension and silencing require us to consider what other avenues of influence, apart from preaching, were available to him within the parish context. What effect did the arrival of other incumbents have, and what sort of a relationship did Hildersham have with his successors as vicar, after his deprivation? The message of his preaching and writing will itself be examined in Chapter 3. This will demonstrate his homiletic priorities, and provide a lens for examining developments in reformed theology such as the rise of Arminianism, hypothetical universalism and antinomianism.¹⁸

The networks of association that existed between the godly have long been acknowledged as an essential part of puritan culture.¹⁹ A significant contribution to our understanding of how such sociability operated has been made by Tom

¹⁷Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village; Terling, 1525-1700* (New York and London, 1979); Patrick Collinson, 'The Shearmen's Tree and the Preacher: the Strange Death of Merry England in Shrewsbury and Beyond', in *idem* and John Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 205-220; Mark Byford, 'The Birth of a Protestant Town: the Process of Reformation in Tudor Colchester, 1530-80', in Collinson and Craig (eds.), *Reformation in English Towns*, pp. 23-47; David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992).

¹⁸For the historiography of theological change, see, for example, Kendall, *English Calvinism*; Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinists. The Rise of English Arminianism, c. 1590-1640* (Oxford, 1987); David Como, 'Puritans, Predestination and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Early Seventeenth-Century England', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 64-87; David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, 2004); Jonathan Moore, "'Christ is dead for him": John Preston (1587-1628) and English Hypothetical Universalism' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000).

¹⁹See, for example, John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 192-197, and Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, 'Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700', in *idem* (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 20-31.

Webster's *Godly Clergy*, which concentrates largely on Essex and the South-East, in the years after 1625.²⁰ Chapter 4, tracing the various kinds of associations in which Hildersham participated, will further illuminate these links and underline their importance.

Shifting configurations of orthodoxy and conformity have a special relevance to Hildersham's long career, spanning as it does both the Elizabethan and early Stuart periods. A seminal work in this context has been Peter Lake and Michael Questier's edited collection of essays, *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c. 1560-1660*.²¹ In particular, the articles by Lake himself, Thomas Freeman, Kenneth Fincham, David Como and Andrew Foster raise pertinent questions about what it meant to be orthodox at different times, and the changing requirements of subscription.²² Conformity is seen as a process, to be defined and negotiated in various ways, rather than as a one-off event. Chapter 5 will take up some of these themes, examining the ambivalent relationship of Hildersham, a consistent nonconformist, with the established church. It will consider what agency was available to those of Hildersham's persuasion in their responses to official demands for subscription, re-assess the importance of nonconformity as a defining category, and say something about the changing identity of the Church of England itself. The part played by ecclesiastical politics and polemic will also be examined.

In the years since Babbage expressed his view of Hildersham, the debate about puritanism has become more sophisticated and nuanced, centring around the mutability of such terms as 'radical' and 'moderate'. That Hildersham has been

²⁰ Webster, *Godly Clergy*.

²¹ Lake and Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy*.

²² Peter Lake, 'Moving the Goal Posts? Modified Subscription and the Construction of Conformity in the Early Stuart Church', pp. 179-205; Thomas Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in late Elizabethan England', pp. 34-63; Kenneth Fincham, 'Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud', pp. 125-158; David Como, 'Puritans, Predestination and the Construction of Orthodoxy in Early Seventeenth-Century England', pp. 64-87; Andrew Foster, 'Archbishop Richard Neile Revisited', pp. 159-178.

included in both camps is in itself an indication of the danger and slipperiness of labels, and the permeability of such classifications. This thesis will build upon important work by such historians as Peter Lake in his *Boxmaker's Revenge*, which traced in some detail the troubled relationship between Stephen Denison and a relatively humble member of his flock in 1620s London, and Alexandra Walsham's 'Frantick Hacket', an examination of the links between a pseudo-messiah and mainstream Midland puritans.²³ Chapter 6 of the thesis will provide two case studies that explore the interface between Hildersham, separatists and so-called radicals, demonstrating yet again that the dividing lines were more blurred than was once thought.

Historians are always interested in the legacy that any age leaves to subsequent generations, and whether changes have any lasting impact. This field of enquiry has recently been applied to the various legacies left by puritan spirituality, in both the Old and New Worlds.²⁴ Chapter 7 examines whether Hildersham's life and ministry had any significance after his death, and investigates how another age perceived and fashioned his memory for its own purposes.

The sources for this thesis are essentially two-fold. Hildersham's published works (along with some manuscript treatises in the John Rylands University Library), which have been examined systematically and critically as evidence of his priorities and thought, provide a basis for discussing the themes outlined

²³ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy' and the Politics of the Parish in early Stuart London* (Manchester, 2001); Alexandra Walsham, "'Frantick Hacket': Prophecy, Sorcery, Insanity and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement', *Historical Journal*, 41:1 (1998), pp. 27-66.

²⁴ John Coffey, 'Puritan Legacies', in *idem* and Paul C. H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 327-345.

above.²⁵ In addition, ecclesiastical court records have been drawn upon, in particular relating to Hildersham's parish ministry in Ashby. Local parish, manorial, and diocesan archives have furnished material to enable some sort of picture of parish life during these years to be reconstructed. Church court records do not reveal, of course, the finer nuances of spiritual belief and vitality. However, the existence of a few personal records, such as letters, helps to create a more detailed impression. To some extent, the fragmentary nature of the sources means that many gaps in our knowledge of Hildersham still exist, especially relating to the time he spent in hiding after 1616. Some questions remain unanswered, for example about the ownership of a theological notebook purported to have belonged to Hildersham, and the whereabouts (and survival) of many of Hildersham's private papers after his death.²⁶ Nevertheless, sufficient material has been identified to attempt some overall assessment of Hildersham's ministry, beliefs and *modus operandi*. This thesis, the first detailed study of Hildersham's life and ministry, aims to throw new light on a figure recognised by contemporaries as among the most influential and respected puritans of the age, and on broader issues concerning the success, pace and nature of the English Reformation itself.

²⁵ JRUL EM 524, f. 75, 'The effect of an exhortation in private to two parties at their contracting before the witnesses by Maister Hildersam'; f. 96v, 'Concerning private reding of the word Arthur Hildersam'; f. 99r, 'AH. For preparation to prayer your heart must meditate'; f. 100r, 'A preparation to the lords supper A H'; f. 103r, 'A larger preparation to the lords supper in [the] form of a Catechism A H'.

²⁶ BL Harley MS 3230, 'Theological Notebook 1582-1614' (unfoliated). It was suggested to me that this may have been Hildersham's notebook, on the basis of the hand. However, the volume contains several different hands, probably of different periods, and it is not possible to make any conclusive judgment depending on this evidence alone. At one point it looks as if the writer is making notes on a book or sermon by Hildersham, as 'Mr Hild' is written in a small hand above the entry which begins 'Thy word, O Lord, is as pure as thyn own majesty ...'. Some of the original entries take the form of ramist trees, a clear sign of godly learning, but the 'best hand' used cannot be identified as that of Hildersham, compared with a holograph copy of a letter he wrote to Lady Barrington, see BL Egerton MS 2645 f. 156. For a discussion of what may have happened to Hildersham's papers, see below, Chapter 7, p. 308.

1. Hildersham: A Puritan Life²⁷

Arthur Hildersham was born on 6 October 1563 at Stetchworth, near Ely, in Cambridgeshire. Mention is frequently made of the pedigree of his mother, Anne Pole, who was his father's second wife. She was the niece of Cardinal Reginald Pole, Mary's archbishop, her father Geoffrey Pole being his younger brother.²⁸ Another brother, Henry Pole, Lord Montague, who was executed in 1538, had two daughters, Katherine and Winifred, who were thus cousins to Anne. Katherine married Francis, the second Earl of Huntingdon, and Winifred became the wife of another member of the Hastings family, Sir Thomas Hastings.²⁹ On his death, Winifred married Sir Thomas Barrington of Hatfield Broad Oak in 1559.³⁰ Arthur's great-grandfather on his mother's side was Sir Richard Po[o]le, a cousin germane to Henry VII, who had married Margaret, Countess of Salisbury. This redoubtable lady, executed in 1541, was the daughter of George, Duke of Clarence, brother to both Edward IV and Richard III, by his wife Isabel, eldest daughter and co-heir of Richard, Earl of Warwick. Thus Hildersham could claim kinship with some of the greatest families in the land, and it was reputed that even Elizabeth I referred to him as 'cousin'.³¹ These family connections were to prove very significant for him,

²⁷ Much of this information, unless stated, is drawn from Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', pp. 144-156.

²⁸ For the letters of Reginald Pole, see Thomas F. Mayer (ed.), *The Correspondence of Reginald Pole* (4 Vols., Aldershot, 2002-8). Anne Pole's brother was called Arthur, and it may be that she named her son for his uncle.

²⁹ For more on the Hastings family, see Claire Cross, *Puritan Earl*; Cross (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Francis Hastings 1574-1609* (Somerset Record Society, Vol. LXIX, 1969); and Cross, 'The Third Earl of Huntingdon's Death-Bed: A Calvinist Example of the *Ars Moriendi*', *Northern History*, Vol. xxi (1985), pp. 80-107. For more on the importance of these relationships to Hildersham, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 183-187.

³⁰ See Arthur Searle (ed.), *The Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632*, Camden Fourth Series, Vol. 28 (London, 1983), which includes a letter from Hildersham to Lady Joan Barrington, p. 61. For more on these relationships, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 187-189.

³¹ Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, pp. 380-381: 'Mr Hildersham was well known at court, and his name was often honourably mentioned in the presence of Queen Elizabeth. On these occasions she used to style him *cousin Hildersham*'. Brook cites as his source 'MS. Chronology, vol. iii. A.D. 1631, p. 4.'

in terms of patronage and protection, during his academic and ministerial career.

Less is known about his father's background. Clarke informs us that Thomas Hildersham was 'a Gentleman of an ancient Family', and this is confirmed by a heraldic visitation of Cambridgeshire in the late sixteenth century, which supplies details of both a Hildersham coat of arms ('A chevron between three crosses flory') and crest ('A tiger (leopard) couchant argent, collared and lined or').³² There is a record of the two Cambridgeshire manors of Patmers and Madfreys being settled on Thomas Hildersham in 1544, having previously been held by his father, John, in 1536. They were in the possession of John's father, Thomas (Arthur's paternal great-grandfather), at his death in 1525.³³ In 1558 we find mention of Arthur's father, 'Thomas Hildersham gent.', appearing in the manorial court rolls for Stetchworth, his social status affirmed by the fact that he was the first of the signatories pledging seigneurial allegiance.³⁴ However, in 1571, when Arthur was eight, his father sold both Patmers and Madfreys to James Altham, who in turn sold them two years later to Roger, Lord North.³⁵ What happened to Thomas and Anne Hildersham after the sale is not clear; they could

³² Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144; John W. Clay (ed.), *The Visitation of Cambridge Made in AD[1575] continued and enlarged with the visitation of the Same County made by Henery St. George Richmond – Herald, Marshall and Deputy to William Camden, Clarenceux, in AD 1619* (London, 1897), pp. 115-116. In a 1619 portrait of Hildersham (now in the National Portrait Gallery), this coat of arms was included. It seems reasonable to suppose that the Hildersham family had a connection with the settlement bearing the same name, approximately eight miles south-east of Cambridge, but the link has not been proved. Certainly, if the family ever lived in Hildersham, it must have been prior to 1525, by which time they were already living in Stetchworth.

³³ *VCH Cambs*, Vol. VI, pp. 172-173. The manors had previously been held by Richard Foster.

³⁴ Cambridgeshire Record Office [CRO], R59/281/2, Stetchworth Court Rolls 1422-60, 1548-58, 1629-39. Patmers manor, for which no separate courts are recorded, owed suit to the 'Cambridgeshire tourn of the honor of Richmond', see *VCH Cambs*, p. 174.

³⁵ *VCH Cambs*, p. 173. There was probably a family connection in the sale to Sir James Altham (d. 1617). Edward Altham, clothier and sheriff of London, had married Audrey Hildersham, daughter to one of the several Richard Hildershams in the family tree, see Clay (ed.), *Visitation of Cambridge*, p. 116.

have moved for economic or religious reasons, and may not have wished their whereabouts to be widely known.³⁶

It is likely that Arthur was born at Patmers manor, which lies within the parish boundaries of Stetchworth, since the family's other estate of Madfreys was part of the adjoining parish of Dullingham.³⁷ The lands of Patmers were later known as Place Farm, but by 1814 the farm-house which had stood at the northern end of the village in 1770 had gone. In 1483, the old manor of Patmers had comprised 140 acres of arable, four acres of meadow, and ten acres of underwood.³⁸ Clearly, Hildersham came from solid and prosperous gentry stock on his father's side.

Hildersham's parents shared a deep commitment to the Roman Catholic religion. Clarke describes both Thomas and especially Anne as 'zealous Papists'.³⁹ Thus they were determined to bring up their children in that faith, including teaching them to say their prayers in Latin. Even if members of the family did

³⁶ Absence of records makes it difficult to be sure of what happened to the family. No parish records exist for Stetchworth prior to 1599, and, in any case, no Hildershams appear in them thereafter. There does not seem to be any surviving record of a will made by Thomas Hildersham.

³⁷ In 1563, the date of Hildersham's birth, the parish of Stetchworth contained forty-six householders, see *VCH Cambs*, p. 172. Because there are no surviving parish registers for this date, it has been impossible to confirm the details of his baptism. His parents' commitment to Catholicism may also have complicated matters, especially if they had insisted on the Roman baptismal rite for their son. John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community 1570-1850* (London, 1975), pp. 133-134, suggests that among the Catholic gentry, Protestant baptism was generally understood to be valid, but that there were various ways in which some individuals sought to circumvent the issue. It is also difficult to ascertain how many siblings Arthur had: a brother, Richard, is mentioned in Arthur's will, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77, but no details of any other brothers or sisters have been confirmed. Winifred Hildersham, who married Edward Barfoot, Arthur's brother-in-law, and then Ezekiel Culverwell on 23 October 1598, may have been a sister. The identity of Richard Hildersham, who became steward to the Barrington family at Hatfield Broad Oak, has sometimes caused confusion; B. W. Quintrell, in his 'The Royal Hunt and the Puritans, 1604-1605', *JEH*, 31:1, 1980, p. 45, refers to Richard as Arthur's cousin, while Hunt, in *Puritan Moment*, pp. 107-108, was under the impression that Arthur himself was acting or 'posing' as Sir Francis Barrington's steward during 1604, when in fact he was still serving as vicar of Ashby. However, that the brother Richard mentioned in Arthur's will was indeed the same Richard Hildersham who was the Barrington steward, is confirmed by a document in which Richard 'of Hatfield Broadoke in the Comt of Essex gent' agrees to act in a financial transaction on behalf of his brother. On the back of the document, Arthur has written, 'My brothers Assignment to me Arthur Hildersam 1 July 7 Jam 1609', see JRUL CRU/677. For more on Richard Hildersham, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 187-189.

³⁸ *VCH Cambs*, p. 173.

³⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144. For an account of how Catholicism was maintained in gentry households after the Reformation, see Bossy, *English Catholic Community*.

attend the parish church of Stetchworth St Peter on occasions, the fact that the vicar in 1561 was recorded as a non-graduate and not licensed to preach meant that their spiritual convictions were unlikely to receive much challenge from that source.⁴⁰ However, when it came to deciding on the appropriate education for his son, the choice of Arthur's father was governed ultimately by social considerations. Thomas Hildersham's aim was to find a 'good School, where many Gentlemens Sons were taught'.⁴¹ Accordingly, Hildersham was sent to Saffron Walden school in Essex. This school, which could trace its original foundation back to the fourteenth century, had an established reputation for educating its pupils 'after the ordre and use of teaching grammer in the Scholes of Wynchester and Eton'.⁴² It had been re-founded in 1549 as one of the first of the eighteen King Edward VI schools, when a connection with Queen's College, Cambridge, had been established.⁴³ Impressed by the social and educational credentials of the school, Thomas Hildersham was apparently unaware of the spiritual convictions of the Master, John Disborowe; Clarke tells us that he was 'a godly man, and a Religious Protestant'.⁴⁴ Hildersham was to attribute his conversion to, and grounding in, the reformed faith to Disborowe's influence.⁴⁵

⁴⁰ *VCH Cambs*, p. 175.

⁴¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144.

⁴² Anon., *A Short History of Saffron Walden School 1317-1928*, available in Saffron Walden library. See also, *VCH Essex*, Vol. II, pp. 518-525. For more on Hildersham's time at the school, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 150-152.

⁴³ During the latter half of the sixteenth century, the school was responsible for the early education of the three famous Harvey brothers; Gabriel (b. 1550), who went on to become Professor of Rhetoric at Cambridge and a friend of the poet Spenser, Richard (MA 1581), an astrologer and Cambridge Praelector in Philosophy, and John (MA 1584), who became tutor at Wenden Lofts in the family of Mr Justice Meade. Several other pupils were admitted to Gonville and Caius College between 1573 and 1601, see *VCH Essex*, Vol. II, p. 522.

⁴⁴ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144. For more on John Disborowe (or Desborough), see below, Chapter 4, p. 151, n. 8. However, it seems likely that Thomas Hildersham's selection of the school may have pre-dated the commencement of Disborowe's tenure in 1573.

⁴⁵ See Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144.

Hildersham proceeded to Christ's College, Cambridge, around 1576, at the age of thirteen.⁴⁶ Although not uncommon for the period, his youth at the time of matriculation certainly indicated that he was a very able scholar. About two years later, Thomas Hildersham revealed his plans for his son to enter the Catholic priesthood. In Rome, his kinship with the late Reginald Pole could expect to give him opportunities for advancement within the Catholic hierarchy.⁴⁷ The resolute refusal of Hildersham to countenance such a proposal, despite the persuasive efforts of his father and various 'Popish Ordinaries' in London, led to his disinheritance, and the withdrawal of financial support which threatened to end his academic career. However, through the mediation of John Ireton, Hildersham was introduced to Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon, who agreed to become his patron.⁴⁸ This enabled Hildersham to resume his studies at Cambridge, where he graduated BA in 1581, and MA in 1584. His abilities were recognised by his peers, who selected him for a fellowship at Christ's in 1583, but his election was blocked by the Master, Edmund Barwell.⁴⁹ However, after protesting to Lord Burghley, the Chancellor of the university, he was subsequently elected Fellow of Trinity Hall, where he continued until September 1587.⁵⁰

On 14 September 1587, Hildersham commenced his ministry as lecturer at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire, having been appointed by his patron, the Earl of Huntingdon. In addition, when the vicar of Ashby, Thomas Widdowes, died,

⁴⁶ For more on Hildersham's university career, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 152-158.

⁴⁷ Hildersham senior probably had in mind the recently-established English College in Rome, which had been founded in 1576 as a centre for English 'exiles who awaited the inevitable return of England to Rome', see Bossy, *English Catholic Community*, pp. 25-27, quote at p. 26. The College's final settlement in 1579 saw it transformed, as Douai had been, into a missionary college under the influence of the Jesuits.

⁴⁸ For more on Hildersham's relationships with the Earls of Huntingdon, and godly patronage in a wider sense, see below, Chapter 2, pp. 36-42, and Chapter 4, pp. 182-193.

⁴⁹ For more on this election, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 156-157.

⁵⁰ The text of Hildersham's letter to Burleigh is reproduced in Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, p. 378.

Hildersham was presented to the incumbency on 4 October 1593.⁵¹ Although he was only to serve as vicar for twelve years, until 1605, Hildersham was to be associated with the town for more than forty-two years, until his death in 1632.⁵² It would seem, however, that the inauguration of his lectureship was not without controversy, for it appears that he started preaching without official ecclesiastical authorisation; he was convened before the High Commission for subversive preaching without orders or licence. A formal submission, dated 10 January 1588, was prepared for his signature:

I confesse here that I have rashely and undiscreetly taken upon mee the office and function of a preacher , and have preched abroad, nether beinge admitted into orders, nether licensed by any authoritie, and contrarie to the orders and laws of this church of England, contrary to the example of all antiquitie in the primitive church, and contrary to the example and direction of the apostles in the Actes, and thereby have given great and juste offence unto manye. And this rashenes I have made more grevous and offensive in that I have uttered in my foresaid sermons and prechinges certain impertinent and very unfit speeches for the auditory, as moveinge their mindes rather to discontentment with the state, then tending to any godly edification for which my presumption and undiscreetenes, I am very hartily sorye, and desire yow to beare witness of this my confession and acknowledgeinge of my seid offences.⁵³

As a result of his failure to assent to this ‘confession’, it seems, Hildersham was suspended by the High Commission in June 1590, and although he was restored in January 1591, he was barred from preaching in any place south of the Trent,

⁵¹ LRO ID41/28/258, Induction Mandate for Arthur Hildersham.

⁵² For more on Hildersham’s ministry in Ashby, see below, Chapters 2 and 3.

⁵³ Albert Peel (ed.), *The Seconde Parte of a Register* (Cambridge, 1915), Vol. II, pp. 259-260. This document is headed ‘Mr Hildersam’s recantation’, and is followed by a note, ‘By me, Arthur Hildersam’, in which he explains that the archbishop has ordered him to utter this apology ‘in trinity hall chapel, betwixt this and Easter. In the meane while I am suspended from the profits of my fellowshippe, and stand bounde to appeare before the commissioners the first courte daye of Easter terme, if I do not before that time recante’.

including Ashby.⁵⁴ This condition was subsequently removed, allegedly by the intervention of the queen herself.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, even at the outset of Hildersham's ministry, it is clear that questions about his relationship with the ecclesiastical hierarchy were being raised, and he continued to attract similar suspicion throughout the course of his career.⁵⁶

He was soon in trouble again with the authorities. A sermon preached by Hildersham at the Leicester Assizes on 20 July 1596 offended Judge Edmund Anderson, who tried, unsuccessfully, to have him indicted.⁵⁷ In 1598, too, an attachment was sent out by the High Commission for his apprehension, which also failed. After the Hampton Court Conference of 1604, and the processes leading up to it, including the Millenary Petition, of which he was one of the chief managers, Hildersham again fell foul of the church authorities.⁵⁸ In the wake of the new demands of the Canons of 1604, he was deprived of his vicarage and silenced by the Bishop of Lincoln, William Chaderton, on 24 April 1605, for refusal to subscribe and conform. He was never again to serve as vicar of Ashby. He was able, however, to continue preaching at the exercises at Repton and Burton on Trent, since these fell under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, William Overton, who granted him a licence. In January 1609, moreover, he was re-licensed by the new Bishop of Lincoln, William Barlow, and was able to resume his duties as lecturer in Ashby. He now began his series of 108 lectures on the fourth chapter of John's Gospel, commencing on 31 January 1609, and continuing until 12 November 1611, when he was silenced again, through the

⁵⁴ Obviously at some point Hildersham must have submitted to episcopal ordination; he explains his reasoning for so doing to 'Mrs N', a separatist, and also discusses the wording of his licence with fellow-nonconformist Humphrey Fenn, see below, Chapter 4, p. 176, and Chapter 5, p. 230.

⁵⁵ Brook, *Lives of the Puritans*, p. 381.

⁵⁶ For more on this issue, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 223-242.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of this episode, see below, Chapter 5, p. 225.

⁵⁸ For more on the Millenary Petition, its ideology and aftermath, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 169-171, and Chapter 5, pp. 210-223.

intervention of Richard Neile, who had succeeded Overton as Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, with the king. Although Hildersham had been officially exonerated of any blame in the heresy case of Edward Wightman of Burton on Trent, the bad publicity and suspicion generated by the episode ensured that Hildersham was to remain silenced.⁵⁹ On 8 December 1612, he received a summons from the High Commission, and at his attendance on 22 April 1613, he was ‘judicially admonished’ and banned from preaching or exercising any other ministerial function, publicly or privately.⁶⁰

It was to be another twelve years before that prohibition was lifted. In the Easter Term of 1615, Hildersham was imprisoned for three months in the Fleet and King’s Bench prisons, for refusal of the *ex officio* oath, and on 4, 5, and 6 November 1616, a commission of enquiry sat at Ashby to examine witnesses into allegations of nonconformity and conventicling against Hildersham and two other local men, Thomas Dighton and John Holt.⁶¹ Hearing of the severe sentence passed on Dighton and Holt by the High Commission on 21 November 1616, Hildersham did not appear before the court personally, but submitted written answers to the depositions against him. On 28 November 1616, the court proceeded, in his absence, to censure him, pronouncing him, ‘a man refractory and disobedient to the Orders, Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of England’ and ‘a Schismaticall person, and a Schismatick’. Labelled the ‘prime Ring-leader of all the schismatical persons in that Countrey, both of the Clergy and Laity’, he was fined £2,000, pronounced excommunicate and ordered to be publicly denounced. He was also

⁵⁹ For a detailed consideration of Hildersham’s involvement with Wightman, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 256-280.

⁶⁰ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148.

⁶¹ See DWL, Morrice MSS, LMN, VIII, ‘Proceedings against Arthur Hildersham, Thomas Dighton and John Holt’ before the High Commission, including ‘2. Copy of the [blank] against Dighton and Holt, for holding conventicles etc at Ashby de la Zouch (21 Nov. 1616)’, f. 2a.

ordered to be committed to prison, and to be brought before the Commissioners to be degraded from his ministry and to make a verbal submission.⁶² Hildersham remained in hiding for some time, seeking refuge with supporters in London and elsewhere and providing help with domestic devotions.⁶³ During this period, he turned down overtures from the English Congregation in Leiden, Holland, to become their pastor. Eventually, he obtained a discharge from his fine, by compounding with an official of the Marquis of Buckingham's household, 'for a great summe of money', and with the registrars of the High Commission itself.⁶⁴ After the death of James I, Hildersham was relicensed on 20 June 1625, by Dr Ridley, vicar-general to Archbishop Abbot, to preach in the dioceses of London, Lincoln and Coventry and Lichfield. He took up his duties as lecturer in Ashby once more, beginning on 3 August 1625 with a series of eight sermons on Psalm 35:13, associated with the national plague fast of 1625-1626. On 28 September 1625 he also embarked upon a series of 152 lectures on Psalm 51, which remained unfinished in 1631 due to his final illness. His last suspension came on 25 March 1630, for failure to comply with the new regulations for lecturers to read service in surplice and hood, and he commenced preaching again on 2 August 1631.

Hildersham preached his last sermon on 27 December 1631, shortly afterwards falling ill with 'scorbutic fever'. He was confined to bed for two or three months, before his death on Sunday 4 March 1632. On the afternoon of the following Tuesday, 6 March, he was buried amidst scenes of great local mourning in the chancel of the parish church at Ashby. At his own request there was no funeral sermon, but in the morning Julines Herring of Coventry had delivered the

⁶² Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150.

⁶³ For more on this issue, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 182-193.

⁶⁴ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150. Clarke does not supply a date for this discharge, but it can be narrowed down to between 1618 (when Buckingham was created a marquis) and 1623 (when he was made a duke).

weekly lecture, in which he spoke of the loss sustained by the ‘Congregation, the Countrey and whole Church’ at Hildersham’s death.⁶⁵

Hildersham was attended in his final illness by members of his family, notably his wife, Ann, and his son and daughter-in-law, Samuel and Mary Hildersham. Arthur had married Ann Barfoot of Lambourne Hall in Essex in January 1591, and she was to outlive him by more than nine years, being buried on 29 November 1641.⁶⁶ Her family had made their wealth as London cloth merchants, and no doubt saw the match with Hildersham’s ancient lineage and connections as socially advantageous.⁶⁷ Their links with the godly fraternity of

⁶⁵ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, pp. 154-155. Many puritans disapproved of funeral sermons, including Hildersham’s mentor, Thomas Cartwright, who had condemned the practice in his *Second Reply* (1571) to Whitgift, see A. F. Scott Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism 1535-1603* (Cambridge, 1925), pp. 94, 109. Hildersham had requested no funeral sermon in his will, see LRO Leics.Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632).

⁶⁶ For more on Ann Hildersham’s involvement with her husband’s ministry, see below, Chapter 2, pp. 48-56. She was buried in the parish of Thrumpton All Saints, Nottinghamshire, presumably having gone to live there with her daughter and son-in-law, Sarah and Gervase Lomax, after her husband’s death, see NAO BT (Thrumpton) 1600-1855.

⁶⁷ Ann Barfoot’s grandfather, Robert Barfoot, owned the manor of Lambourne at the time of his death in 1547. A brass in the chancel of Lambourne church commemorates Robert and his wife Katherine (still alive in 1569), and bears the arms of the Mercers’ Company and a merchant’s mark. Their son, Thomas Barfoot, who was Ann’s father, built Lambourne Hall in 1571. He was a wealthy man, having other property in Essex and the city of London. His will, PRO, Prob/11/79, proved in 1592, gives no definitive indication about the nature of his religious piety, but shows that he left 6s 8d for the relief of the poor of the parish. He had six sons (Edward, Robert, John, George, Thomas and William) and three daughters (Elizabeth, Alice and Ann). Ann, like her sisters, received only a rather modest sum of £10 under the terms of her father’s will, but this may indicate that a more generous marriage settlement had already been made. Her brother, Edward, a graduate of Christ’s College, Cambridge (matriculating pensioner in 1568), who married Winifred Hildersham, predeceased his father. According to Venn, Part I, Vol. I, p. 83, he may have been of Furnival’s Inn and afterwards of Lincoln’s Inn, 1576. Edward and Winifred had four children, Francis (?), Winifred, Katherine (bp. 13 September 1584, Lambourne) and Thomas (bp. 24 January 1587, Lambourne). In his will, he describes himself as being of ‘Hatfeild Broadoke ... gent’, see ERO D/ABW 6/26. His son, Francis, may have been the Francis Barfoot admitted pensioner at Emmanuel College in 1606. George Barfoot, another brother of Ann, also attended Christ’s College, graduating BA in 1576. He was ordained deacon by Bishop Aylmer in May 1578, age twenty four, and became rector of Fyfield in Essex in the same year, see Venn, Part I, Vol. I, p. 84. However, his spiritual standing was dubious, since he was listed in a ‘Survei of the unpreaching ministers in Essex with their conditions’, see Peel (ed.), *Seconde Parte of a Register*, Vol. II, p. 157. Another brother, John, may well be the ‘John Barefoot of Lambourne’ who appears in a December 1604 list of Essex gentlemen who had not paid the forced loan levied by the king, see *VCH Essex*, Vol. II, p. 222. Lambourne Hall continued in the possession of the Barfoot family until 1733, when John Barfoot (Thomas’s great-great-grandson) sold it to Sir John Fortescue-Aland. For the Barfoot family and Lambourne, see *VCH Essex*, Vol. IV, pp. 72-86, Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex* (1763), Vol. I, p. 172. For a discussion of social status and aspirations of gentility, including the alliance of wealth and breeding, see H. R. French, ‘“Ingenious & learned gentlemen” – social perceptions and self-fashioning among parish elites in Essex, 1680-1740’,

Essex, including Hildersham's relatives the Barringtons of Hatfield Broad Oak, may also have contributed. The union seems to have been a solid and supportive one.⁶⁸ Arthur and Ann Hildersham had eight children, all born and baptised at Ashby. Their first two daughters died in infancy; Sarah I (baptised 30 October 1591, buried 7 November 1591) and Mary I (baptised October/November 1592, buried 28 November 1592). Another daughter, Mary II, died aged four and a half years (baptised 28 June 1598, buried 5 January 1603), but the other five children lived into adulthood: Anna (baptised 6 January 1594), Samuel (baptised 19 August 1595), Timothy (baptised end of May 1600), Nathanael (baptised 9 September 1602), and Sarah II (baptised 9 December 1604).⁶⁹ Anna Hildersham married Nycollas Mor(e) in Ashby on 27 January 1610, when she was sixteen years old.⁷⁰ They had two children, Elizabeth and Thomas, but the latter predeceased his grandfather.⁷¹ Anna herself was buried in Ashby on 14 August 1625, in the same month that her father recommenced preaching there. Samuel, Arthur's oldest son, followed him into the ministry and became his literary executor.⁷² His marriage to

Social History, 25:1 (2000), pp. 44-66; H. R. French, 'Social Status, Localism and the "Middle Sort of People" in England 1620-1750', *Past and Present*, 166 (2000), pp. 66-99; H. R. French, 'The Search for the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1600-1800', *Historical Journal*, 43:1 (2000), pp. 277-293. For social emulation, see P. Langford's discussion of 'the pursuit of genteel status' by those of middling rank in his, *A Polite and Commercial People: England 1727-1783* (Oxford, 1992), p. 59. I am grateful to Dr Judith Spicksley for these references.

⁶⁸ See Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 146.

⁶⁹ LRO DE1013/1, parish register for Ashby St Helen's (baptisms 1561-1719, marriages 1561-1729, burials 1561-1671).

⁷⁰ The identity of Nicholas More remains uncertain; the only person of that name listed in Venn, Vol. III, p. 206, matriculated from Trinity in 1611, and seems therefore too young to be a candidate. A Nicholas Moore of Leicestershire matriculated from Gloucester Hall, Oxford, in February 1585, aged 32, see J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (Oxford, 1891). Vol. III, p. 1624, but this would have made him aged 57 in 1610. More was, of course, a common surname, and it is possible that Nicholas was the son of one of the several godly ministers in Leicestershire who were thus named, for example, George More of Calke (associated with Hildersham and Darrell, see below, Chapter 6, p. 274) or John More, the nonconformist rector of Knaptoft (1586-1619), see Chalmers 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 146. Unfortunately the relevant records for checking out these possibilities have not survived.

⁷¹ LRO Leics.Wills, Ashby, no. 77 (1632). Both Elizabeth and Thomas are mentioned in Arthur's will, but Thomas (and possibly Elizabeth, too) has been deleted.

⁷² For more on Samuel Hildersham, see Chapter 7, pp. 302-304.

Mary Goodhere of Polesworth appears to have been without issue.⁷³ Timothy, the second son, apparently remained unmarried, and was buried in Ashby on 4 March 1633, aged thirty two years.⁷⁴ He had outlived his father by almost exactly a year. The youngest son, Nathanael, remains something of a mystery; used as a messenger by his father and the parish on several occasions, and mentioned in Arthur's will, his whereabouts after his father's death have not been discovered.⁷⁵ Sarah, Arthur and Ann's youngest child, married Gervase Lummas (sometimes rendered as Garvice Lomax or Lomas, and hereafter called Gervase Lomax) in Ashby on 10 April 1627.⁷⁶ They had six children, three, baptised in Ashby, prior to Arthur's death, and a further three subsequently.⁷⁷

⁷³ Mary Goodhere, whom Arthur himself had 'propounded as a meet Wife for his dearest Son' and whom he praised affectionately, saying, 'Never man had a kinder Daughter-in-law' (Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 154), was the daughter and co-heir of Sir Henry Goodhere of Polesworth, Warwickshire. She had two sisters, Lucy, who inherited Polesworth, and married Sir Francis Nethersole, a Kentish gentleman knighted in 1619 on becoming secretary to Elizabeth of Bohemia, and Elizabeth, who married Samuel Roper, an eminent antiquarian and barrister of Lincoln's Inn. Mary survived her husband by six years, and was buried in Aston, Birmingham, on 13 August 1679, see *The Register of the Parish Church of Aston-juxta-Birmingham*, Vol. 3, p. 9. For the Goodhere family, see F. L. Colville, *The Worthies of Warwickshire 1500-1800* (Warwick, 1869), pp. 314-320.

⁷⁴ For more on Timothy Hildersham, see below, Chapter 2, pp. 89-91, especially n. 196.

⁷⁵ For more on Nathanael Hildersham, see below, Chapter 2, p. 89. In his father's will, Nathanael was bequeathed the silver bowl that Lady Barrington had given to Arthur. A bowl fitting this description (a 'Guilt Boule'), was left by his brother-in-law, Gervase Lomax, to Nathanael's sister, Sarah, in his will of December 1647, specifically stating that it was for her 'wholly and onely'. If these two references were to the same item, it would suggest that Nathanael had died sometime between 1632 and 1647, at which point he had left the bowl to Gervase Lomax. The fact that there is no mention of Nathanael in Gervase Lomax's will, whereas Samuel Hildersham and his wife feature significantly, might also serve to confirm his demise prior to its drawing up, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no.77 (1632) and NAO PR/NW (will of Gervase Lomax).

⁷⁶ LRO DE1013/1. Gervase Lomax was born around 1607 in Thrumpton, Nottinghamshire, and attended Repton school. He was admitted pensioner at Christ's College, Cambridge, on 6 May 1624, aged 17, see Venn, Vol. III, p. 101. He was the son of Henry Lomas of Thrumpton, (buried there on 31 August 1633) who leased lands from the Earl of Huntingdon and whose relative Thomas Roby was a servant to the earl: in Henry's will he mentioned a new house built for Gervase near his own in Thrumpton, and left his daughter-in-law, Sarah, £5 in her own right, as well as the power to act with her husband in the administration of his affairs. The grandchildren, Henry, Arthur and Ann were left £5 each, see PRO, Prob/11/165. Hildersham obviously thought highly of Gervase Lomax, in his will leaving him his 'bible in folio that was printed at Cambridge and my book of Acts and monuments', as well as his copy of Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi* (London, 1592). Sarah was bequeathed 5s and 'my gold ring', see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632).

⁷⁷ For the details of Sarah Hildersham's children, see Chapter 7, below, p. 305, n. 75.

2. Hildersham in Print: a Publication History

Many preachers used the metaphor of ‘children’ for the books they authored. Samuel Hildersham, in the Epistle Dedicatory to his father’s, *The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier* (1633), referred to the forthcoming volume on Psalm 51 as ‘another of later birth, but greater growth’.⁷⁸ By the standards of the day, and especially those of the godly clergy, Hildersham was not a particularly prolific literary ‘parent’, although two of his works were weighty tomes of more than 500 pages. His relatively small published output is probably explained by his reluctance to go into print, which may have been caused by a lowly estimation of the value of the works themselves in an already crowded marketplace, his privileging of preaching over written communication, and the low profile he was forced to adopt due to his suspensions, especially between 1611 and 1625.⁷⁹ His entire corpus consists of works of practical divinity, in the form of sermons, catechetical treatises or biblical paraphrases, although he also made unwitting or unacknowledged contributions to two titles of a more polemical or controversial nature.⁸⁰

Hildersham’s earliest attributable work, although published anonymously, was his catechetical treatise, *The Doctrine of Communicating worthily in the Lords Supper*, which was first issued in 1609, appended to a treatise by William Bradshaw on the same subject entitled *A Direction for the weaker sort of Christians; shewing in what manner they may be prepared to the worthy receiving*

⁷⁸ Samuel Hildersham, ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’ (unpaginated), in Arthur Hildersham, *The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier, and Humiliation for Sinne* (London, 1633) [STC13459].

⁷⁹ See above, pp. 17-19.

⁸⁰ These occur in Francis Johnson, *A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England* (1595), and *An Abridgement of that Booke which the ministers of Lincolne Diocesse delivered to his Majestie upon the first of December 1605* (reprinted 1617).

*of the Sacrament of the bodie and bloud of Christ.*⁸¹ In his preface to Hildersham's work, Bradshaw explained that:

After that I had yielded to the publishing of mine owne poore meditations upon 1 Cor.11. 23 there came to my hands in writing this, ensuing Treatise, written some yeeres since by a godly and faithfull Pastor, for the direction of his owne people, in the worthy receiving of the Sacrament of the Lords Supper, at what time hee was first called unto them.⁸²

Moreover, he continued, 'I was earnest with the Author to give mee leave to publish the same, and to adjoyne it as an ornament and helpe unto mine which with much importunitie at length I have obtained'.⁸³ In a passage excised from editions after 1615, Bradshaw went on, 'though in the hard and unjust conceit he entertaineth of it, hee suffers it in this sort as you see, to come abroad as a Childe of the Earth, not bearing his name from whom it is descended'.⁸⁴ John Cotton, too, later referred to the anonymous publication of this treatise on the Lord's Supper, calling it 'a bastard child not acknowledged', but declaring that:

yet have they [those questions and Answers] been of singular good use to many poore soules, for their worthy preparation to that ordinance. And in very deed they do more fully furnish a Christian to that whole spirituall Duty, then any other, in any language (that I know) in so small a compasse⁸⁵

Bradshaw explained that this treatise had been written some years previously, and in fact a manuscript version is in existence, dating from the 1580s, which allows a

⁸¹STC 3510. Hildersham's treatise has its own title page and is separately paginated. Bradshaw's treatise was revised in 1614, but Hildersham's remained unchanged. The relationship between Bradshaw and Hildersham is discussed further in Chapter 6, pp. 254-255. The first edition of 1609 was printed by W.Hall for Samuel Macham, the 1615 edition by Humfrey Lownes for 'SM', while editions from 1617 on were printed by John Beale or John Haviland (1630).

⁸² Bradshaw, 'To the Reader', sig. A2.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ John Cotton, 'To the godly reader', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A4.

valuable insight into the way in which the material was later reformulated by Hildersham to suit a different context.⁸⁶

This 'little treatise' was by far the most popular and accessible of Hildersham's published works, indeed it is the only one to feature in Ian Green's sample of early modern 'Best-sellers and Steady Sellers'.⁸⁷ One of the earliest of the specialist 'pre-communion handbooks', a genre which reached its peak between 1660 and 1700, the Bradshaw/Hildersham book passed through eleven editions between 1609 and 1643, which puts it in the top four of the best-selling titles on this subject surveyed by Green.⁸⁸ Green also suggests that the pricing of the volume at 9d bound (in 1634) placed it near the bottom end of the market. This is further supported by factors of length and style: Bradshaw's work of 143 pages, and Hildersham's of 135 pages would have been considered 'little treatises' in this context.⁸⁹

⁸⁶ JRUL EM 524, 'A larger preparation to the lords supper in [the] form of a Catechism', ff.103r-111v. This work forms part of a collection of manuscripts copied out in a scribal hand, including several authored by Hildersham, see above pp. 9-10, n. 25. It is obvious that these manuscripts, like those attributed to Greenham, had been circulated and copied amongst the godly community. The manuscript version is very similar to the final printed version, though rather shorter: it contains 94 questions and answers, but this has been expanded to 100 in print. The order has also been rearranged, and individual words altered, either to make the point more clearly, or for a slightly different emphasis in a different pastoral situation. The main emphasis in the 1580s seems to be to persuade hearers/readers that the sacrament was still important, but by the time the *Lords Supper* was published, Hildersham appears more concerned that those who received did so in a worthy manner.

⁸⁷ Ian Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2000), Appendix 1, pp. 591-672. As well as these statistics, Green provides a very useful introduction to the genre of pre-communion handbooks, see pp. 288-304. Editions of the Bradshaw/Hildersham volume appeared in 1609 (two editions) [STC 3510], 1615 [STC 3510.5], 1617 [STC 3511], 1619 [STC 3511.5], 1623 [STC 3512], 1627 [STC 3513], 1630 [STC 3514], 1634 [STC 3515], 1636 [STC 3515.3] and 1643 [STC 4159].

⁸⁸ According to Green, the other most popular manuals were: Christopher Sutton's, *Godly Meditations upon the Most Holy Sacrament of the Lord's Supper* (1601), which passed through at least thirteen editions by 1683, Henry Tozer's, *Directions for a Godly Life* (1628), which had been reprinted eleven times by 1680, and Jeremiah Dyke's, *A Worthy Communicant* (1635), which had seen seventeen editions by 1696. For a survey of early works on preparation for communion, see Christopher Haigh, 'Communion and Community in Post-Reformation England', *JEH*, 51:4 (2000), pp. 722-725.

⁸⁹ Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 295. Green indicates that at the top end of the market was John Kettlewell's, *An Help and Exhortation to Worthy Communicating* (1683), which was priced at 3s bound, for just under 500 duodecimo pages. The average price for such works, Green reckons, was 1s bound, see p. 294.

No other work by Hildersham appeared in print until three years before his death. His *Lectures upon the Fourth of John* was published in 1629, eighteen years after the conclusion of the series of 108 Tuesday morning lectures preached in Ashby between 1609 and 1611.⁹⁰ The delay in publication was probably due to Hildersham's suspension from the ministry and his being officially a *persona non grata* during the intervening years as well as his own reluctance to go into print; that the work existed in manuscript form and clearly had some sort of circulation amongst his godly peers is demonstrated by comments made by John Preston. He, 'having long desired, at length obtained of Master Hildersam the Copy of them, which he kept a long time, and perused', finally offered his opinions to Hildersham in a letter dated 28 November 1615.⁹¹ Urging publication, he declared:

these two things I observe in the Reading of it; First, throughout the whole carriage, there appeared a continued strength (that I may so call it) without any failing or deficiency, without any inequality, un-evenness of Deformity of some parts with the rest. Secondly, it is press and succinct (though large) the things choice and pertinent, and thoroughly depending each on other. In brief, so it is, there is nothing that need be added and *nihil quod amputem*.⁹²

⁹⁰ The work was entered at Stationers' Hall on 11 January 1629. It was printed in folio (457 pages) in London 'by G. M. for Edward Brewster', with a foreword by J[ohn] C[otton], sometimes erroneously identified as J. Carter [STC 13461]. A letter from Cotton to Hildersham clearly refers to the preface he had written, see BL Add. 4275 f. 154. The second edition [STC 13462], published 'by George Miller for Edward Brewster' appeared posthumously in 1632, the year that Hildersham died, and proclaimed that it was 'corrected and much enlarged by the Author': now 500 pages long, it included a list of Bible references used in the text entitled 'Severall places of Scripture opened and applied in this Treatise'. As well as clarifying and expanding certain points, the second edition also inserts more biblical references in full and includes a longer index. All references in this thesis are taken from the second edition. A third edition appeared in 1647, 'by Moses Bell for Edward Brewster' [STC 1976], and a fourth in 1656, 'for Edward Brewster' [STC 1977]. In 1634, John Hayne, an Exeter merchant, bought a copy for 7s, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 240.

⁹¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 152.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 152.

‘I hope’, concluded Preston, ‘it will be a good help to Ministers when they read it, and bring the method of Doctrine and Uses into more credit’.⁹³

The *Lectures upon John* is the only one of Hildersham’s works to contain a preface written by him; earlier titles had either appeared anonymously or were unauthorised, whereas the later works were published posthumously with a preface by his son Samuel. In this Epistle, dedicating the work to his patron, Henry, the fifth Earl of Huntingdon, Hildersham explained his reticence in publishing ‘these Lectures which I have for so many yeares kept by me, and refused to let them see the light of day’. However, he declared that one reason for finally agreeing to put them in print was the opportunity it afforded him to pay tribute to the sustained patronage he had received from the Hastings family over so many years.⁹⁴

The first of the posthumous works to appear was *The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier, and Humiliation for Sinne*. This came out in a quarto edition in 1633, edited by Samuel Hildersham.⁹⁵ Another edition, this time in duodecimo, was printed in 1636.⁹⁶ As well as the eight sermons on Psalm 35:13 delivered during the national plague fast of 1625-26, it also contains, with a separate title page and pagination, ‘A Sermon preached in Ashby-Chappell, Oct 4 1629’, on Eccl.11:8.⁹⁷ Although Hildersham did not approve of funeral sermons *per se*, this sermon, which deals with death and dying in a more general sense, was preached in the

⁹³ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, pp. 152-153.

⁹⁴ ‘Epistle Dedicatory’, in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A2.

⁹⁵ Printed by G. Miller for the publisher Edward Brewster [STC 13459].

⁹⁶ Printed by R. Y[oung] for Edward Brewster [STC 13460].

⁹⁷ A proclamation on 3 July 1625 ordered a ‘publike, generall, and solemne fast to be held on Wednesday 20 July 1625 and ‘from thenceforth continued upon the Wednesday of every weeke following’, see *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, Charles I 1625-1626* (HMSO, London, 1858), p. 52, and J. F. Larkin (ed.), *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, Vol. II (Oxford, 1983), pp. 46-48. For a discussion of the content of Hildersham’s work, see Chapter 3 below, pp. 101-147.

private Hastings Chapel in Ashby Castle the day after the burial of ‘The right Honorable Sara, Lady Hastings, mother to Henry, erle of Huntingdon’.⁹⁸

Dedicating the work to his patron, the London merchant William Cokayne, who had presented him to the living at West Felton in Shropshire, Samuel Hildersham declared that, ‘as a faithfull Executor, I am carefull to discharge this part of his (though nuncupative) will, to endeavour the publishing of this, and some other of his Workes, which himselfe intended and prepared for the presse’, and, he continued:

I here solemnly promise, that what is or shall be by me published under his name, shall not be loose notes (that have been taken by some ignorant Scribe) nor shall it be made up with additions, and alterations of my owne; but the Copies under his owne hand carefully transcribed.⁹⁹

Samuel Hildersham also expressed the hope, as we have seen, that this work would be followed by another, a reference to the massive 815-page folio volume, *CLII Lectures upon Psalme LI*, entered at Stationers’ Hall on 26 August 1633. Dedicated to Katharine, Countess of Chesterfield, in acknowledgement of ‘her noble favour and respect shewed to the Author both living and dying’, it was published in 1635.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ LRO DE1013/1. For Hildersham’s desire that no funeral sermon should be preached on his own demise, see his will, LRO Leics.Wills, Ashby no.77 (1632).

⁹⁹ Samuel Hildersham, ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’ (unpaginated), in Arthur Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*.

¹⁰⁰ This volume was published by G. Miller for Edward Brewster [STC 13463]. A second edition appeared in 1642 [STC 1978]. Lady Katharine Hastings was the sister of Henry Hastings, fifth Earl of Huntingdon. In 1605 she married Philip, Lord Stanhope of Shelford and first Earl of Chesterfield (1584-1656) who bought his title in 1628, and she bore him eleven sons. If she was indeed sympathetic to the godly cause, as this dedication suggests, the marriage may not have been an easy one; her husband was rumoured to be homosexual at the louche court of James I, and became a rather elderly cavalier officer when the civil war broke out. He was captured at the siege of Lichfield in 1643, and remained in prison until he died. Their son, Henry Stanhope, was MP for Nottinghamshire in 1626 and East Retford in 1628-9, but died young in 1634. Katharine died on 28 August 1636, and an epitaph was raised at Shelford, Notts., see Nichols, *History and Antiquities of Leicester*, Vol. III, Part II, p. 608; George E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage* (London, 1910-

These 152 lectures were preached in Ashby between 28 September 1625 and 27 December 1631, and were in fact an unfinished series due to Hildersham's final illness and death. The series was also interrupted for seventeen months by his last suspension, between 23 March 1630 and 2 August 1631.¹⁰¹ The first nine sermons were delivered as Fast sermons on Wednesdays during 1625, whereas the remaining 143 were preached on the normal lecture day of Tuesday. A paraphrase of *The Canticles*, attributed to Hildersham, appeared in octavo in 1672.¹⁰²

Two further works in which Hildersham was heavily implicated, but for which he owned no direct responsibility, were published in 1595 and 1605. The first of these, Francis Johnson's, *A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England*, contained the text, or part of a text, of a letter written by Hildersham to 'Mrs N', a gentlewoman imprisoned for separatism who had sought Hildersham's advice. Johnson, who published the letter without Hildersham's consent, sets out to refute his arguments point by point, in great detail.¹⁰³ The second treatise, *An Abridgement of that Booke which the ministers of Lincolne Diocesse delivered to his Majestie upon the first of December 1605* (reprinted 1617), was presented to James I by thirty two clergy of Lincoln diocese, including Hildersham, during the king's hunting season at Hinchbrooke.¹⁰⁴ It represented 'An Apologie for themselves and their brethren that refuse the Subscription and Conformitie which is

1959), Vol. 3, p. 180; Lawrence Stone, *The Crisis of the Aristocracy 1558-1641* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 666, 682, 761, 780.

¹⁰¹ See Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 154.

¹⁰² Published by L. Milbourn for Robert Clavel [STC 1975].

¹⁰³ Francis Johnson, *A Treatise of the Ministry of the Church of England* (Low Countries?, 1595). For more on this work and its context, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 204-209, and Chapter 6, pp. 246-252.

¹⁰⁴ C.W. Foster, in his edited collection, *The State of the Church in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln* (Lincoln, 1926), p. lxxi, argues that, in fact, the real date was 1 December 1604. For a discussion of this work, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 210-221.

required'.¹⁰⁵ Since Hildersham was generally recognised as one of the leading diocesan nonconformists, and one of the few ministerial suspensions subsequent to the book's presentation, it is not unreasonable to conclude that he played a major part in its drawing up, and that it provides an accurate representation of his opinions.

The world of print and theological thought, however, was only one of the multiple worlds inhabited by Hildersham. Columbus used his copy of the *Imago Mundi* to chart his global voyages in the fifteenth century. Hildersham inscribed his with the motto '*Nosce teipsum*' (know thyself) and in attempting to navigate the various worlds of Arthur Hildersham, this thesis will seek to do for him what he endeavoured to achieve for himself.

¹⁰⁵ Title page, *Abridgement*.

CHAPTER 2

THE WORLD OF MINISTRY I: PARISH LIFE IN ASHBY

Neere to this place lies interred the bodie of Arthur Hildersham ... more honoured for his sweet and ingenuous disposition, his singular wisdom in settling peace, advising in secular affaires, and satisfying doubts, his abundant charitie, and especially for his extraordinary knowledge and judgment in the holy scriptures, his painfull and zealous preaching, together with his firme and lasting constancie in the truth he professed, he lived in this place for the most part of 43 yeares and 6 moneths, with great successe in his ministry, love and reverence of all sorts, and died with much honour and lamentation March the 4th 1631.

Memorial to Arthur Hildersham in St Helen's Church, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, erected by his son, Samuel.

In this town of Ashby de la Zouch, for many years together, Mr Arthur Hildersham exercised his ministry at my being there; and all the while I continued at Ashby, he was silenced ... most of the people in the town were directed by his judgment, and so continued, and yet do continue presbyterianly affected ...

William Lilly, *Mr William Lilly's History of His Life and Times: from the year 1602, to 1681* (London, 1715, 2nd edn.), p. 6.

Hildersham's epitaph on the memorial raised to him in Ashby parish church by his son Samuel declared that 'he lived in this place for the most part of 43 yeares and 6 moneths, with great successe in his ministry'. Though this may have been strictly true, in that Hildersham arrived in the town as lecturer in September 1587, and died there in March 1632, it is too easy to gain a false picture from these bare statistics. For during this time, Hildersham was in fact the vicar of Ashby for a mere twelve years, from 1593 to 1605. After his suspension for nonsubscription and nonconformity by the Bishop of Lincoln in 1605, he was never again to be reinstated to the vicarage, and for the rest of the period officially served as lecturer only. Even in the periods before and after his incumbency, he suffered frequent suspensions and silencings. No fewer than six other vicars served in Ashby

alongside Hildersham, thus creating the inbuilt potential for conflict and factionalism.¹ How Hildersham viewed, and indeed exercised and negotiated, his ministry under these circumstances, how that ministry changed over the years and in response to differing situations, will form the focus of this chapter. It contends that Samuel's emphasis on his father's residence in Ashby is crucial – and that although Hildersham's early ministry as lecturer and then vicar owed much to his preaching and the patronage of his powerful relative, the third Earl of Huntingdon, the maintenance of his status at the heart of Ashby's community (and not just the godly part of it) was achieved by his becoming firmly embedded within that local society. His large and prominently-situated house in Ashby symbolised his position, and his informal, private, and secular dealings with the town's inhabitants meant that his influence was increasingly secure, even when he was barred from the pulpit. William Lilly's record of his schooldays, between 1613 and 1620, 'that all the while I continued at Ashby, he [Hildersham] was silenced' and yet 'most of the people in the town were directed by his judgment', provides striking testimony to this paradox.² Under normal circumstances, a grammar school boy in Ashby might well have heard Hildersham preach, but because he was either silent or absent in these years, Lilly was denied the opportunity. Nevertheless, he was very aware of the latter's powerful and continuing influence in the local community.

¹ Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970) describes a number of such conflicts between lecturers and incumbents, for example that which arose between the lecturer, Thomas Warren, and the curate, James Wittaker, in Rye in 1623, see p. 98.

² William Lilly (1602-1680), the famous astrologer, was at school in Ashby, between the ages of eleven and eighteen. Not only was Hildersham 'silenced' during these years, but latterly was also absent from the town, concealing himself for 'a long time, sometimes in the City, sometimes in the Country' subsequent to his sentencing by the High Commission on 28 November 1616, see Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 153. For Lilly, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/16661).

1. Introduction: the World of Ashby

Ashby-de-la-Zouch was a small Leicestershire market town, with a population of about 800 in 1570, growing to between 1,000 and 1,400 in the first forty years of the seventeenth century, and then suffering a sharp decline during the 1640s.³

Physically, economically and socially, the town was dominated by the Earls of Huntingdon, whose main family seat was at Ashby Castle.⁴ The Hastings family's authority and economic influence in the town were maintained by their control of its government through the manorial courts and patronage, while their presence meant that Ashby possessed a significance disproportionate to its size.⁵ On the poor acid soil, the agricultural economy of the area was basically pastoral, with cattle-rearing and perhaps horse-breeding the most significant features, and leather-working trades developing in consequence.⁶ Oats and barley appear to have been the main crops. Although coal mines existed on the 300-acre barren heathland to

³ Much of the detail on the economic and demographic background of Ashby in the early modern period is taken from the very useful study by C. J. M. Moxon, 'Ashby-de-la-Zouch – a social and economic survey of a market town – 1570-1720' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1971). Other helpful secondary sources include John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicestershire*, Vol. III, Part II (London, 1804); W. G. Hoskins (ed.), *The Victoria County History of the County of Leicester*, Vol. 2 (Oxford, 1969); W. and J. Hextall, *The History and Description of Ashby-de-la-Zouch with Excursions in the Neighbourhood* (London, 1852); W. Scott, *The Story of Ashby-de-la-Zouch* (Ashby-de-la-Zouch, 1907); and Kenneth Hillier, *The Book of Ashby-De-La-Zouch* (Buckingham, 1984).

⁴ The manor of Ashby had been granted to the Hastings family by Edward IV in 1462, and in 1472 permission was given to erect a fortified manor house. Almost all of the townspeople were Hastings' tenants, see Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 78. The manorial court seems to have been the sole means of town government, alongside the quarter sessions operating at county level. For a biographical account of the third Earl, see Claire Cross, *The Puritan Earl: the Life of Henry Hastings, Third Earl of Huntingdon* (London, 1966).

⁵ The manorial court records for Ashby are now held as part of the Hastings collection at the Henry H. Huntington Library, San Marino, California. These holdings include the town rules book from 1627 (on microfilm at LRO), court rolls after 1660, parts of the churchwardens' and overseers of the poor' accounts 1623-34 (on microfilm at LRO), correspondence between the Earl and his agents concerning the town, family accounts and rent rolls, petitions from various townspeople, a large number of land deeds, miscellaneous memoranda, accounts of local coalmines, and papers concerning the business of the Earls of Huntingdon as Lords Lieutenant of Leicestershire. I am indebted to Moxon for this summary of holdings.

⁶ See Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 155-158.

the west of Ashby known as the Woulds, and at nearby Coleorton owned by the rival Beaumont family, the area's mineral reserves were not fully exploited until after the industrial revolution. Most of the town's inhabitants were occupied in a mixture of various trading and subsidiary agricultural activities. As well as the twice-weekly markets, annual fairs for cattle, sheep and horses were held in the town.⁷

These trading activities were no doubt promoted by Ashby's location at the centre of a network of road systems, which facilitated travel and communications.⁸ Some 120 miles from London, it lay on the main roads between Leicester and Burton on Trent, Nottingham and Tamworth, and Derby and Coventry. As we shall see in other chapters, this relative ease of mobility was significant for the extension of a godly ministry like Hildersham's over a considerable area, and facilitated interaction between various groups within the wider locality. Of perhaps even greater import in this regard was Ashby's position as a border town, in terms of both ecclesiastical and secular administration. Situated on the most north-westerly boundary of Leicestershire, bordering on Staffordshire and Derbyshire and close also to Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire, it meant that legal ambiguities over jurisdiction could easily arise or be exploited. Ecclesiastically, Ashby was part of the archdeaconry of Leicester, within the vast diocese of Lincoln, but it was only necessary to travel a few miles from the town to enter the diocesan realm of the Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, or that of the archdeaconry of Nottingham

⁷ For more information on the markets and fairs in Ashby, see Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 27-34.

⁸ This is perhaps reflected in the existence of more than forty alehouses in the town in 1627, see LRO DE/432 Box 37, Churchwardens Account Book 1765-1847, which contains at the back an 'Order of Assizes for Suppression of some of the Alehouses in Ashby 1627'. This document (which complains about the number of alehouses being too great for such a small town, lists only twenty-seven as being fit to continue, and refers to the disorders arising from them) entreats the assistance of the earl in their suppression. There is no indication in the document whether Hildersham himself was involved in this campaign, but he certainly preached against the evils of frequenting the ale house in his sermons, see, for example, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 231, 710.

which was part of the northern province of York. For Hildersham, this was to prove of enormous significance when he found himself silenced by his own bishop, for it enabled him to continue preaching at places like Burton and Repton, under a more sympathetic administration.⁹

The progress of the Reformation in Ashby has been the subject of some attention from religious historians over many years, and, indeed, its importance as a centre of puritanism was also recognised by contemporaries.¹⁰ In 1595, the separatist Francis Johnson, rejecting the notion of a parochial system that was subject to the authority of bishops, nevertheless singled out as examples of ‘the best of them’, ‘Blackfryers or Mary Overyes in London, or Ashby de la zouch in Leycestershire, or Maldon in Essex, or Coventry in Warwickshire’.¹¹ Hildersham

⁹ For a more detailed exploration of the differences that existed between diocesan administrations, and the effect that this had on the implementation of a national ecclesiastical policy, see Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990).

¹⁰ In particular, see Cross, *Puritan Earl*; Patrick Collinson (ed.), *Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-1577* (London, 1960); C. D. Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire, 1558-1633’ (MA thesis, University of Leeds, 1962); and Moxon, ‘Ashby’, pp. 283-340. More recently, see Christopher Haigh, ‘The Troubles of Thomas Pestell: Parish Squabbles and Ecclesiastical Politics in Caroline England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 41:4 (Oct 2002), pp. 403-428.

¹¹ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 59. Of course, the fact that Johnson is engaged in refuting an (unpublished) letter of Hildersham’s in this treatise may help to account for the presence of Ashby in his select list of parishes. For further discussion of this treatise, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 204-209, and Chapter 6, pp. 246-252. The parish of St Anne’s, Blackfriars, was served by Stephen Egerton, one of the most popular preachers of the age and one of the co-organisers of the Millenary petition with Hildersham. He was maintained by a ‘great congregation’, ‘mostly of merchants’ wives and drawn from all parts of the city’, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967), pp. 320-321, 341. On Hildersham’s recommendation, William Gouge was later recommended to a vacancy there. Mary Overyes (or the parish of St Saviour, Southwark), was one of the London parishes that established an early ‘reputation for religious radicalism’ and ‘that attracted a continuous stream’ of puritan lecturers from the 1570s until 1625, including Robert Crowley, James Stile, Hugh Smith, Francis Marbury, Edmund Snape, William Symonds and John Trundle, see Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, pp. 106, 124, 145, 150, 199, 214, 224, quote at p. 199. The parish of Maldon, the Essex port and market town, is most associated with the prominent puritan minister George Gifford, the author of *The Country Divinity* (1581), and one of the leaders of the Essex presbyterian movement of the 1580s. After suspension for nonsubscription in 1584, he was not reinstated as curate, but remained as lecturer in the town for the next thirty-five years, see Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 265-267, 279, and William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), pp. 93, 94, 96, 99-100, 132, 135, 141, 153-155. Hunt paints a picture of conflict in the town between Gifford and his supporters, and conformist factions opposed to his reformation of manners. The parish of Holy Trinity, Coventry, was served for many years by Humphrey Fenn, a close associate of Cartwright and Hildersham, see below, Chapter 4, p. 176.

himself frequently reminded his hearers that the town, as well as the country, had been privileged to have unbroken gospel preaching for many decades; in August 1631 he declared that this had continued ‘above 70. yeares without interruption’.¹² The role of the godly third Earl of Huntingdon, the patron of the living, in establishing Ashby as a model of reformed ministry, has, of course, been generally acknowledged, and traced in detail by Claire Cross in her biographical study. It was the earl who had been responsible for bringing Anthony Gilby, the outspoken and influential Marian exile and translator, to Ashby as lecturer in the early 1560s, from where his critics claimed he ruled like a bishop.¹³ As part of a wider scheme for the godly education of the young, it was the earl, too, who took the lead in the re-endowment of the town’s Grammar School in 1567.¹⁴

2. Hildersham as Lecturer: the Early Years 1587-93¹⁵

Hildersham entered the world of Ashby as a young man of twenty-four, when he was presented to the lectureship by his patron, the third Earl of Huntingdon, on 14 September 1587, following the death of Gilby.¹⁶ As lay rector of the benefice, the earl settled upon Hildersham the impropriated (that is, the great) tithes for life, an arrangement continued by his two successors. This was to give Hildersham considerable financial security and also very likely as lecturer a higher income than

¹² Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 778.

¹³ See Cross, *Puritan Earl*, p. 131. The manorial system of government in Ashby meant, of course, that it was far easier for the Reformation to be imposed from above, than in a place like Dorchester, for example, which as a borough was ruled by fifteen ‘Capital Burgesses’, see David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992), p. 7.

¹⁴ For a history of the school, see Levi Fox, *A Country Grammar School: A History of Ashby-de-la-Zouch Grammar School through four centuries 1567 to 1967* (Oxford, 1967).

¹⁵ For the biographical details relating to this period, see above, Chapter 1, pp. 15-22.

¹⁶ Anthony Gilby was buried at Ashby on 31 December 1584, the parish register recording that he was ‘a detestor of popery from his youth and a preacher of the gospel’, LRO DE1013/1, parish register for St Helen’s Church, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Vol. 1, 1561-1671.

the vicar, who presumably received only the small tithes or an annual cash payment from the earl.¹⁷ In addition, his relationship to the Hastings family established him as a person of high standing in local society.

The problem with any attempt to reconstruct these early years of Hildersham's ministry in Ashby is the paucity of direct source materials. Diocesan and archidiaconal court records do exist for this period, and the parish registers survive from 1561, but none supply any direct evidence of Hildersham as lecturer.¹⁸ Those churchwardens' and overseers of the poor accounts that are extant relate to a later period, for which, generally, all categories of records are much richer.¹⁹ Some personal records, such as wills, do survive in small numbers for the Elizabethan years, but Hildersham does not feature in any of them as either a witness or recipient.²⁰ However, his catechism on the Lord's Supper, we are told, was written 'for the direction of his owne people ... at what time hee was first

¹⁷ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 146. The glebe terrier of 1704 for Ashby is the earliest one that specifically lists the vicarage dues, including tithes of hay, wood and lamb, geese and pigs, but by this stage the lectureship had ceased to function as an independent entity, see LAO Ashby terrier bundle. I am grateful to Dr Heather Falvey for a discussion on the matter of tithes, and her suggestions for further reading, including R. J. P. Kain and H. C. Prince, *Tithe Surveys for Historians* (Chichester, 2000), pp. 2-4; D. Hey, *The Oxford Companion to Local and Family History* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 440-441; E. J. Evans and A. G. Crosby, *Tithes: Maps, Apportionments and the 1836 Act: a guide for local historians* (British Association for Local History, 3rd edition, Salisbury, 1997), pp. 1-3. For the views of one particular vicar, Thomas Heton of Layston, on tithes, see H. Falvey and S. Hindle (eds.), *"This little commonwealth": Layston parish memorandum book 1607-c. 1650, and 1704-c. 1747* (Hertfordshire Record Society, Vol. 19, 2003). Thomas Pestell, one of Hildersham's successors as vicar of Ashby, was later to get embroiled in tithe suits relating to his time as vicar of Packington, see Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', pp. 405-407. For further discussion of the issues relating to tithes, see Christopher Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 77-167.

¹⁸ See for example, LRO ID41/4 series, which contains only one case for Ashby during these years, a testamentary case at ID41/4/459. ID41/11 series contains the Archdeaconry Instance Books, and ID41/13 series the Act Books.

¹⁹ Churchwardens' accounts, mainly overseers, survive from 1623 to 1638, see LRO MF/5.

²⁰ For the period 1587-1593, eighteen wills survive for Ashby, see LRO Leicestershire Wills. Hildersham acts as a witness to wills during his time as vicar (1593-1605), though in a surprisingly small number of cases: William Atkins (1601, no.1), signed twice by Hildersham, and possibly William Sharpe (1599, no. 38). Neither is distinguished by particularly godly preambles. Hildersham later witnesses the will of Margaret Jarram (1627, no. 43), which contains a lengthy and obviously godly preamble in a document itself only just over a page long, including a codicil. He also witnesses the will of William Rise (1612, no. 82), see below, p. 61.

called unto them', thus providing evidence of the sort of instructive personal work in which he was engaged at this early stage.²¹

As lecturer in Ashby, Hildersham succeeded Anthony Gilby, but the quieter, less spectacular Thomas Widdowes, who remained as vicar of the town, perhaps in some ways supplied a more direct role model.²² After Widdowes' death in 1593, the earl's presentation letter to Hildersham commended his ministry as 'faithful, careful, and diligent in his function, according to his talent'.²³ It is apparent that Gilby and Widdowes had cooperated closely; not only does it appear that their religious views were in sympathy, but Widdowes had also married Gilby's daughter Esther in 1570.²⁴ They may well have viewed their ministries as complementary; Moxon has suggested that while Gilby was the player on a wider stage, it was Widdowes to whom the local clergy might turn for advice, as Henry Presbury, vicar of nearby Packington, had done when he sought counsel about a disputed marriage in his own parish.²⁵ However, there is little doubt that it was the lecturer, Gilby, who was the senior figure in the relationship, and who enjoyed the

²¹ Bradshaw, 'To the Reader', sig. A2, in Hildersham, *Lords Supper*. For details of the publication history, see above, Chapter 1, pp. 23-25. An earlier manuscript version survives at JRUL EM 524 fos. 100r-111v. For a discussion of Hildersham's approach to the sacrament, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 138-146. Certainly, it would have been the responsibility of the incumbent rather than the lecturer to admit parishioners to the communion and therefore by extension to prepare them for that sacrament, but it is probable that Hildersham would also have shared in those duties.

²² Widdowes had been vicar since 17 November 1569, see LRO ID41/28/132 Induction Mandate.

²³ CUL, Mm.1.43 (Baker MSS.32), 426, quoted in Cross, *Puritan Earl*, p. 141. Little is known of Widdowes himself: in the *Liber Cleri* of 1576 he is recorded as 'John Wydowes vic' of Asbydalazouche ... resident, presented by the Ealre [*sic*] of Hunt' patron 50 yeres of age, married, ordered by Thomas Bisshop of Lichf., preacher licenced by the said Bisshop of Lichf', not graduate, brought up in Cambridg in St Jones college [in margin, Preacher]', cited in C. W. Foster, *The State of the Church*, Vol. I (Lincoln, 1926), p. 33. Venn states that he was admitted as sizar at Christ's in 1545, see Vol. IV, p. 401, but as Moxon and Cross suggest he may have studied first at Christ's before transferring to St John's, see Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 292.

²⁴ Although Widdowes does not appear to have fallen foul of the ecclesiastical authorities, Chalmers includes him in his list of puritan ministers in Leicestershire, largely on the basis of his close association with similarly-minded men, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 339. Besides, it is unlikely that he would have received the patronage or commendation of the third Earl unless he had espoused godly views.

²⁵ For more details of this incident and Presbury's nonconformity, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 335.

greater prestige; this set an important precedent for how Hildersham was later to be viewed *vis-à-vis* the vicars who replaced him. There is no reason to think that Hildersham's relationship with Widdowes after 1587 was not similarly cordial; again it is likely that there was a coincidence of religious priorities and probably the personalities of both men also contributed to a working concord. Hildersham, always anxious to stress the need for 'love and esteem' between 'all able and faithfull ministers', was described as being 'pleasant in discourse' and of a 'sweet and ingenuous disposition'.²⁶ The earl's description of Widdowes as 'faithful, careful and diligent' could equally well have applied to Hildersham.

During these years, Hildersham's emphasis must have been very much on his preaching.²⁷ It is interesting to speculate about how he might have viewed his ministry as lecturer, in the light of Paul Seaver's discussion of the possible theological differentiation some made in the early Elizabethan period between the pastoral preaching role of the parish incumbent and the teaching role of the lecturer/doctor. Some presbyterian contemporaries argued that the latter was scripturally mandated to preach in a more doctrinal fashion: 'The pastor is to take one course, and the Doctor another, for the one is to direct himself principally to exhort, and the other to attend to doctrine'.²⁸ Theoretically this neat distinction may have been valid and to some extent could have been worked out in practical situations, but in many instances the boundaries between the two kinds of preaching must have become blurred. Although all of Hildersham's printed sermons were, in fact, delivered as lectures, and no examples of his Sunday vicarial

²⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 297, 301; Lilly, *History*, p. 6; Memorial to Hildersham in Ashby Church.

²⁷ For a consideration of the content of Hildersham's preaching, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 101-146.

²⁸ John Udall, *A Demonstration of the Truth of That Discipline* [1588], ed. Edward Arber (Westminster, 1895), p. 49, cited in Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, p. 24. Udall, like Hildersham, was a friend of Cartwright and Travers.

sermons survive with which to compare them, it is hard to imagine that there would have been significant distinction in style and structure between the two. Certainly, these later lectures are rigorously theological, but always with a strong practical priority; the obligatory 'Uses' of each doctrine often contain a section for exhortation. It is possible that the presence of a more godly, motivated congregation for the midweek lecture may have influenced the emphasis of his preaching, but Hildersham vehemently rejected the notion that attendance was voluntary and frequently addressed himself to unconverted hearers.²⁹ It could be that, in accord with another of Seaver's suggestions, Hildersham shared the pragmatic imperative of those whose primary concern was increasing the spread of godly preaching by any means available, and who thus viewed the lecturerships as an ideal vehicle for this purpose. On the face of it, this justification would seem to be slightly more problematic here because of Ashby's recent history of being well-supplied with preachers; indeed, few other places in the land could boast such a rich gospel heritage. However, the town was located in an area where religious conservatism was strong, and the earl evidently regarded it as a base from which light could be spread amidst the surrounding darkness.³⁰ Ashby had become known as a preaching centre, and there is evidence of many coming to the exercise that had been established there since at least 1570. Having two able preachers officially based in Ashby also gave wider scope for their participation in prophesyings in

²⁹ See below, Chapter 3, pp. 97-100. However, Hildersham can also be found addressing his fellow-ministers in these midweek lectures, a feature which presumably would not have been relevant on the Sabbath, when they would have been preaching to their own congregations.

³⁰ Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 246, notes that only the places where the earl owned the advowsons in the otherwise conservative deanery of Akeley were puritan centres. At nearby Coleorton, for example, the Catholic Beaumont family were influential. For the earlier development of Ashby as a 'missionary centre', see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', pp. 29-52.

nearby towns, such as Burton, Repton, Appleby and Packington, without neglect of the local flock.³¹

Preaching was always viewed by Hildersham as absolutely central to his ministry, both as lecturer and vicar. Interestingly, Hildersham was to treat the two titles of ‘preacher’ and ‘minister’ as synonymous, and to use them interchangeably in his lectures.³² For him, ministry meant ‘Ministry of the Word’, the crucial tool in winning souls to God.³³ Surviving letters written to him by Humphrey Fenn and John Cotton were both addressed to Hildersham as ‘preacher of the word at Ashby’.³⁴ Cotton’s own pattern of preaching while lecturer at Boston, although remarkable, gives some indication of the sheer number of sermons that might be delivered each week;

besides his ordinary lecture every Thursday ... [he] preached thrice more every week; on the week-days, namely on Wednesdays, and Thursdays, early in the morning, and on Saturdays at three in the afternoon, and ... “ kept a daily lecture in his house ... [to which] many pious people in the town would constantly report”³⁵

It is not clear where Hildersham was living at this stage. Widdowes was presumably still occupying the vicarage, and the earliest surviving record which shows Hildersham as a tenant of the school properties is 1597, but logic would

³¹ Of course there were other godly clergy who made Ashby their base, including curates. It may be, too, that this arrangement made for a better supply of services to the dependent chapelry of Blackfordby, although there is no evidence to support this theory. Men from Blackfordby complained in the archdeaconry courts around 1578 about paying dues for the repair of Ashby church, and argued that they were not compelled to worship at Ashby, see LRO ID 41/4/273, cited in Moxon, ‘Ashby’, p. 232. This dispute rumbled on until 1663, when a nominal agreement was reached, see Moxon, ‘Ashby’, pp. 331-334. However, in the interim, there were periodic complaints from the chapelwardens of Blackfordby about the neglect in the provision of services to them by the vicars of Ashby, notably Hacket in 1615 and Watson in the 1630s, see below, p. 62, and Chapter 7, pp. 287-288.

³² See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 278, 293.

³³ *Ibid.*, for example, pp. 278, 292. The content of Hildersham’s preaching is considered in more detail in Chapter 3, below, pp. 101-146.

³⁴ See BL Add. 4275 fos. 154, 223. Both letters are undated, although the Fenn letter is obviously much earlier. He actually styles Hildersham as ‘preacher of God’s word at Ashby’. Cotton mentions writing the preface to Hildersham’s, *Lectures upon John*, which was published in 1629.

³⁵ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Hartford, Conn., 1820), cited in Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, p. 30.

suggest that he may well have taken over the impressive dwelling previously occupied by Anthony Gilby; this, says Moxon, was one of only two houses in Ashby inventoried before 1621 that contained eight or more rooms.³⁶ In the little world of Ashby, Hildersham was already, by virtue of these social advantages as well as increasingly by virtue of his ministry itself, becoming a very big player indeed.

3. Hildersham as Vicar: 1593-1605

The period of twelve years between 1593 and 1605 was the only time that Hildersham held an official cure of souls, and he combined this with a continuation of his role as lecturer.³⁷ Thus there were no potential rivals to his ministry or status in the town, and presumably he received the income from both great and small tithes during these years. Evidently, the earl must have been sufficiently satisfied with his performance as lecturer to present him to the living. Writing to inform Hildersham of his decision, the earl not only commended the ministries of Gilby and Widdowes, but also expressed his desire that ‘the supply of that place ... may be continued and increased’. ‘Yet’, the earl went on, ‘let this be your care, to advance the glory of God by exercise of your ministry which you shall do best when you are in your pastoral charge’.³⁸ It seems obvious that Hildersham heeded this advice, for he clearly pursued a similar kind of ministry to that of his predecessors, and which had also been ably modelled by his earlier mentor Richard

³⁶ For Gilby’s inventory see LRO Inventories, 1584/99, discussed in Moxon, ‘Ashby’, pp. 180-181. Hildersham’s own inventory, which is much briefer and does not include details of the number of rooms in his house, nevertheless contains nothing that would contradict this theory that he took over his predecessor’s house, see LRO PR/I/34(1632).

³⁷ Hildersham’s Induction Mandate, dated 4 October 1593, can be found at LRO ID41/28/258.

³⁸ CUL.Mm.I.43 (Baker MSS.32), 426, cited in Cross, *Puritan Earl*, p. 141.

Greenham at Dry Drayton, known often as ‘practical divinity’.³⁹ Such a ministry was characterised by the guiding principles of regular and faithful godly preaching, catechising and teaching the flock, a careful administration of the sacraments, and personal dealings with his parishioners through spiritual counselling.⁴⁰

Once again, though, a difficulty arises about the lack of much direct evidence relating to these years; no sermon manuscripts or printed sermons seem to have survived, and only a trickle of presentments occurred, mostly for immorality.⁴¹ Is it possible, therefore, to infer from silence that a relative sparseness of court cases was an indication of a successful parish ministry, and that most problems were being settled informally? Hildersham’s memorial certainly made expansive claims in this respect, that he was renowned for ‘his sweet and ingenuous disposition, his singular wisdom, in settling peace, advising in secular affaires, and settling doubts’.⁴² Court records may be useful in a negative sense by providing evidence of discontent or resistance, but they are probably not the best indicators of a positive engagement with a message or ‘success’, however that may be defined.⁴³ They certainly can give little idea of the internal spiritual response that would have been Hildersham’s own criteria.

However, it is possible to construct some sort of picture of Hildersham’s ministry during this period. As we have seen, there is little doubt that he heeded his

³⁹ See Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *‘Practical Divinity’: The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 59-85.

⁴⁰ For examples of the historiography relating to the post-Reformation parish ministry, see above, Chapter 1, p. 6, n. 15. For Hildersham’s own scriptural and theoretical justification for this type of ministry, see Chapter 3, below.

⁴¹ LRO ID41/13/19-29. One presentment in 1597 of Thomas Hill was for a failure to pay dues for communicating, see LRO ID41/13/22 f. 24r.

⁴² Memorial to Hildersham in Ashby Church.

⁴³ A similar problem was identified by David Underdown in his study of the reformation in Dorchester; ‘Drunkenness and irregular church-going are very visible in the sources; sobriety and godliness are not, yet they were probably much more common’, see his, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 131.

patron's call to continue the pattern of his predecessor, and that he exercised a careful and conscientious office. During his twelve-year incumbency, 410 baptisms, 259 burials and 80 marriages were performed.⁴⁴ His keeping of the parish registers indicates a desire for everything to be done in an orderly fashion; he signs the baptismal register at the bottom of the page on at least nine and possibly eleven occasions, indicative of his conscientious approach which contrasts favourably with some of the later clergy.⁴⁵ Interestingly, he never signs himself as vicar, as some of the later incumbents do, but always as minister.⁴⁶ He baptised six of his own children between 1594 and 1604, but there is no indication in the register that these are the minister's children, as some later vicars ostentatiously announce.⁴⁷ It is not clear how frequently communion was administered at this stage, although accounts for 1627-28 indicate that it was celebrated on four occasions during the year, with two administrations at Easter.⁴⁸ This quarterly pattern, with an attendant collection for the poor, would certainly match the model advocated by Hildersham in his treatise on the Lord's Supper, and may well have been instituted by him during his incumbency. Following Greenham's counsel, it is likely that he delayed celebration of the sacrament in Ashby until he felt that his parishioners appreciated

⁴⁴ LRO DE 1013/1, parish registers for Ashby.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* Hildersham signs the register in 1594 (f. 11v), 1595 (f. 12r), 1597 (f. 12v), 1598 (f. 13r), 1599 (f. 13v), 1601 (f. 14v), 1602 (f. 15r), 1603 (f. 15v) and very faintly in 1604 (f. 16r). It is very possible that he also signed it in 1600 (f. 14r), but a huge blot makes any signature illegible. In 1606 (f. 16v), the page is very faint and blurry, and something illegible is written after the word 'minister'. This, however, was after the time that Hildersham was silenced.

⁴⁶ Thomas Pestell signs himself as vicar at the bottom of f. 143r, in 1618. On the title pages of his printed works, Hildersham is always described as a 'Minister of Jesus Christ'.

⁴⁷ For the details of the baptisms of Hildersham's children, see above, Chapter 1, p. 21. Thomas Pestell announced the birth of his daughter with a flourish in November 1618 (f. 21r): 'Elizabeth Pestell Novemb. 28th & she was borne the 6th November', and Anthony Watson's daughter was clearly identified as the minister's child in 1632 (f. 26v): 'Elizabeth the daughter of Mr Ant. Watson vicar of Ashby. was bapt the third of July 1632'.

⁴⁸ LRO MF/5, Accounts of the overseers of the poor at Ashby-de-la-Zouch from April 1623 to Feb 1637 (unfoliated). Communion took place in June 1627, September 1627, January 1628, and 30 March and 6 April 1628. Each communion included a collection for the poor.

its true meaning: ‘before the Communion be administred to any people, or they be urged to receive it’, Hildersham advised, ‘there should bee care had, that they bee first catechised and instructed’.⁴⁹

Within the community, we see Hildersham becoming an ever-more established part of the scene. At some stage he had been appointed as one of the feoffees of the Grammar School, which was to form an increasingly significant source of his influence and intercourse with Ashby’s leading citizens, as will become apparent later.⁵⁰ As a feoffee, he must surely have participated in and probably initiated, the appointment of John Brinsley as schoolmaster in 1599.⁵¹ He was subsequently to become Hildersham’s own curate, too. The appointment of Brinsley not only served to strengthen the godly establishment and milieu within the town, but it ensured for Hildersham a loyal ally.⁵²

During his incumbency, Hildersham may have occupied the ‘vicarrige house’ next to the churchyard, for it was he who signed the glebe terrier of July 1601.⁵³ The more detailed terrier compiled by Anthony Watson in 1625 shows that

⁴⁹ For Greenham’s advice that when new to a parish a minister should delay the initial administration of the sacrament for a ‘good while’, until the people were properly taught and tried, see Parker and Carlson, ‘*Practical Divinity*’, p. 76; Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 77. For a discussion of Hildersham’s approach to the Lord’s Supper, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 138-146.

⁵⁰ LRO ES/AB/9/I, The Feoffees Book of Accounts 1594-1768, is an important source not only for the conduct of the school affairs, but also about the leading citizens of Ashby, including Hildersham, who constituted the feoffees. A transcript exists at Appendix V of Fox, *Country Grammar School*, pp. 132-176, though there are omissions for the years 1641 and 1642 (see fos. 20v, 21v). The first official mention of Hildersham as a feoffee occurs on 30 October 1606, but as this is in the earliest surviving list of feoffees in the book that dates from 1594, it is likely that he had been already serving for some time.

⁵¹ Brinsley was a graduate of Hildersham’s own college, Christ’s, and had previously taught for some years in the parish of Kegworth where he had also served as curate to Hildersham’s close friend and mentor, John Ireton. For more on these godly connections, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 154-156.

⁵² Brinsley, too, was a nonconformist, and was suspended by the Bishop of Lincoln on 1 December 1604. He was also presented with Hildersham and ninety-nine parishioners at the visitation of 1615 for refusing to receive the communion kneeling. He was closely involved with Darrell and his exorcism activities in the late 1590s, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 272-280. Of course, he was to become well-known in his own right as a schoolmaster and the pedagogical author of *Ludus Literarius: or, The Grammar Schoole* (London, 1612). For more details of Brinsley, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/3440) and Fox, *Country Grammar School*, pp. 25-38.

⁵³ LAO Terr/13/36 (1601).

this was a substantial building, which he describes as a ‘mansion house’ consisting of ‘four bayes’.⁵⁴ It contained ‘one parlour and a hall, one lodging chamber over the p[ar]lour w[i]th a studie in it one kitchen, one barne house, two little butteries w[i]th a loft over them, one milke house & a colehouse w[i]th two lofts over them’. In addition, there was ‘one barne of two bayes for corne or hey’, ‘one stable w[i]th two several smale roomes at either end for cows or swine consisting in al of one bay and an halfe’, ‘one small grasse close containing half an acre’, and ‘a fold yard and a garden w[i]th the ground on w[hi]ch the aforesaid buildings stand upon, containing one acre & a halfe’.

Impressive as this was in Ashby terms, denoting a high level of social prestige – perhaps ranking alongside the ten largest dwellings found by Moxon in his study of local inventories for 1625-45 – it was more than rivalled by the house that Anthony Gilby was occupying at the time of his death in 1584, and which Hildersham may also have lived in as lecturer.⁵⁵ But by Ashby standards, both of these two residences, the vicarage and the lecturer’s house, denoted that their occupants had a high status within the community. These houses, too, were also important as centres for hospitality. Not only was this a formal ecclesiastical requirement, enquired after by episcopal visitors, it also reinforced the sense of patronage and social substance; gentry could be entertained and provision made for the poor.⁵⁶ For the puritans especially, the home became significant as a centre for family or household religion and by extension for fellowship with godly brethren.

⁵⁴ LAO Terr/8/267 (1625). This house was demolished during the Civil War, and ‘since rebuilt by the inhabitants of Ashby de la Zouch’, avouches the Glebe Terrier of 1674, see LRO ID/41/2/19. This vicarage was in turn replaced by a new one built by Rev. John Prior (1783-1804).

⁵⁵ For Moxon’s study of Ashby housing, see ‘Ashby’, pp. 179-181. From inventories he found that the ten largest houses from 1625-45 had eight or more rooms. Gilby’s inventory shows that his house had eleven rooms, see LRO Inventories 1584/99.

⁵⁶ Hildersham is listed as ‘Hosp est’ i.e. hospitable in the 1603 *Liber Cleri*, see Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 286. For a more detailed discussion of the subject of clerical hospitality, see Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), especially pp. 257-299.

Although Hildersham would obviously have used his home in this way throughout his incumbency, it was to assume an increasingly important role as a sphere of influence when other more formal means were denied to him, as we shall see later. For, it will be argued, his home occupied that ambiguous and slippery ground between a private and a public space, being able to claim the legal and protective rights of the former, but as a focus for a self-selecting group of godly associates or poor dependents to seek his counsel, taking on characteristics of the latter.

References to Hildersham's home, possibly but not necessarily at this point the vicarage, also occur in the literature surrounding John Darrell and his exorcism activities.⁵⁷ Darling, the dispossessed 'boy of Burton', recorded that he had dinner at Hildersham's house in Ashby with Hildersham and a godly group including Darrell and Ireton.⁵⁸ More generally, these publications relating to Darrell and the charges brought against him in the 1590s also supply significant evidence of the spiritual milieu of Ashby during Hildersham's incumbency.⁵⁹ Hildersham's weekday lectures were obviously a magnet for drawing like-minded ministers into the town, and also provided opportunities for conference. Darrell was to maintain that the decision that he should become involved initially in a case of possession was taken by a group of sixteen ministers after one such lecture in Ashby.⁶⁰ Ashby itself, a place where public fasting was an established occurrence, was apparently

⁵⁷ Darrell lived in Ashby between 1592 and 1599. For a further discussion on his relationship with Hildersham, and his practice of exorcism, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 272-280.

⁵⁸ Samuel Harsnett, *A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrel* (London, 1599), p. 293.

⁵⁹ A polemical battle of claim and counter-claim between Darrell and his supporters and their opponents led by Samuel Harsnett was waged in the late 1590s and early 1600s. In this literature and at Darrell's trial, much technical discussion centred on the location and exact timing of various events in an attempt to prove or disprove the possibility of them thus occurring. Ashby and its parks and alehouses were therefore at the centre of such disputes in the William Somers counterfeiting allegations.

⁶⁰ Darrell, *A True Narration* (n.p., 1600), p. 8, and anon., *The Triall of Maister Dorrell* (Middelburg, 1599), p. 13. See also George More, *A True Discourse* (n.p., 1600), pp. 49-50, where he explains that he and Darrell only accepted an invitation to go to Lancashire after the matter had been shared with their 'brethren', who made the decision that they should go.

not untouched by the heightened atmosphere concerning demonic possession that developed out of such fasts in the 1590s; it seems that one ‘Phipps’, the servant of John Brinsley, who was himself intimately involved with the William Somers case, was under suspicion of being possessed, but this was discounted by Darrell.⁶¹ More than thirty of the chief residents of the town signed a testimonial attesting to Darrell’s good character during his residence in Ashby, seeming thereby to be in full accord with the spiritual ethos being promoted in the town.⁶² It would appear, from this evidence at least, that the prevailing orthodoxy in Ashby was a godly one, created no doubt by the earl and sustained by his preachers, and that it found support from the social elite of the town. Of course, to what extent this acceptance of a godly rule was merely a pragmatic recognition of the economic and social realities of a place dominated by the manorial system, and how much a genuine religious conviction on the part of individuals, is hard to assess. This obviously posed a dilemma for Hildersham, too: the dangers of hypocrisy, formalism and mere outward observance of religion were a recurrent theme in his sermons.⁶³

This spiritual milieu of fasting, exorcism, and godly preaching, which seemed to characterise Ashby under Hildersham’s ministry, and for which it became famed, was however apparently not totally inclusive. The case of Richard Spencer in 1605-6 challenges the notion of an unopposed godly hegemony in the town and supplies an alternative perspective on affairs. A less irenic side of Hildersham is also displayed; indeed, at first sight it might look as if Hildersham’s condemnation of Spencer was vindictive and harsh. The historian Stuart Babbage

⁶¹ In a lecture of August 1610, Hildersham refers to an earlier period of God’s blessing, when he recalls, ‘This, you that can remember our publike fasts, can witness from your own experience’, see Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 295 ; Harsnett, *A Discovery*, p. 34.

⁶² For further discussion of this issue, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 272-273.

⁶³ For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 119-122.

interpreted it in this way, calling Hildersham ‘a loveless and intransigent puritan’.⁶⁴

However, when we look more closely at what actually occurred, we find the situation was more complex and ambiguous than might initially appear.

Richard Spencer, an Ashby chandler whose house was destroyed by fire, can be found writing to John Belley, chancellor of the diocese of Lincoln, complaining of his treatment at the hands of three members of the religious elite in the town. Although this is a celebrated case, which has not escaped comment from historians, it is worth quoting from Spencer’s letter to Belley at some length, since little such countervailing evidence exists:

[R]ichard Spencer cominge to Mr Brinsley late curate of [Ash]by aforesaid to desire him to publish & demand in the church certain money of his the said Spencers w[hi]ch was taken out of his house about Michaelmas last when his house was on fire & after burned downe to the ground w[i]th all his goods to the value of xl li the said Mr Brinsley answeres nay, nay, the crosse hath lighte on thee, & a wors judgement hangeth on thy head, thou will have thy children baptised w[i]th the crosse the said Spencer answered that yf he had anie more children he would have them baptised w[i]th the signe of the crosse according to his majes[ties] lawes, & Mr Brinsley asked if not gods lawes, & Spencer said that his maj[es]ties lawes was gods lawes. Afterwards Mr Hildersham in his sermon said that there was three dwelling houses burned & 2. of them were Christians & the third meaning the said Spencer, he could not tell what to make of him Also Mr Hildershams wife came to a widowe woman where the fire began & told her Jone be of good comfort IIII li will build upp thy house againe, & as for Spencer the crosse hath light on him, let him beware the surplisse or other words to the like effecte

signed Richard Spencer⁶⁵

⁶⁴ S. B. Babbage, *Puritanism and Richard Bancroft* (London, 1962), p. 185.

⁶⁵ LAO Misc.Corresp. (1601-1643) Cor/M2 f. 38. The letter is undated, though a provisional date of 1606 has been put on it. However, the alleged episode must have been recorded between 1 December 1604, when Brinsley was suspended as curate (see Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 365) and 24 April 1605 when Hildersham himself was suspended. Thus the fire itself must have occurred around 29 September 1604. The Spencer case is referred to, for example, by Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, p. 104, and Babbage, *Puritanism*, p. 185.

The first thing to notice about this document (and this is clearly borne out by the files in Lincoln) is that the initial and prime subject of the grievance was not Hildersham, but John Brinsley, his curate. From the Darrell evidence it is apparent that Brinsley was not noted for his judicious remarks, although the description of him as ‘a very rash and headstronge yonge man’ was polemical and referred to a decade earlier.⁶⁶ It is Brinsley who allegedly refused Spencer’s request to publicise in the church his loss of money after the house fire, and Brinsley who is said to have pronounced the verdict that his misfortunes were due to his desire to have his children baptised with the sign of the cross. With Brinsley alone does the altercation over whether God’s law was the same as the king’s law seem to have arisen.

In this narrative of events, Hildersham’s wife, Ann, does not speak directly to Spencer about the incident, but to a widowed neighbour ‘Jone’. What was obviously intended as a comfort to Jone, who thus appears to be regarded sympathetically by the godly fraternity, is filtered presumably through local gossip networks before it reaches Spencer, and so may well have been distorted or misrepresented as a result. However, Ann Hildersham does not seem to have a very high opinion of Spencer, and is not slow in voicing it. As for the phrase ‘let him beware the surprisse’ attributed to Hildersham’s wife, it is hard to be sure of its precise meaning. Was it a threat or warning of further judgments to come for Spencer? Had he also objected to the failure of Ashby’s clergy to wear such vestments, as well as to their refusal to sign with the cross when baptising? It is clear, however, that Ann appears to equate the judgment of God with opposition to

⁶⁶ Darrell, *A Detection*, p. 114.

the godly *status quo* and is ready to pronounce with confidence on the matter, assured that the majority of people who mattered would agree with her.

Hildersham himself seems to have engaged subsequently in some kind of particular preaching in his sermon, by which Spencer is publicly identified before the congregation and as a result of which he takes strong offence.⁶⁷ When what Hildersham is reported to have said is deconstructed, however, it can be seen that he chooses his words carefully. Spencer, it appears, was not actually named in the sermon, but it was clear to the congregation that he was indeed the third person meant. This suggests that there must have been widely-known grounds for this general apprehension. Of course, it could be that his desire for conformist ceremonies was so unusual in a parish where the prevailing orthodoxy was nonconformity that he was distinct amongst his neighbours, but it could also be that his lifestyle marked him out as notoriously ungodly and immoral. If this was the case, as circumstantial evidence might seem to suggest, it would support the view that the majority of the parish at least approved of the ‘civil’ behaviour that was associated with the godly message, even if they did not all experience a true conversion. It reinforces the impression that godly *mores* were so pervasive in Ashby, that any dissenters were immediately conspicuous. The scenario that Hildersham outlined in a 1609 sermon seems relevant here: ‘That when a mans offence is knowne and scandalous to many, the Minister is not bound to admonish him in private; but may (without malice) reprove it publicly’.⁶⁸ It is also important to notice that Hildersham carefully avoids saying that the third person was not a Christian, but merely that ‘he could not tell what to make of him’.⁶⁹ This may be

⁶⁷ For more on the subject of particular preaching, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 127-133.

⁶⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 108.

⁶⁹ See Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 331: ‘there is no particular person that lives in the Church, but we are to judge and hope he is one of Gods Elect’.

the clear import of his words, but he does not spell it out. Hildersham apparently does not talk about the fire being a judgment upon Spencer's ceremonialism, in the way that Brinsley is alleged to have done, or surely Spencer would have complained of it. In his lectures, Hildersham was always careful to stress that conformity was a 'matter of judgement', and was not in itself a plumb-line for assessing whether or not someone was a true believer. He would surely not have denounced Spencer in this public fashion if conformity was his only fault. It seems that although Spencer wanted the case to be seen as a doctrinal issue, with himself cast in the guise of the wronged conformist denied his legal rights, Hildersham firmly viewed it as a moral question.

We have to remember, too, that this document represents only half a story, an inevitably-biased narrative of a man embittered by his apparent social exclusion. Unfortunately, the other side's version of events does not appear to exist. The timing of the complaint must also be significant, coinciding with the Bishop of Lincoln's campaign against nonconformist clergy in his diocese. Although the alleged incident must have occurred between the end of 1604 and April 1605, it seems that Spencer waited some months before writing to Belley. By 1606, both Brindley and Hildersham had been suspended, and there must have been a feeling of uncertainty about the future direction of religious affairs in Ashby. With the fourth Earl dead by the end of 1604, and the fifth Earl succeeding his grandfather as a minor, a certain insecurity amongst the godly elite would not have been surprising.⁷⁰ Perhaps the aggrieved Spencer felt he would receive a more sympathetic hearing if he played up those aspects of his case relating to conformity, or even that he was encouraged in his suit by those who felt

⁷⁰ For details of the fourth and fifth Earls and their religious convictions, see below, p. 57, n. 82.

it would supply grist to their own mill in the battle against nonconformity. That this is the only surviving formal evidence of dissatisfaction with Hildersham's godly regime, is in itself noteworthy; it would be misleading, therefore, to accord it too much significance, although it does alert us to the existence of an undertow of discontent, however marginalised. It also presents us with a picture of Hildersham that is less irenic than his admirers like Samuel Clarke were ready to admit; because of his powerful patrons, it was rare for Hildersham's authority to be challenged openly within Ashby, but when it was, clearly Hildersham was prepared to denounce opponents forcefully and publicly, albeit with a careful and judicious choice of words. In his preaching, too, he was more than ready to delineate instances of ungodly resistance to his message, but, of course, the tropes of his pulpit rhetoric must be treated with some caution.⁷¹

It is difficult, also, to reconstruct a context for this episode that would allow a more objective assessment of affairs. Spencer may have been a supporter of traditional, prayer-book ways or he may have been well-known as profane. We cannot tell, though the circumstantial evidence, in the form of later family history, may point to the latter. Although there were Spencers in Ashby occurring in the parish records from at least 1562, a year after the registers began, there is no definite record of Richard's own baptism or marriage.⁷² No will or inventory seems to have survived, and he does not appear in any ecclesiastical court records. If there

⁷¹ This matter is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, below, pp. 127-133.

⁷² LRO DE 1013/1. The earliest mention of a Spencer in the register is the burial of a William Spencer 'botcher' on 25 November 1562 (f. 130r). It is possible that Richard is the child of John Spencer, receiving baptism on 27 July 1565 (f. 2r), but the first name of this infant is indecipherable though the initial letter could be an 'S'. Although of doubtful likelihood, this entry would certainly be of the right sort of age profile for our Richard, for it would make him forty years old in 1605. John Spencer, who married Elizabeth Wetten on 24 October 1563 (f. 85r) is recorded as having ten children baptised between 1565 and 1585. Another of these ten children could also be Richard: the child baptised on 14 September 1572 (f. 4v) has no given forename, but is merely indicated by a letter which could be 'N'. It seems that Richard must have married outside Ashby, but was this just because his wife came from another parish, or because he wanted a 'conformist' wedding? Maybe

had been an earlier history of trouble, it does not seem to have reached the courts. Richard himself did not survive this episode by many years: his burial is recorded on 16 August 1610, when presumably he was buried by Hildersham's equally nonconformist successor as vicar, William Darling. Intriguingly it was in the Michaelmas visitation of 1610, just after Spencer's burial, that Darling was presented for a full range of nonconformist offences, including that he had 'not worne the surplice ... nor buried the dead nor read divine service in such form as in such terms of Lawes he is comanded'.⁷³ It is tempting to speculate whether complaints about Spencer's mode of burial may have contributed to, or featured in, Darling's presentation. Unfortunately, no will survives to give any clues about Spencer's religious views or funeral preferences. However, a survey of the wider Spencer clan supplies us with an interestingly diverse spiritual and moral spectrum. Robert Spencer, who may even have been Richard's brother but in any case is almost certain to have been some relation, was one of the staunchest nonconformists when the issue was forced after 1614, being presented as standing

he was influenced by his wife's views on such matters? As for his children, whom he was apparently so keen to have baptised with the sign of the cross, there were at least four who were baptised in Ashby during Hildersham's tenure as vicar; Thomas, baptised on 18 December 1597 (f. 13r), Abraham, baptised on 4 November 1599 (f. 14r), Elizabeth, baptised in late November 1601 (f. 15r), and Sa[yr?]a, baptised on 27 January 1604 (f. 16r). It is possible, therefore, that some sort of dispute involving Spencer, over the lack of ceremonies, may have been rumbling on since 1597. There may have been another child, recorded on f. 14v of the register, but the name of the child is obscured due to a large ink blot. A further child, James, was baptised on 3 August 1606 (f. 16r), and although 'Arth; Hildersam minister' appears below this at the bottom of the page, this date in fact falls during the period of Hildersham's suspension, when Richard Jardfeild was presumably serving briefly as vicar. Hildersham's signature is followed by the words 'until April [?] 1605'. Most of Spencer's children seem to have continued living in Ashby after their father's death; Thomas married Katherine Aute on 28 April 1623, Abraham, who became a tiler, married Katherine Williemett on 8 June 1628, Elizabeth married John Penson on 4 November 1628, and James, a butcher, married Rebecka Bedmore on 24 October 1638. Sara Spencer was buried on 12 May 1634. Unfortunately, what ceremonies, if any, accompanied these various rites, is not known, although they all occurred during the incumbency of Anthony Watson, who was known to be sympathetic to nonconformists.

⁷³ LRO ID41/13/34 f. 60r.

excommunicate in every visitation thereafter through to 1623.⁷⁴ On the other hand, Abraham, Richard's second son, seems to have been a less godly individual; he was presented on 27 October 1628 for 'incontinence with his now wife before marriage'.⁷⁵ His brother James, Richard's youngest son, was fined 1s for swearing on 26 February 1632.⁷⁶ Richard's eldest son, Thomas, was the worst of the lot; he was acknowledged as the father of an illegitimate child, John, baptised on 10 April 1623, only marrying the (presumed) mother, Katherine Aute, two weeks later on 28 April.⁷⁷ Presented for fornication or adultery with Elizabeth Shotwell, the wife of Samuel Shotwell, on two occasions, in 1630 shortly before their marriage ('the said Spencer being a married man at the same tyme'), and again in 1631, he was also implicated in a drunken bawdy prank on the Sabbath, which involved exposing the body of a young man, Thomas Perse, at the common fair, for which he was questioned at the Quarter Sessions in May 1630.⁷⁸ The conduct of Richard's three sons, Thomas, Abraham and James, does not immediately suggest an upbringing in a godly conformist household; although their father could hardly be blamed for the misdeeds of his children some years after his death, posthumously a cloud of shame hung over the family. Mere outward conformity, unaccompanied by a reformation of life, was, for Hildersham, the worst form of hypocrisy and spiritual barrenness. It is possible that for Spencer his protestations of thwarted conformity may have been merely a legitimising front to cover the sense of grievance he felt against a system that disapproved of his lifestyle, and consequently had excluded

⁷⁴ LRO ID41/13/39 – ID41/13/56.

⁷⁵ LRO ID41/13/59 f. 59v. He had married Katherine Williementt on 8 June 1628.

⁷⁶ LRO MF/ 5.

⁷⁷ LRO DE 1013/1 f. 23r. John's birth is recorded as 'spur' i.e. spurious or illegitimate. In the visitation of 1623, Thomas is formally presented for 'comittinge fornicacon with Katherine Aulter', on 30 April 1623, see LRO ID41/13/56 f. 52r.

⁷⁸ LRO ID41/13/59 f. 349v, ID41/13/60 f. 76v; ID41/13/59 f. 350v.

him from the mainstream of community relationships. Whatever the case, he dared voice his complaint only after Hildersham had been deprived of the vicarage.

The prosecutions of Spencer's sons also serve as a reminder of two things: first, that the reformation in Ashby had not succeeded in stamping out all manifestations of ungodly behaviour, and second, that the faithful were especially assiduous in reporting such conduct. Both Chalmers and Moxon agree that a rise in presentments for incontinence and Sabbath-breaking prior to 1630 does not indicate an increase in these types of behaviour under godly rule, but merely a greater zeal on the part of the puritans to expose such transgressions.⁷⁹

Interestingly, however, Hildersham's own views on the subject were far more complex and ambivalent than these more recent assessments, and confound any simplistic attempts at explanation. He believed that increased immorality could be expected in a town where gospel preaching had been delivered. Paradoxically, it was in fact evidence of both the success and failure of a preaching ministry there; fornication abounded, he argued, in places where the gospel had been preached, as a direct punishment from God on those who had received the message with contempt:

Many speake much, how this sin [fornication] abounds in such townes, where the Gospell hath beene most plentifully and powerfully preached; and thinke they have great advantage against religion for it; but indeed, this makes much for the honour of the Gospell, that the Lord cannot indure the contempt of it, but useth to punish it in this fearefull manner.⁸⁰

Those who were guilty of this sin, continued Hildersham, were either 'such as ... regard not to know God', or, if they did know Him, 'have not glorified him as they ought, *Rom 1.21*. but have been hypocrites, and have nourished under the

⁷⁹ Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 259; Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 326.

⁸⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 72.

profession of Religion some grievous sinne'.⁸¹ Fornication, then, was both a sin dishonouring God and at the same time something which brought honour to His name as a punishment from God on other sins.

4. Other Vicars, Other Voices: Clerical Relationships within Ashby 1605-1632

Within Ashby, Hildersham's relationships with those incumbents who succeeded him must have been crucial for both parties. Doubtless it was a daunting task to follow the renowned Arthur Hildersham into the vicarage, unsure of the reception from parishioners, a considerable number of whom could be expected to feel unhappy at his deprivation. Would Hildersham's message be diluted and his influence diminished? Gone, too, was the third Earl's explicit patronage of godly ministry, and the continued support of the fourth Earl.⁸² It was a new and uncertain world, spiritually speaking, in the Ashby of 1605.

Very little is known about Richard Jardfeild, Hildersham's immediate successor, whose tenure only lasted a matter of months in 1605-6.⁸³ The induction mandate for William Darling, who was the next vicar of Ashby, indicates that he

⁸¹Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 72. For more on Hildersham's views on the divisive effect of preaching, see below, Chapter 3, pp. 106-110.

⁸²George Hastings, the fourth Earl, died in 1604. Claire Cross says that although he had early Catholic sympathies, when he succeeded to the title in 1595 he continued to protect the Protestant preachers sponsored by his brother, and may even have experienced a conversion, see *Puritan Earl*, pp. 31, 274. His grandson, Henry, the fifth Earl, was 'undoubtedly Protestant', having been brought up in the household of the third Earl, and tutored by Nathaniel Gilby, see *Puritan Earl*, pp. 31, 54. He unwaveringly supported Hildersham, diligently frequenting his lecture series on John and making financial contributions to his son's education, see below, p. 73, n. 140, and Chapter 4, p. 185. However, there were aspects of his lifestyle that were decidedly un-puritan; his account books detail payments for cards and dice, see *HMC Hastings I Series 78* (HMSO, 1928), pp. 361-374. His support for Hildersham perhaps may have owed as much, therefore, to family loyalty as to religious conviction. His appointments to the living at Ashby also reveal a curious mixture of conformists and nonconformists, see below, pp. 58-72.

⁸³Venn, Vol. III, p. 463, records that Jardfeild was from Hertfordshire and matriculated pensioner from Queen's College, Cambridge at Easter 1583, gaining his BA in 1591-2. The entry suggests that he was perhaps rector of Icklingham All Saints in Suffolk from 1617-18.

took up the position on the ‘free resignation’ of Jardfeild.⁸⁴ The most plausible explanation seems to be that Jardfeild was regarded as something of a stop-gap, when there was every hope and expectation that Hildersham would soon be reinstated. Certainly, Jardfeild seems to have left no trace of any discernible or lasting impact on Ashby, and if he was indeed the same person who was later the ‘parson’ of Icklingham, his will reveals no godly ideology whatsoever.⁸⁵ Perhaps it was just as well he did not last long in Ashby, or conversely this might indeed be the reason that he did not.

William Darling, who succeeded him as vicar on 6 October 1606, provides a much more interesting case study. Born at nearby Clifton, in Staffordshire, in 1580, he was a graduate of Emmanuel College.⁸⁶ At first, after Darling’s induction to Ashby, the visitation records seem to indicate the same sort of pattern as previously in the parish, with a handful of presentments for fornication and illegal pregnancy, and the odd case of neglecting to attend the church or communion.⁸⁷ However, 1609 witnesses a change in that pattern; Darling himself was presented at that visitation for a failure to wear the surplice, and at the next visitation in 1610 for the full range of nonconformist faults:

That he hath not worne the surplice nor used the crosse in baptisme nor the ringe in marriage nor buried the dead nor churched women nor read divine service in such form as in such terms of Lawes he is commanded .⁸⁸

⁸⁴ LRO ID41/28/327, 6 October 1606.

⁸⁵ PRO, Prob/11/131, will of Richard Jardfeild, 1618. The will contains no religious preamble of any sort about the disposition of the soul or body.

⁸⁶ Venn, Vol. II, p. 11. Darling was admitted to Emmanuel College as a pensioner on 13 September 1595, gaining his BA in 1598-9, and MA in 1602. He was ordained deacon at Lichfield on 29 September 1606.

⁸⁷ LRO ID41/13/30 f. 27r and v; LRO ID41/13/31 f. 4r and v, f. 36v; LRO ID41/13/32 (no Ashby presentments).

⁸⁸ LRO ID41/13/33 f. 26r; LRO ID41/13/34 f. 60r.

It is perhaps significant that in the same year he left Ashby and took up the less prominent Hastings benefice of Packington, some two miles distant, a position he occupied until his death two years later in 1612.⁸⁹ By the look of things, his patron had been trying to protect him from further trouble with the diocesan authorities, who were increasingly concerned with imposing conformity. Moxon suggests quite plausibly that Darling may have been a conformist prior to his arrival in Ashby, and that it was his contact with Hildersham that radicalised him. This was certainly the case with Francis Higginson, who followed a similar trajectory under Hildersham's influence.⁹⁰ Darling was a fairly young man, in his first benefice, and it would not be surprising if he was influenced by the learned, older man. This proposition would be greatly enhanced if the purely speculative connection between Darling and his namesake Thomas Darling, the 'boy of Burton', could be established. Both originated from Staffordshire, Clifton not being very far from Burton, and their ages suggest that it is even possible that they could have been brothers.⁹¹ Thomas himself was greatly influenced by Hildersham, being part of a godly group in Burton prior to his possession, and went on to study at Oxford.⁹² However, parish registers for the relevant period for Clifton do not exist, and William himself did not leave a will, thus making it very difficult to test this theory of relationship conclusively.⁹³ That Hildersham was the source of William Darling's nonconformist views, must also be treated with some caution in that

⁸⁹ According to Venn, Darling was buried in his home parish of Clifton.

⁹⁰ See below, Chapter 4, p. 168, and Chapter 7, pp. 296-297.

⁹¹ Thomas Darling was aged 13 at his dispossession in 1596, when William Darling probably would have been in his late teens, having commenced his studies at Emmanuel in September 1595.

⁹² He matriculated in 1600, and in 1603 was sentenced to lose his ears for libelling the Vice-Chancellor, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1991 edn.), p. 577, n. 65.

⁹³ Registers for Clifton are not available before 1662. No wills can be traced for any Darlings for this period at either at Leicester or Lichfield, except for one William Darling of Breadsall, Derbyshire, labourer, made in 1590 and proved in 1599 (Lichfield Record Office), which would appear to have no connection at all to the Staffordshire Darlings.

Emmanuel had been established as a puritan college and Darling would surely have been exposed to similar influences whilst he was there. Ordination by the more tolerant Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield could also suggest that he knew his opinions might not find favour in Lincoln, and may well have been the very reason he was chosen by the patron to supply Ashby in the first place. Whatever the true explanation may be, and although there is no evidence to indicate whether the two men were personally close, it is clear that by 1609 Darling and Hildersham shared a common standpoint on ‘matters of judgment’. Together, they must have provided a consistent advocacy of nonconformity, especially after January 1609 when Hildersham was allowed to preach again in Ashby.

It seems likely that Bishop Richard Neile, an arch-opponent of Hildersham and a fierce anti-puritan, was behind the conformist drive which Darling’s successor, Thomas Hacket, was to endeavour to implement in Ashby.⁹⁴ Initially it might have appeared that Hacket possessed the right credentials to appeal to the godly tradition prevailing in Ashby that allowed conformity to be a matter of individual conscience.⁹⁵ Like his predecessor, he was an *alumnus* of the impeccably puritan Emmanuel College.⁹⁶ After being ordained deacon by the Bishop of Lincoln in December 1607, he became vicar of Ashby sometime in 1611; he was a young man, in his first incumbency, inexperienced, but apparently with a point to prove. He was certainly in residence by September 1611, for on the 28th of that month he recorded the baptism of his daughter Mary in the parish

⁹⁴ Richard Neile had been appointed as Bishop of Lincoln in 1614, at which point Hacket began to take more open action to establish conformity in Ashby. For Neile’s campaign against the puritans, and Hildersham in particular, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 256-280.

⁹⁵ Henry, the fifth Earl, may also have believed Hacket to be a godly minister when he appointed him to the living. It could be that Hacket’s views altered under the influence of Bishop Neile or others, after he came to Ashby.

⁹⁶ Venn, Vol. II, p. 279. Hacket was admitted pensioner on 18 April 1600, emerging BA in 1603-4, and MA in 1607. The College enjoyed the patronage of the fifth Earl, but it is not stated from where Hacket originated.

register, in a very small, neat hand.⁹⁷ At the beginning of his time in Ashby there is evidence that Hildersham was willing to work with him; in 1612, Hildersham and Hacket are to be found acting jointly as witnesses to the will of one William Rise, an Ashby parishioner, so at this most basic level some sort of *modus operandi* must have been reached in the interests of the flock.⁹⁸ However, even from 1611, there is a small hint of the style that Hacket favoured, when the lack of Jewell's *Works* was recorded at the visitation.⁹⁹ Two men were presented for quarrelling in church, and a couple for receiving the communion standing on 22 May 1612.¹⁰⁰ Also in 1612, two cases of Sabbath-breaking, three of 'seldom cominge to the Church', and three of leaving the church before divine service was ended, were reported.¹⁰¹ Already, Hacket's more confrontational approach, and his desire, probably under orders from above, to achieve conformity in the town, was becoming clear. Of symbolical significance, the churchwardens' accounts for 1614 record the purchase of two yards of holland cloth at 9s 2d to make surplice sleeves.¹⁰² And yet, paradoxically, one of the churchwardens in that year was William Cox, who was to emerge as Hildersham's closest lay ally and friend in the town and a consistent nonconformist. He, along with the sidesman John Ash, also reported for nonconformity the following year, was amongst the church officers who presented six people for failure to attend church.¹⁰³

⁹⁷ LRO DE1013/1 f. 19r. For other occasions when he signs the baptismal register, see fos. 19v (1612), 20r (1615). As well as his daughter Mary, the register records the baptism of Anna Hackett (16 July 1614) and John Hackett (9 January 1616). Hacket also signs the burial register at f. 42v (October 1614) and f. 143r (1616). All the entries are in his very small neat hand. By mid 1617 he has gone, and the script changes to a much larger, more sloping and less tidy hand for his successor, Thomas Pestell, who records the baptism of his daughter Elizabeth on 28 November 1617 (f. 21r).

⁹⁸ LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 82.

⁹⁹ LRO ID41/13/35 f. 157.

¹⁰⁰ LRO ID41/13/35 f. 158.

¹⁰¹ LRO ID41/13/37, fos. 63v, 64r, 64v.

¹⁰² *HMC Hastings I*, p. 382.

¹⁰³ LRO ID41/13/39 f. 38a. A copy of the actual presentment is preserved in the *Liber Officio*.

All Hacket's approach achieved, however, was to expose the differences which Hildersham had apparently striven to contain or resolve by informal means, and render Ashby by 1615 what Haigh has described as 'deeply and bitterly divided over religion'.¹⁰⁴ The fact that Hacket was unable to pay on time any of the 11s for which he was assessed in the 1615 Subsidy of Clergy, 'by reason of late suites with his parishioners', may indicate an undertow of discontent with his ministry manifesting itself in a conflict regarding tithes.¹⁰⁵ He also managed to annoy the inhabitants of Blackfordby, sensitive to any perceived slight from Ashby at the best of times, who complained in the archdeaconry court in 1615 that 'they have noe minister nor have had any service for the space of halfe a yere last past', by reason of the neglect of 'Mr Hacket'.¹⁰⁶

The tensions are usually regarded as having come to a head in 1615, when, famously, nearly a hundred parishioners, including Hildersham, Brinsley the schoolmaster, Aberly (who had been curate of Burton during the Darling incident) and William Cox, along with their wives, were all presented by Hacket for failure to receive the communion kneeling at Easter.¹⁰⁷ Chalmers calls the episode 'an unmatched spectacle in the sheer volume of nonconformity, expressing active sympathy for their former minister'.¹⁰⁸ However, it is important to try to establish what actually occurred; the confusion to be found in reports of the events mirrors the evident confusion, even chaos, of claim and counter-claim, which must have surrounded the incident itself. To do this, it is necessary to draw on other sources as

¹⁰⁴ Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 417.

¹⁰⁵ LRO ID41/1/17 (1615), f. 7r. That Richard Neile, as bishop of Lincoln, was apparently prepared to allow Hacket more time to pay, is perhaps a mark of his favour towards him.

¹⁰⁶ LRO ID41/13/40 f. 20v, cited in Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 332-333. For more on the long-running dispute with the dependent chapelry of Blackfordby over the payment of dues and the provision of services, see above, p. 41, n. 31, and Chapter 7, below, pp. 287-288.

¹⁰⁷ LRO ID41/13/39 fos. 99r-101v.

¹⁰⁸ Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 257.

well as the court presentment (in itself a polemical and untrustworthy record), and here Clarke's account is very useful because it provides details of some of the evidence supplied to the Commissioners sitting in Ashby in September 1616, and afterwards in London in November 1616.¹⁰⁹ Both Haigh and Moxon, relying on the visitation records, state that the allegations refer to the Easter communion of 1615, and, indeed, the presentations for nonconformity did occur in the subsequent visitation of 1615.¹¹⁰ However, if Clarke is to be believed (and there is no reason to doubt him on this as he quotes from the actual wording of one deposition article), the problem originally arose a year earlier, during the Easter communion season of 1614. Of Hildersham, 'one George Reding deposed':

That upon Palm-Sunday was two years, he was one of those that came up to the Communion-Table in Ashby Church in several companies, and (though Master Hacket had before given warning, that he would admit none that would not receive it kneeling) refused so to receive it, but would have received it standing, and when he could not have it so, yet stood still among them that kneeled, till the Communion was done.¹¹¹

A little earlier, Clarke had been careful to detail the serious and well-attested illness which had struck Hildersham in the Spring of 1614.¹¹² Hildersham's response to Reding's article refers to this illness to prove that his accuser was not telling the truth:

That it is notoriously known to all the Inhabitants at Ashby, that I was at that time sick in my bed, and for many weeks before, and after, utterly unable to stir out of my Chamber, neither did I ever at any other time present my self in that manner to the Communion-Table, neither doth Master Hacket, or any other deponent charge me with any such matter.¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', pp. 148-150.

¹¹⁰ Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 418; Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 309.

¹¹¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', pp. 149-150.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 148-149.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 150. See below, Chapter 5, p. 236, for details of this illness.

That Hildersham was not even present in the church at the time of the alleged nonconformity alerts us to the unreliability of the whole 1615 presentment. In addition to the ninety-nine names listed in the indictment, a further eight have been crossed out, some names may have been included twice, two are reported as ‘gone away long since’, and two (Henry Aberley and his wife) as ‘gone awaie before Easter’. One has the original sentence crossed out and replaced by ‘in Coventry’. Beside the name of Elizabeth Newton is written ‘she is blind and unable to come to church’. Against the names of Hildersham and his wife appear the words, ‘set aside because they be in prison’. Curiously, the name of Hildersham’s accuser, George Reding, also appears in the list of nonconformists, raising all sorts of questions about what was happening here. Was he a weak man who went along with the swell of feeling at the time, and later concocted a story to save his own skin perhaps under pressure from the church authorities? ¹¹⁴ Certainly Hildersham was very dismissive of Reding’s account and character, asserting that, ‘this fellow that hath devised this against me, (whereof there was no colour at all of truth) would in all likelihood have sworn any thing that might have done me hurt, if he had been required to do it’.¹¹⁵

That some kind of protest occurred in 1614, against Hacket’s open declaration that he would only administer the sacrament to those kneeling, seems to be incontrovertible. However, the extent and composition of that protest is more doubtful. It is clear that Hildersham did not lead, or participate in this demonstration, or even approve of such an action; he is insistent in his avowal that

¹¹⁴ The entry in the presentment beside his name records that ‘he appeared and confessed [that the] things objected against him ... to be true’. There are no references to any ‘Redings’ in the baptismal, marriage, or burial entries in Ashby parish registers, which would tend to support Clarke’s assertion that the witnesses against Hildersham were ‘strangers’ or outsiders.

¹¹⁵ Clarke, *Life of Hildersam*, p. 150.

‘neither did I ever at any other time present my self in that manner to the Communion-Table’.¹¹⁶ It seems likely that the compiler of the list, with an unsympathetic bias, included everyone he might expect to be a nonconformist or a troublemaker, even if some of those were absent from the church. Although the presentment listed some who were amongst Hildersham’s most faithful supporters, such as John Brinsley and William Cox and his wife, who do not appear to have denied their offence, it included erroneously others like Henry Aberley, who attempted to avoid confrontation by absenting himself. How many of the excuses given were genuine, and how many arose from a casuistical desire to evade prosecution, it is impossible to tell. Similarly, to what extent the episode was a protest against Hacket’s ministry rather than support for Hildersham is difficult to judge. That many - who were later to conform - may not have been truly converted, but merely registering their discontent, is very possible. Even those who were presented again for nonconformity after 1615 were not necessarily part of a godly elite; for example, Thomas Watson, presented for nonconformity in 1615 and 1616, was also presented for fornication with Anne Reynolds in the Michaelmas visitation of 1616.¹¹⁷ Closer examination of the 1615 presentment and a comparison with Clarke’s account thus cautions against any easy generalisations. It challenges the rather crude and easy paradigm that outward nonconformity necessarily equated exactly with ‘godliness’ - something Hildersham himself firmly resisted - and that the boundaries were never as clear cut as this division would appear on the surface to suggest. It would seem obvious that it was not Hildersham but Hacket, probably under instructions from Bishop Neile as Haigh

¹¹⁶ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 150. Rather than open confrontation, Hildersham would surely have preferred the approach taken by Aberley of absenting himself from Ashby and receiving communion at a church where the celebrant was more sympathetic to his position.

¹¹⁷ LRO ID41/13/39 f. 101r; ID41/13/40 f. 167r; ID41/13/41 f. 26r.

suggests, who was the initiator of confrontation within the parish.¹¹⁸ Clarke calls Hacket the ‘principal accuser and informer of the Court against them’ and asserts that he especially and many of the other deponents were ‘professed adversaries’.¹¹⁹ That the issue of conformity was brought to a head at Easter 1614 is hardly likely to be coincidental, for this was the first large-scale communion to be administered after Hildersham’s suspension on 22 April 1613 by the High Commission, and the first since Neile’s appointment as bishop. Neile’s campaign against nonconformity in his diocese, and against Hildersham in particular, was gaining momentum, and Hildersham was thus denied the opportunity of any public advocacy or defence of his position in the pulpit. Backed by the bishop, Hacket must have felt in a strong position, but he perhaps underestimated the strength of local opinion. It seems likely that any attack on Hildersham would have attracted a more general sympathy within the parish than even the hundred or so presentments might suggest. Clarke paints a picture of Hildersham belonging to the community, whereas Hacket ‘the then Vicar of Ashby’ is an outsider, a new appointment, unfamiliar with or unsympathetic to local ways of doing things. After all, by 1614, Hildersham had lived amongst the people for twenty-seven years and everyone was cognisant of his views and manner of operating, but Hacket had been there for only three. Clarke declares that ‘all the parish’ knew the sworn depositions of witnesses ‘to be

¹¹⁸ Divisiveness and controversy have sometimes been regarded as a feature of puritan ministries, see, for example, the work of Christopher Haigh, “‘A Matter of Much Contention in the Realm’: Parish Controversies over Communion Bread in Post-Reformation England’, *History*, 88:3 (2003), pp. 393-404; ‘Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England’, *JEH*, 51:4 (2000), pp. 721-740; ‘The Taming of Reformation: Preachers, Pastors and Parishioners in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England’, *History*, 85:4 (2000), pp. 572-588. This view, countered by the reverse situation in Ashby under Hacket’s ministry, has also been challenged by Eric Josef Carlson, ‘Good Pastors or Careless Shepherds? Parish Ministers and the English Reformation’, *History*, 88:3 (2003), pp. 423-436.

¹¹⁹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 149. Clarke also states that in the High Commission hearing there was a legal anomaly, since Hacket’s ‘testimony ought not in Law have been allowed received against them’ as he ‘was the principal accuser and informer of the Court against them’.

notoriously false' and that 'all the neighbours knew' that these witnesses were 'meer strangers to him'.¹²⁰ Only by bringing in outsiders could evidence be compiled against Hildersham, for even those in Ashby who had no sympathy for nonconformity as a religious position might well have had a certain communal loyalty by this time to a man who was such an integral part of local society. Hackett may have thought he had won the battle by 1616, with the backing of the bishop for his hard-line approach and the High Commission's judgment against Hildersham, but he had certainly lost the war. Not only had he alienated a significant section of his parishioners and brought about unrest, he had also reckoned without the intervention of the fifth Earl of Huntingdon. As the patron of both the living and Hildersham's relative, he acted to replace Hackett with the more pragmatic Thomas Pestell in late 1616.¹²¹

Haigh has painted a masterful portrait of the complexities and contradictions of Pestell's personality and ministry.¹²² Ultimately, though, he is sympathetic to the man he describes as 'arrogant, embittered, and ill tempered but humane, sensitive and brave'.¹²³ Defying such crude generalisations as 'puritan' or 'Laudian', to Haigh he was 'a more worldly and ambitious George Herbert, with a chip on his shoulder'.¹²⁴ He was certainly a conformist, even if his approach may

¹²⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 149.

¹²¹ What happened to Hackett subsequently is not certain. Venn suggests that he was perhaps Rector of Mersham, Kent from 1628-35, see Venn, Vol. II, p. 279. However, it looks as if the family retained some local connection, for a 'Thomas Hackett', himself son of a Thomas of Derbyshire, and therefore possibly the grandson of Hildersham's adversary, is listed in Venn as being admitted pensioner at Emmanuel on 17 April 1667. He was entered as 'of Leicestershire', for he had been a pupil at Ashby-de-la-Zouch Grammar School, under Mr Shaw. After being ordained priest, he served as Rector of Whittington, Gloucestershire, from 1678 to his death in 1718.

¹²² Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell'. He was a Leicestershire man, a graduate of Queen's, and at one stage chaplain to the Earl of Essex, see Venn, Vol. III, p. 350.

¹²³ Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 428. Haigh states that Pestell compounded as vicar of Ashby on 23 Jan 1617 (PRO, 334/15, fol. 39v), which means that he was probably instituted in December 1616, see p. 414, n. 31.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 428.

have been different from that of Hackett, but Haigh's contention that Pestell's ministry achieved dramatic success in restoring conformity in Ashby is perhaps a little optimistic. As we have seen, interpretation of the 1615 visitation record is slippery and open to a variety of possibilities. The number of presentations for nonconformity certainly diminished to a hardcore of about fifteen persistent offenders by the early 1620s, but it is too easy to attribute this, as Haigh does, primarily to the more flexible and patient approach adopted by Pestell alone. This indeed may have borne fruit with some of the less committed, but in other instances apparent conformity, or the promise of it, may have been a way of playing for time. For there is evidence that suggests that open confrontation was not the strategy favoured by many committed nonconformists; they either simply stayed away, sought ministry elsewhere, or prevaricated.¹²⁵ Margery Burrows, for example, was presented along with her husband in 1615 and 1616.¹²⁶ He then presumably conformed, but in 1620 it was reported that she had not received communion at any time. John Burrowes told the court in October 1620 that she had received communion several times in the last eighteen months but not at Ashby and that he hoped conference between his wife and Pestell would persuade her to receive it kneeling from Pestell's hand. On the point of her excommunication in 1621, Pestell wrote to the bishop's commissary pleading for more time for her to resolve her doubts. Although she was not presented in 1621 for nonconformity her name again appeared in 1623 for being absent from the Easter communion, after Pestell had left Ashby.¹²⁷ Haigh cites her case as an example of Pestell's pastoral concern, but it could well be that Margery Burrows was merely playing for time, holding out the

¹²⁵ For a discussion of these issues on a wider scale, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 227-238.

¹²⁶ LRO ID41/13/39-40. See also Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 419, for a fuller account of this case.

¹²⁷ LRO ID41/13/50 f. 146r; ID41/13/51 fos. 4a, 4v, 40r.

possibility of an eventual conformity which she never had any intention of fulfilling. Others, too, attempted to find ways around the problem; John Bentley and his wife, also presented for not receiving the communion in 1615 and 1616, were presented in September 1616 for procuring Hacket's absence from Ashby so that they could have their child baptised in a basin 'by a strange minister', and she for failing to undergo the proper churching after the birth.¹²⁸ Likewise, John Aranson (or Armeson) and his wife, nonconformists in 1615 and 1616, were accused in September 1616 of having their baby christened at 'Blougherbie' in a basin by an 'unconformed' minister, Mr Hanley from Derbyshire, with no sign of the cross, and no churching afterwards.¹²⁹ And these were amongst the more prominent inhabitants; there may have been others who successfully evaded notice.¹³⁰ Perhaps Pestell was just less assiduous than Hacket in seeking prosecutions.

Hildersham, of course, was not around in Ashby for all of the five years of Pestell's incumbency, having been imprisoned and then gone into hiding as a result of the High Commission case against him. He was probably absent from Ashby for a full two years, and only visited intermittently during the remainder of this period. Nevertheless, Pestell's move in 1622 was merely to nearby Packington, so that there was ample opportunity for the two to become acquainted.¹³¹ Pestell's encomium on Hildersham's death in 1632, allowing for its flights of rhetorical hyperbole, suggests that by that time he had sufficient dealings with Hildersham to

¹²⁸ LRO ID41/13/42 f. 20r. 'Blougherbie' or Blackfordby was a dependent chapelry of Ashby.

¹²⁹ LRO ID41/13/42 f. 3r.

¹³⁰ By 1627 John Burrows was the earl's bailiff, and in 1630 John Armeson was an overseer of the poor.

¹³¹ Haigh's suggestion ('Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 420) that Pestell was moved to the earl's benefice of Packington 'to facilitate Hildersham's return, to work in tandem with a vicar more willing to tolerate nonconformity than Pestell had been' seems very plausible. However, Haigh's comment that Pestell may have wanted 'the larger profits' at Packington is puzzling; the benefice was only valued at £5, whereas Ashby was worth more than £14.

regard him as a true friend.¹³² Haigh's comment that by that stage of his troubled career Pestell needed all the friends he could get, seems unduly cynical. But even if Pestell did have ulterior motives in writing the poem, it is evidence that he recognised the enormous influence of Hildersham, if he thought that by lauding him he might gain favour with the earl with whom he had fallen out. Calling Hildersham 'Ashbie's lampe', it is significant that he chooses to praise Hildersham's wisdom, holiness, nobility and learning but especially his counselling activities, his treatment of the poor, and his capacity for friendship. Above all, the consistency of his life - 'a woven roabe, without a seame' - stands out. Although, then, as Haigh has shown, it is impossible to pigeonhole the highly idiosyncratic Pestell, it would appear that a measure of mutual respect, even friendship, existed between him and Hildersham, despite their different shades of opinion.

Anthony Watson, who succeeded Pestell as vicar following his transfer to Packington in 1622, has also been explored in some detail by Haigh, particularly the fraught and litigious relationship that developed between the two men. It says something about Hildersham that he managed to retain the goodwill of both. Watson, who had previously served as curate of Harfield, Middlesex, continued as vicar of Ashby until his death in April 1644.¹³³ Despite Watson's protestations of conformity in 1636, it is clear that during Hildersham's life he was considered sympathetic to the puritan cause, being himself presented in 1629 for administering the communion to a parishioner standing.¹³⁴ He excused himself on occasions for

¹³² Pestell, 'Epitaph on Mr Hildersham 1632', from H. Buchan (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Pestell* (Oxford, 1940), p. 10. For the full text of the poem, see Appendix, p. 333.

¹³³ Venn, Vol. IV, p. 347. Watson, a native of Beckington, Buckinghamshire, had graduated from Pembroke College, Cambridge, as BA in 1610-11 and MA in 1614, being ordained deacon in London in December 1614, aged twenty-two. He was ordained priest at Peterborough on 17 Sept 1620. For a memorandum detailing Watson's nuncupative will, made on the night before his death, see LRO Will Register 1644-1645, p. 2.

¹³⁴ LRO ID41/13/59 f. 219r.

not wearing the surplice 'when he could not come att the surples and when the same hath binn washing'.¹³⁵ In general, his attitude towards Hildersham appears to have been deferential and respectful. After the resumption of Hildersham's preaching ministry in Ashby in 1625, there is evidence that he and Watson worked closely together. Watson, along with William Cox, was one of the two signatories on Hildersham's will, as well as participating in taking the inventory of his goods at his death. Both men cooperated in the administration of charity. In a letter to the Mayor of Leicester of June 1625, reassuring him that rumours of plague in Ashby were false, Hildersham's name as the first of the signatories was closely followed by that of Watson.¹³⁶ If the order of names is any indication of relative status, it would appear that Watson was happy to concede the pre-eminent position of town representative to the older man. Perhaps he was only too glad to receive the support of Hildersham and his influential friends against the allegations of abusing servant girls that featured in the ecclesiastical courts.¹³⁷ Perhaps, too, he could hardly fail to realise how Hildersham was regarded in the town by the later years of his life and, pragmatically, was merely acknowledging the *status quo* by his deference. For his part, Hildersham seems to have reciprocated with loyalty and support. Unchallenged by this stage, he could well afford to be generous.

By looking at the different incumbents and Hildersham's interactions with them, it would appear that wherever possible he attempted to maintain cordial relationships. No evidence has emerged that he tried to use his position to usurp their authority as vicars; indeed, from the pulpit his lectures seem very supportive of the respect due to parish ministry (especially regarding those who possessed

¹³⁵ Cited in Hillier, *Ashby*, p. 23.

¹³⁶ See p. 83, and n. 174, below.

¹³⁷ See Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', pp. 412-417.

inferior gifts). He often urged that differences of judgment should not become a matter of division amongst brethren. Only with Hacket does there seem to have been a rift, and this arose from Hacket's own activities and attitudes rather than Hildersham's. Incumbents who were wise, like Darling, Pestell and especially Watson, realised that Hildersham was too influential a man to be crossed.

5. When the Preaching Stopped: Hildersham's 'Silent' Influence

This section will explore some of the various ways in which Hildersham exercised and developed his ministry and influence in Ashby even when the most powerful weapon in his armoury, his 'painful preaching', was denied him, especially between 1611 and 1625. Strikingly, too, the ability to perform the significant rites of passage - baptisms, weddings and burials - and administering communion, which afforded any incumbent a uniquely indispensable status within local society, was possessed by Hildersham for only twelve out of the forty-three years he was linked with Ashby. Without in any way detracting from the pre-eminence of preaching in the reformed ministry, this section will seek to show that the role and position of the godly pastor was a complex one and that how he was viewed within the parish depended on a broad range of factors. While some of these were unique to Hildersham, the ways in which he was able to maintain a position of unrivalled local significance illustrate that a wide variety of actions and attributes, both formal and informal, contributed to the embedding of the reformed faith within the culture of the English parish.

5.i. Social Status and Personal Factors

Many of the new breed of reformed minister appear to have been drawn from the ranks of the middling sort, and there was often some ambivalence about the precise social standing they should occupy within the local parish.¹³⁸ Hildersham's 'noble' birth, however, presented no such uncertainty.¹³⁹ This, combined with the family relationship to his patrons, the Earls of Huntingdon, and their continued personal support, assured him of a prominent position within Ashby society.¹⁴⁰ His reputation for learning would have served to enhance those credentials. The social capital he accrued during his years as vicar meant that he was able to assume a patriarchal role, based on personal authority, even when official accreditation was withdrawn and his pulpit voice silenced.

Closely connected with Hildersham's social standing was, of course, his relative wealth. We have already seen that the financial provision made by the third Earl, and continued by his heirs, made Hildersham a rich man in Ashby terms. Always an advocate of the careful husbandry of one's personal estate, his inventory of 1632 suggests that he followed his own advice. It reveals property to the value of £525-10s-4d, which, as Moxon points out, was unrivalled in local terms up to this date.¹⁴¹ Included in it was 'one lease of Alton grounds for the tearme of 19

¹³⁸ For further discussion of the ambiguous social position of the post-Reformation clergy, see Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 257-299; and *idem* and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales 1500-1700* (Basingstoke, 1994), pp. 319-345.

¹³⁹ See Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 144, and above, Chapter 1, pp. 3, 11-12.

¹⁴⁰ The continued support of the fifth Earl is indicated by the financial allowance he provided for Samuel Hildersham, see HAF 7/3 accounts (13 April 1611), HAF 7/22 (29 October 1609), HAF 6/3 (3 April 1610). I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Fincham for these references.

¹⁴¹ LRO PR/1/34 (1632), f. 29; Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 90, claims that Hildersham, on the basis of a study of probate inventories, was the richest man in Ashby up to 1645. Strangely, though, in March 1617 when the Exchequer made enquiries about his estate to the Sheriffs of Leicestershire in an attempt to recover the fine of £2000 that had been imposed on him, 'they, by several returns, answered, They could find none', see Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 150. Presumably Hildersham had managed to hide the evidence, rather than this being a true assessment of his financial position. Later, he was able to obtain a discharge by compounding with and giving 'a great summe of money' to Master Williams, page to the marquis of Buckingham, who had been granted the fine under the

yeares to come', valued at £160, another 'Lease of a messuage in Ashby for 60 yeares to come', worth £30, and 'two other Leases of two Cottages in Ashby' at £7.¹⁴² It is interesting to note that the value of his library was £66-6s-8d, although the number of volumes and titles are not recorded.¹⁴³

Hildersham's inventory, although relatively brief and lacking in detail, does supply some hints about the style in which he must have lived. The hallmarks of a gentleman's life – his 'wearinge apparrell' (£40), 'watch and seale ringe' (£3), 'plate' (£20), 'napery' (£10), 'Bedds, Beddinge, furniture and hangings' (£19-15s), 'Carpetts and Cushiones' (£2) – are all in evidence. 'Shugar and spice' valued at 10s are a reminder of the good table that must have been maintained as part of the obligatory hospitality.

Great Seal of James I. Although Hildersham's level of wealth at the time of his death was unremarkable compared to the large fortunes amassed by some of the great merchant families, it was nevertheless significant when compared both to other local residents and clergy. A study of fourteen probate inventories of Lincoln clergy between 1661 and 1714 showed that the median value of the inventories was £207-8s, with four of the estates valued at more than £500. John Featley, for example, Doctor of Divinity and precentor of Lincoln cathedral, left £207-16s-1d in 1667, whereas Michael Drake, clerk at St Swithins in the city, left a mere £38-6s 0d in 1696, see J. A. Johnston (ed.), *Probate Inventories of Lincoln Citizens 1661-1714* (Lincoln Record Society, Vol. 80, Woodbridge, 1991), pp. lii, 22-26, 100-101. Of more local Leicestershire clergy, a survey of twelve probate inventories taken between 1597 and 1633, not including that of Hildersham, shows a range of values from £17-16s (George Strongitharme, vicar of Lubenham, LRO PR/I/25, 1614, f. 218) up to £340-2s (William Scampton, rector of Stoney Stanton, LRO PR/I/32a, 1626, f. 167). The mean value of these clerical inventories is £92-66. Gilby, Hildersham's predecessor as lecturer, left £87 in 1587 (LRO Inventories, 1584-99).

¹⁴² The messuage referred to may well have been the house he rented from the school properties, for which he payed a rent of 10s per annum. His will also refers to a 'messuage; farm of tenement in ?Stanton Mead in the countie of Derby', see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no.77.

¹⁴³ From his will we learn that he possessed a copy of Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, Andrew Willet's *Synopsis Papismi*, a pocket bible and a Cambridge folio bible. He also owned a copy of Petrus de Alliaco's *Imago Mundi*, see above, Chapter 1, p. 1. A sample of Leicestershire clerical inventories from 1597 to 1633, in which books are valued separately, indicates a range from 30s (George Strongitharme, vicar of Lubenham, LRO PR/I/25, 1614, f. 218) to £50 (Humfrey Rowe, parson of Croft, LRO PR/I/30, 1624, f. 99. This figure also covered 'mapps' and 'globes'). Puritans, of course, were noted for their extensive libraries, and thus Hildersham's library was probably fairly typical for this kind of minister. In New England, Ralph Partridge left a collection of 420 volumes in his inventory of 1658, valued at £32-9s, while Samuel Stone left books valued at £127 in 1663, see Thomas Goddard Wright, *Literary Culture in New England, 1620-1730* (New Haven, 1920), p. 52.

Reference has already been made to the size and significance of Hildersham's house itself.¹⁴⁴ Not only was it a refuge when he was barred from the vicarage after 1605, it also came to symbolise Hildersham's enduring presence in the town. It supplied a constant reminder of his existence, his commitment to the people, even when he was physically absent from Ashby, and it offered a promise of his return.¹⁴⁵ Standing in an elevated position on the north side of Wood Street, this imposing property with its gate providing access to the Near Commons, became indissolubly associated with Hildersham in the minds of the local people.¹⁴⁶ Everyone knew where he lived. Even after the house itself was pulled down in 1643, the site continued to be referred to in the school accounts as 'Mr Hildersham's house or 'Gate' at least as late as 1668, some thirty-six years after his

¹⁴⁴ The earliest reference to Hildersham renting this property comes in the school accounts of 1597 (LRO ES/AB/9/1, f. 2r), but it seems likely, as has been suggested already, that he may have rented this house from 1587 when he commenced his lectureship, and may well have taken over the tenancy from Anthony Gilby, his predecessor.

¹⁴⁵ Evidence that his wife and family continued to live in Ashby even when Hildersham himself had gone into hiding in London after his trial by the High Commission, is provided by Ann Hildersham's presentment for non-participation in communion during the visitation of Easter 1617 (LRO ID41/13/44, f. 51r).

¹⁴⁶ I am indebted to local historians Robert Jones and Kenneth Hillier for their help in locating the (likely) site of Hildersham's house. Based on the information in the school accounts that the property included a gate into the Near Commons, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the site at 55 Wood St, currently occupied by Lorne Hill House (itself a substantial three-storey listed property of the late eighteenth century) is the only possible location. The earliest extant Huntingdon estate map of 1735 shows a fairly large house on the plot now occupied by Lorne Hill House adjacent to a long and narrow access to the Near Commons (the largest area of common land, covering about 150 acres, and probably that which was known as the 'Drift' as it lay across the road which the drovers must have taken to Nottingham, see Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 142). Nearly adjacent is a strip or field called 'gate land'. It looks as if the end of this strip may still have had a gate in 1735. The map also shows that the footprint of the property has changed with rebuilding. Robert Jones indicates that the present house has an almost total absence of any fabric older than the late eighteenth century. The existing cellar is brick-lined. There is a little evidence of an older structure on the ground floor centred round the central chimney stack and there is an obvious part-stone fabric on the south-east corner. The whole of the north side of Wood St was owned by the Huntingdon estate, and this property was not sold by the estate until the mid/late 1800s. However, I have not found any evidence to confirm that the property formed part of the original school endowment of 1567. Although Nicholas Carlisle, *A Concise Description of the Endowed Grammar Schools in England and Wales*, Vol. I (1818 edn., reprinted 1975), p. 742, states that the enfeoffment consisted of '26 Houses and Land in the Market-Place of Ashby', the original document lists twenty-three properties in Ashby, Callis and Kilwardby, identified only by the names of the current tenants, see Fox, *Country Grammar School*, Appendix III, pp. 119-124.

death.¹⁴⁷ Interestingly, the local historian W. Scott, writing at the beginning of the twentieth century, tapped into a folk memory in the town which indicated that even then the existence of such a residence had not been completely forgotten:

According to tradition there were at one time four houses of importance in [Wood] Street. One, called the Hall, an Elizabethan mansion, stood at the top of Field Lane; it was a large house, built of stone, some of which probably form the wall by the roadside. The interior, with its wide staircase, carved oak, ornamental ceilings, and large lofty rooms, showed that it had been occupied by persons of consequence. It had a terraced garden, with steps from one level to another.¹⁴⁸

Positioned within the rectangle of church, castle and Wood Street, which formed the basis of the ancient town settlement, Hildersham's house was thus at the heart of community life. It also controlled, via its gate, access to the extensive pasture land of the Near Commons, and, in addition, its location on the main road to Nottingham would have facilitated Hildersham's preaching trips to other places.

This house became the visible focus of Hildersham's influence in Ashby, an alternative site of power to the vicarage house. As the public functions of preaching and other statutory clerical duties were closed to him, it became increasingly important as the space in which he could exercise a different kind of ministry. Here he could continue his habitual practice of hospitality and household religion: 'In all places where he did reside ... he was alwaies helpfull in Family-Prayers, in expounding the Scriptures read, and in the repetition of the Sermons preached in the publique Congregation'.¹⁴⁹ Clearly these devotions were not strictly private, but were extended to any visiting the house. Even his 'secret Prayer' was regularly

¹⁴⁷ See LRO ES/AB/9/1, fos. 22r (1643), 23r (1645), 24r (1646), 25r (1647), 27r (1653), 29r (1657), 34v (1665), 37r (1668). For more on this issue, see below, Chapter 7, pp. 282-283.

¹⁴⁸ Scott, *Story of Ashby*, p. 241. I am grateful to Kenneth Hillier for drawing this reference to my attention.

¹⁴⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 153.

overheard by ‘some godly friends, whose occasions brought them often near to the place where he studied’, because he was so ‘frequent in holy ejaculations audibly expressed’.¹⁵⁰ It was also reported that ‘Mr Hildersam used to preach in his own House, when silenced: and two or three Families came to hear him’.¹⁵¹ Distinctions between public and private thus became blurred in this domestic space. Ironically and unintentionally he was thereby fostering a milieu for the voluntary religion that he so deplored. Catechising was another means that might be expected to continue his influence, although the judicial admonition served by the High Commission Court on 22 April 1613 at the time of his silencing specifically stated that

(saving the catechizing of his own Family only) he should not at any time hereafter preach, catechize, or use any part of the office, or function of a Minister, either publicly or privately, untill he should be lawfully restored and released of his said suspension.¹⁵²

It is apparent, however, that parishioners and others continued to seek him out for counsel, perhaps in increasing numbers after his public teaching was denied them: he was ‘willing by private conference to instruct the ignorant, to satisfie the doubtfull, to settle the wavering, to comfort the dejected, and to encourage all sorts in the exercises of Religion’.¹⁵³ Thus he was, by informal and unofficial means, able to sustain a powerful spiritual ministry amongst his neighbours.

Hildersham’s personal accessibility, both geographically and in terms of his pleasant disposition, ensured that public silencing did not result in the end of his influence in Ashby, as Lilly so acutely observed. If Hildersham’s example supplies

¹⁵⁰ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 153.

¹⁵¹ Vincent Alsop, *A Reply to the Reverend Dean of St Paul’s Reflections ...* (London, 1681), p. 11.

¹⁵² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 153. These private conferences presumably went on across the whole period of Hildersham’s residence in Ashby, but it seems reasonable to conjecture that the practice might have increased when other avenues of ministry were closed to Hildersham, and if those who looked to him for spiritual advice felt that they could no longer expect to find such a sympathetic hearing from his successors.

any wider lessons it could be that where ministers were able to utilise these more informal avenues and also to reside in a parish for a lengthy period of time, their preaching as well as their broader ministry stood a much greater chance of becoming firmly rooted in the local soil. Example carried at least as much weight as precept.

5.ii. The Grammar School Feoffees

Feoffeeship of the Grammar School at Ashby provided an important area of unbroken influence for Hildersham, and brought him into a close association with some of the other leading inhabitants of the town.¹⁵⁴ Although many of these were apparently religious conformists, there is no record of any open disharmony within the governing body: indeed, the other feoffees seem to have recognised and respected Hildersham's authority in their decision-making.¹⁵⁵ Frequently, he appears as the first signatory to memoranda recorded in the accounts, and may well have been the initiator or the formuliser of these matters.¹⁵⁶ Although both Gilby and Widdowes had been amongst the signatories to the original enfeoffment of the school on 10 August 1567, no other clergyman or vicar of Ashby was appointed to the feoffees during Hildersham's lifetime, a sure testimony to his unrivalled pre-eminence in this arena.¹⁵⁷ Even during the years of his suspension, when he was unable to preach in the town, Hildersham continued to attend meetings of the

¹⁵⁴ The main source for the school feoffees is LRO ES/AB/9/1, the Feoffees Book of Accounts 1594-1768. This has been transcribed, with some omissions, in Fox, *A Country Grammar School*, Appendix V, pp. 132-176.

¹⁵⁵ Although formal accounts may not be the best source to discover controversy and strife, one such example is recorded between 1657 and 1660 when it seems that the authority of the feoffees was challenged and they were commanded 'by an Order' not to act, see LRO ES/AB/9/1, f. 29v-f. 31r.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, *ibid.*, f. 4v (30 October 1606.)

¹⁵⁷ After Hildersham's death, he seems to have been replaced by his close friend and ministerial associate, Henry Aberly, who is recorded as collector of rents for the year 1640, see *ibid.*, f. 20v.

feoffees and made a full contribution to affairs, as on 30 October 1606, when it was agreed that the schoolmaster, John Brinsley, should receive an additional *ad hoc* payment for the repair of the schoolhouse.¹⁵⁸ Of even greater significance is Hildersham's presence when the same matter was again discussed on 30 April 1616; this meeting occurred while Hildersham was being investigated by the High Commission, between his release from the King's Bench prison in the summer of 1615 and the visit of the Commissioners to Ashby in September 1616. Clarke records that after his censure by the High Commission Court in November 1616, he concealed himself 'for a long time in the City'.¹⁵⁹ But far from being absent from Ashby for the full nine years until his reinstatement in 1625, the school accounts reveal that Hildersham maintained his household there throughout the period, and that he continued his involvement with the feoffees, making regular visits to the town for their meetings as required. The annual meeting to pass the accounts was held at the end of October or the beginning of November each year, and in addition Hildersham was the first to sign the memorandum of 17 September 1616, which agreed, *inter alia*, that 'All the feoffees shall once every yeare viz upon the second tuesday in May (or therabout) meet and goe together to veiw all the tenements belonging to the school-land' and also 'Once every yeare viz the second thursday in May (or therabout) the feoffees shall meet together to visit the school'.¹⁶⁰ Thus the feoffees were obliged, from 1616 at least, to be present and available in Ashby for school business on a minimum of three formal occasions annually. Hildersham served as Collector of the School Rents and was responsible for making the accounts in 1615-16, again in 1623-24, and finally, after his restoration to the

¹⁵⁸ LRO ES/AB/9/1, f. 4v. Hildersham is the first signatory.

¹⁵⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150.

¹⁶⁰ LRO ES/AB/9/1, f. 7r.

ministry, in 1628-29. On the first occasion, though, his enforced absence from the town was apparently recognised by the appointment of Samuel Adams to make the accounts on his behalf. In 1629, too, Abraham Bainbrigg is recorded as performing this function as Hildersham's proxy, although at this point Hildersham had been reinstated as town lecturer. However, it would seem that in 1623-24, Hildersham, still officially suspended from the ministry, carried out these duties personally, for no deputy is mentioned.¹⁶¹

This harmonious cooperation between Hildersham and the other feoffees involved local men far outside an exclusive nonconformist oligarchy. Of the twelve feoffees listed in the accounts in 1606, only four, in addition to Hildersham, were presented for nonconformity in 1615 or subsequently: Thomas Dighton, Robert Newton, Robert Clark and John Ash.¹⁶² A significant number of the feoffees had no such record, including Robert Bainbrigg, Nicholas Haskie and Thomas Sherwood. By far the most important of them was Robert Bainbrigg, the earl's bailiff and a 'gentleman', who was very obviously the leading figure among the feoffees apart from Hildersham. In the earlier years covered by the accounts (1594-1616), Bainbrigg was responsible for drawing them up on nine separate occasions, and subsequently a further four times prior to his death in 1635. No one else managed more than four appointments. When it was decided, in 1616, that a chest was needed in which to store the 'Evidences of the school-land' and the 'booke of our Accompts', it was natural that this chest should 'stand in Mr Rob; Bainbriggs

¹⁶¹ LRO ES/AB/9/1, fos. 8r, 12v, 15r.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, f. 4v. The fifth signature has an illegible surname after 'Rob', but is almost certainly Newton because of other references to him in the accounts. Of the twelve feoffees, however, listed in 1606, only eight remain in the next list which appears in 1616 (see f. 7v); four of these were presented for nonconformity in the previous year. The four who have disappeared from the list are Thomas Dighton (sentenced by the High Commission on 21 November 1616, fined, excommunicated and returned to prison until he conformed himself, see Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 149), John Hall (died 1608), Edward Farmer (died?), and Gawyn Reade (died?). They do not appear to have been replaced by 1616.

house' and that he should be the one entrusted with drawing up the evidences.¹⁶³ He was the chief tenant of the school properties, paying 40s rent annually, which would suggest a substantial dwelling.¹⁶⁴ Yet he too seems to have deferred to Hildersham in school matters, usually signing his name immediately below that of the minister when both were present.¹⁶⁵ It is interesting to note, also, that Bainbrigg and Hildersham were connected through marriage, which indicates that they moved in the same social circles.¹⁶⁶

Nicholas Haskie, who died on 22 February 1626, styled himself a yeoman in his will.¹⁶⁷ He, too, was a tenant of the school lands, paying 24s as rent, and he held his estate by indenture from the Earl of Huntingdon. His will is intriguing, because although he apparently had no record of nonconformity, it shows a particular awareness of the language of godly piety (surprisingly rare in local wills considering Ashby's religious pedigree) and even a mention of being one of the elect:

I offer and bequeath my soule into the hands of Almightye god my creator, trusting onely through faith in the meritts death and obedience of Jesus Christe my onely saviour and redeemer to bee saved from his wrath. And to bee one of his elect at the last generall ... judgment day¹⁶⁸

It is impossible to say without further evidence, but could Haskie have been one of that breed of genuinely godly conformist, whom Hildersham accounted as brethren and with whom he had no quarrel? Moreover, it seems that whatever his own spiritual stance, Haskie was prepared to name his 'kinsman', Joseph Hatterly, a

¹⁶³ LRO ES/AB/9/1, f. 7r.

¹⁶⁴ The only other tenant to pay a rent of 40s was Robert Newton, see, for example, f. 2r.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, e.g., fos. 6v, 7r, 12r.

¹⁶⁶ Hildersham's daughter Sarah married the son of Henry Lomas of Thrumpton whose niece Elizabeth had married into the Bainbrigg family, see PRO, Prob/11/165, will of Henry Lomas, 1633.

¹⁶⁷ LRO MF/660, 1626 (10-13).

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

man who did have a record of nonconformity and who in his role as overseer relied very heavily upon Hildersham, as ‘my haire and lawful executor’.¹⁶⁹ Perhaps Haskie did not regard nonconformity as an important issue. At the very least, Haskie’s pious will seems to shed further doubt on the usefulness of conformity/nonconformity as a category for spiritual analysis. Local networks in Ashby appeared to function without much regard to these divisions.

Thomas Sherwood, the third of this trio of apparently conformist feoffees, was a yeoman blacksmith with social and dynastic aspirations. By 1660 his son John was being styled as a ‘gentleman’ when he was responsible for making the school accounts, while already by 1638 his servant, Richard Boidell, was to be found leaving property valued at £25-11s-0d, suggesting that his master must have been a man of some wealth himself.¹⁷⁰ Thomas Sherwood, it seems, rose in the social hierarchy by working hard at it; many of the feoffees were frequently called upon to act as witnesses and appraisors to their neighbours’ wills and inventories, but Sherwood excelled them all. It may have been his preparedness to act in such a capacity, or his elegant hand, which recommended him to his fellow-inhabitants.¹⁷¹ He also put himself about on church business; in 1610-11, the churchwardens record that he gave money to a man and his family to leave the town upon his promise never to return, while in 1621-22 he received payment for work on the steeple and for ‘taking in the moor’.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁹ LRO MF/660, 1626 (10-13).

¹⁷⁰ LRO PR/1/40 (1638), f. 147.

¹⁷¹ I have found at least seven occasions between 1599 and 1627 where Sherwood acted either as a witness to a will or an appraiser of a probate inventory, and his son John seems to have succeeded him in this function. Although both father and son seem to have a very elegant hand, there are times when Thomas merely makes a mark.

¹⁷² *HMC Hastings I*, p. 382. No clue is given to the reason for this payment.

Matters of local service and daily social intercourse such as these reveal that ‘conformists’ and ‘nonconformists’ worked closely together, acting jointly in the interests of the community. Together they served on the feoffees, or witnessed a will. Hildersham, too, as a prominent inhabitant, collaborated with these others, irrespective of their religious position, in matters relating to the town’s welfare. This is particularly well-illustrated by events during the plague summer of 1625, when Hildersham returned to his post as lecturer in Ashby.¹⁷³ Apparently rumours had begun to circulate in the county about the ‘dangerous and contagious sicknes yt is said to bee in this town of Ashby and of the greate numbers that have dyed amongst us’, and this was having an alarmingly detrimental effect on local trade and markets. Seeking to set the record straight, and to reassure people ‘that since the 25th of March last there have not dyed in this town above 15 persons in all’ and that these deaths were attributable to causes other than the plague, a group of local worthies combined to pen a letter on 1 June 1625 to the Mayor and corporation of Leicester. Hildersham heads the list of signatories, once again underlining his status in the town and the value of his reputation for probity, followed by the vicar Anthony Watson. The names of the other eight contributors, obviously leading men in Ashby society, include a mixture of conformists and nonconformists: Henry Aberley, Robert Bainbrigg, Robert Newton, Nicholas Haskie, John Armeston and Joseph Tomlinson (the churchwardens), William Taylor the Constable, and Thomas Sherwood.¹⁷⁴ Although there was certainly a godly group in Ashby, which included men like Cox and Aberley, with whom Hildersham clearly had a special relationship, it would seem that this group was neither isolated from the rest of

¹⁷³ See below, Chapter 3, pp. 138-146 for further discussion of the plague fast of 1625, and Hildersham’s sermons on that occasion.

¹⁷⁴ LRO BR 11/18/15, f. 586, Leicester Borough Minute Book, 1623-25. I suspect, from the hand, that Thomas Sherwood actually penned the letter.

local society, nor indeed dominated that society, but that secular affairs were organised by an integrated body of solid, respectable men of the middling sort. Was this a measure of Hildersham's 'success', that these men who may not have shared common religious views were able to work together, in what seems to have been an atmosphere of mutual respect and cooperation? This may have been what Samuel Hildersham had in mind when he praised his father's 'singular wisdom in settling peace, advising in secular affairs ... with ... love and reverence of all sorts'.¹⁷⁵ It seems that he may have become, over the years, the constant lynchpin which held the community together. As Clarke puts it, 'He was a Friend to every one in a good Cause, and it was his unwearied Delight to be Christianly serviceable in any kind'.¹⁷⁶ Alternatively, his failure to convert some of these leading inhabitants to his own spiritual outlook, despite the obvious respect they had for him and the closeness of their collaboration in secular affairs, could be regarded as a mark of his deepest humiliation and failure. After all, humanly speaking, if Hildersham could not win them over, then who could? However, once again a note of caution must be sounded over the equating of nonconformity with true spirituality – something Hildersham himself insistently rejected.

5. iii. Charity

Hildersham's personal charity, and his encouragement of it in others, was recognised as benefiting the poor of Ashby, and was a means of almost daily interaction with both those responsible for, and the beneficiaries of, poor relief. Clarke calls him 'the Patron of the Poor', and declares that, 'He was very

¹⁷⁵ Memorial in St Helen's Church, Ashby.

¹⁷⁶ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 156.

Charitable to the poor himself, and in exciting of his auditors to contribute towards their relief'.¹⁷⁷ By looking at Hildersham's involvement in this area, it is possible to obtain a specific insight into how he was able to maintain, in a tangible way, his involvement in the very fabric of the local community.

From as early as 1610, there is evidence that Hildersham was responsible for administering charitable donations, but the primary source for Hildersham's role in poor relief is the accounts of the overseers of the poor at Ashby, which survive from April 1623 to February 1638.¹⁷⁸ Here we find Hildersham's name occurring at regular intervals. It is clear that he, rather than the subsequent vicars of Ashby, was the major player in this area. He is to be found giving approval for disbursements and arrangements, encouraging collections, and providing advice. It is also possible to trace his influence in payments for the relief of 'the exiled ministers of the Palatinate', and other poor ministers.¹⁷⁹ Charity is very obviously recognised by everyone, including the overseers, as Hildersham's preserve. Significantly, during Hildersham's lifetime, Anthony Watson (the vicar) appears only infrequently, and then in conjunction with Hildersham; for example, on 7 January 1626 a gift of 4s to 'Abraham Chamberlin to beare his charges to London' was granted with 'the consent of Mr Hildersam and Mr Watson'.¹⁸⁰ Watson, either a wise or a weak man, was ready to acknowledge the *de facto* authority of his senior colleague and to leave this particular stage to him. That Watson was sometimes completely bypassed is suggested by the will of John Collins, clerk,

¹⁷⁷ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 155. In his will Hildersham left 40s to the poor of Ashby, as well as several individual bequests, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77.

¹⁷⁸ Charity was obviously regarded as Hildersham's preserve from at least 1610; on 3 April 1610, when he was no longer the vicar but still the lecturer, a gift of 26s 'to Mr Hildersam for the poor of Ashby by your lordships command' is recorded in the earl's accounts, see HAF 6/3 accounts 1606-1613. I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Fincham for this reference.

¹⁷⁹ LRO MF/5, 15 May 1631.

¹⁸⁰ LRO MF/5, 7 January 1626.

who died on 31 May 1627; he left 40s to the poor of Ashby, ‘to be distributed by Mr Hildersom and the churchwardens’.¹⁸¹ Joseph Hatterly, who had been a nonconformist in the great presentation of 1615 but then does not appear again in the court records, was one of the overseers for 1626-27, and he clearly deferred to Hildersham’s authority in matters of poor relief. When 10s was ‘delivered to Thomas Bammford’ in the summer of 1626, it was ‘with Mr Hildersams consente’.¹⁸² Later, on 11 July 1626, Hatterly recorded the receipt of £1-16s-11d ‘by a collection ffor the pore moved by Mr Hildersam’ and on 2 August a further £2-16s ‘by a collection at the ffast’.¹⁸³ It is Hildersham who audits Hatterly’s accounts and who authorises them in his own hand at the end: ‘All Joseph Hatterlyes accompts for the year were cleared and discharged Apr 9 1627 Arth; Hildersam’.¹⁸⁴ In 1629, too, Hildersham stood surety for Hatterly when he received a loan of 20s from the overseers on 26 July.

When John Sherwood was overseer (1629-30), 2s 6d was given ‘To a poore man by Mr Hildersams appointment’ on 28 March 1630.¹⁸⁵ A further demonstration of Hildersham’s involvement with the intimate mechanics of poor relief comes during the tenure of his friend and fellow-nonconformist, William Cox, as overseer in 1630-31; on 1 May 1631, Joan Ball was allocated 1s for the care of Ruth Farmer’s bastard, in what was obviously to become a weekly

¹⁸¹ PRO, Prob/11/151. Collins made the will on 28 October 1626. His witnesses were Joseph Hatterly, John Armeston and Abraham Bainbrigg.

¹⁸² LRO MF/5. Thomas Bamford had been entrusted by the parish with the care of two children, ‘a boy of John Tattenells & Thom. Dipsey’s bastard’, for which he received regular weekly payments of 2s 2d (normally) from 10 November 1628 onwards. He also received occasional additions for clothes or shoes. This particular payment, which seems to have occurred before a regular allowance was approved, seems therefore to have been of an emergency or advance nature.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* Hildersham preached the eighth and final of his series of fast sermons on Wednesday 2 August 1626, see his, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 130-143. In this series, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, he exhorts his hearers to give to help those afflicted by the plague.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

allowance. In the margin beside this entry, Cox has noted ‘Mr Hildersham is to have Joan Balls money’. This arrangement whereby Hildersham appears to have held the money in trust for Joan Ball until she was able to collect it, continued through until 12 June 1631, when Cox indicates that ‘Mr Hildersham for Joan Ball her[e] endeth’.¹⁸⁶

The collection for the poor at the fast in 1626, instigated by Hildersham, was not the only example of such a practice. Clarke tells us that, ‘In few Countrey-Congregations in England the Collections for the poor were so large, as they were at the Quarter-daies at his Lectures’.¹⁸⁷ It is hard to verify Clarke’s assertion: Steve Hindle, for example, in his survey of thirty-nine Warwickshire parishes in the 1630s found no record in any of the overseers’ accounts of giving at Quarter Days.¹⁸⁸ However, the sums collected in Ashby were certainly substantial, at communion services and lectures as well as on Quarter Days.¹⁸⁹ This was doubtless inspired by example as well as precept, but we find the instigation of such

¹⁸⁶ LRO MF/5. Ruth Farmer, the mother of the illegitimate child, died and was buried sometime in December 1629, aged 34, see LRO DE1013/1. She had been baptised by Hildersham on 24 August 1595, and was the daughter of Edward Farmer who had served with Hildersham on the school feoffees in 1606. Her mother had been buried by Hildersham two days after Ruth’s baptism. On 4 January 1630, the overseers record the payment of 4d to the two women who had ‘sate up with her the night she dyed’ and also 12d to Richard Ashe for ‘a loade of coales for her’. On the same date, Robert Hassard received 8d ‘for going to Bosseworth to enquire for Willm Allen the reputed father of Ruth ffarmar’s childe’, see LRO MF/5. It appears that Ralph Narborow initially cared for the child after Farmer’s death, for which he received payment in January and February 1630, but this entry in May 1631 is the first to record the role of Joan Ball. The sale of Ruth Farmer’s goods after her death brought in 24s 2d, and then a further 15d, to offset the charge upon the parish for her child’s care. However, this care was not required for long; the child died in the spring of 1632, her entry in the burial register immediately precedes that of Hildersham himself in March 1632.

¹⁸⁷ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 155.

¹⁸⁸ Steve Hindle, *The Birthpangs of Welfare: Poor Relief and Parish Governance in Seventeenth-Century Warwickshire* (Dugdale Society Occasional Papers, no. 40, 2000), Appendix II. In Dorchester, too, a comparable, though somewhat larger, puritan town renowned for its charity, there is no mention of Quarter Day giving, see Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, pp. 117-129. The author claims that the charitable giving in Dorchester was ‘on a scale unmatched by any other town in England’, p. 126.

¹⁸⁹ On the twelve recorded occasions when Hildersham was lecturing on Quarter Days between 10 October 1626 and 15 November 1631, the amounts collected ranged from £1-8s-1d to £5-5s-11d, with a typical sum in the £2-£3 range. On the seven recorded Quarter Days when someone else was preaching, the figures generally appear to be lower, ranging from 9s-8d to £2-9s-6d.

collections occurring at the end of Hildersham's Lecture 22 on Psalm 51, delivered on 18 April 1626. He exhorts his hearers:

I speake the more of it to stirre you up at this time, to shew your compassion, and extend your liberality toward the poore of this Towne. I have long thought it a shame unto us, that such an assembly as this is, should so often meete together to serve God, and no collection be made in it in all this time for the poore. I could alleadge the example of other reformed Churches, to provoke us to this, and name to you congregations in our owne land, where collections are made for the poore every moneth once, upon the Lecture day. But I pray you rather consider the equitie of that law of God, *Deuteron.16.16,17.5* ... If it were for nothing else, even to professe our homage to God, it is fit in our Church-assemblies, we should sometimes give somewhat to the poore. I have hitherto forborne to doe it, because of that willingnesse many of you shewed in your weekely contributions, while the fasts continued. Now I hope it will not offend any of you that believe this, that you have heard (as I doubt not but you all doe) if once a quarter I crave this of you, that as you are made here *partakers* of our *spirituall things*, so you will bee content to *minister* unto our poore, in *these carnall things*. *Romanes 15.27*.¹⁹⁰

Judging by the response to this carefully constructed appeal, his hearers were not offended, but indeed gave generously. That they were moved as much by Hildersham's personality as by his principles is indicated by how much more was given on those days when he himself was preaching; in 1631-32, William Cox records:

Receaved on 4 Quarter dayes
August 2 - £5-5-11d - Mr Hildersam
November 15 - £3-12s-7d Mr Hildersam
Janua: 10 - £2-9-6d Mr Cotton
April 3 - £1-1-0 Mr Watson¹⁹¹

¹⁹⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 121.

¹⁹¹ LRO MF/5.

The poor accounts also demonstrate the involvement of not only Hildersham but his wider family within the community. On 28 August 1631, we find £1-3s-4d being paid to his youngest son, 'Mr Nath: Hildersam that he laid out for Sansom's daughter at London'.¹⁹² After Hildersham's death in March 1632, the receipt of £5 is recorded on April 24 'of Joseph Tomlinson for Mr Samuell Hildersam of West Felton in the Countie Salop'; what this was for is not detailed, but it is most likely to be a contribution towards the cost of the memorial to his father that Samuel had erected in the parish church.¹⁹³ This would surely be a tangible means for the overseers to demonstrate the esteem in which Hildersham was regarded. However, it is the entry referring to Hildersham's second son, Timothy, which is the most remarkable because it perfectly encapsulates the mutuality of the relationship that existed between the minister and the local community. For Timothy appears in the accounts not as a donor or facilitator of aid to others, in the way his brothers or father do, but as a recipient of poor relief. On 24 December 1629 he can be found heading the list of beneficiaries of George Smith's will, whereby he received 6d.¹⁹⁴ How could the son of such a wealthy man

¹⁹² LRO MF/5. Ann Sansom had previously, on 7 June 1629, received 20s 'towards the curing her legg and to carry her up to London'. Presumably Nathanael Hildersham had been engaged in seeking further treatment for her medical condition in London. Her mother was by this stage a widow, who sometimes received payment from the overseers, for example 6d on 4 January 1629.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.* Joseph Tomlinson was one of the overseers for 1632. He had been a nonconformist in 1615, and was one of the signatories to Hildersham's inventory, see LRO PR/I/34 (1632).

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* George Smith, yeoman, of Islington, who had been born in Ashby, made his will on 17 October 1625, and left 'unto the Parishe of Ashbie de la zouch ... yerely forever the some of tenn shillings ... which I will shall be distributed amongst the poore people of the same parish at the discrecon of the Churchwardens for the tyme beinge allwaies upon the even of the ffeaste of the birth of our Lord god ... I also give and bequeath every yere yearely forever the some of three shillings and ffoure pence unto the Churchwardens ... to be spent upon the Churchwardens and ringers on the same said even of the birth of our Lord god, the said Churchwardens and ringers causinge a peale on the said even to be rung for and in remembrance of me', see PRO, Prob/11/147. The legacy was to be paid annually out of the profits of a tenement or messuage known as the Castle in Islington. It seems that the churchwardens of Ashby expended a fair amount of time and money ensuring that the legacy was paid and the exact provisions ascertained; on 5 July 1629, 10s 8d was 'Paide for the copy of Georg Smiths will', and on 27 December 1629, 3s 4d was paid to 'Mr Joseph Newton for his paines in getting the money dewe to our towne by Georg Smiths gift', see LRO MF/5. The first record of the 10s bequest being paid to the poor of Ashby occurs on 24 December 1628 and then each year through to 1634, when the records end.

as Hildersham possibly be considered in a position to receive a gift specifically designated for the parish's poor? Admittedly, it was a one-off payment, at the discretion of the churchwardens, from a source that was additional to the normal or expected revenues at their disposal, but it raises questions about Timothy himself. No direct evidence exists which would explain conclusively the action of the churchwardens towards him in 1629, but such information that there is about Timothy suggests that perhaps he was disabled in some way, and thus was regarded as dependent and unable to support himself.¹⁹⁵ Hildersham's tender and caring relationship with his son, attested to in his will, would surely have evoked sympathy from his neighbours and also created an opportunity for reciprocity. Timothy was one of them, a part of their community, and they were thus able to

¹⁹⁵ Timothy Hildersham was born in Ashby, and was baptised in late May 1600. Hugh Blithe, rector of nearby Appleby, makes a bequest of 'some greate volumes of Saint Chrisostymes workes' to Timothy in his will made on 26 November 1608 (LRO Leics. Wills, Appleby no.76, 1610), which suggests that Hildersham's son was not mentally incapable, at least at this early stage. There is no record of Timothy attending university or marrying, and he died, aged 32, in the year following his father, being buried in Ashby on 4 March 1633. Churchwardens accounts for 1632-33 record the receipt of £1 'for the breaking of the church' for the burial of Timothy Hildersham with two others (*HMC Hastings I*, p. 383). Arthur makes very careful provision for Timothy in his will (LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby, no. 77, October 1630), in marked contrast to his son Nathanael, who merely receives a silver bowl, and to other family members who also receive only small individual gifts; Samuel, his oldest son and heir, is instructed to pay Timothy 'one yearly rent of twenty pounds' out of the profits or yearly revenues of one of his properties 'for the term of his natural life; at the feast days of Michael tharchangell ... by even and equal portions'. Moreover, the executors were to see that the rent was paid to Timothy immediately after his father's decease. Timothy was also to have £5 per annum after his mother's death (if he survived her, which he did not) from an estate in Ashby worth £25-16s-8d for 21 years. Hildersham also gave Timothy a gift of £6-13s-4d, and the 'best horse or mare, that I shall have at the tyme of my decease', suggesting that perhaps Timothy was unable to walk or get about freely. Hildersham's inventory lists a mare, the only horse to be individually itemised, valued at £6, which was presumably for the purposes of fulfilling this bequest. Arthur also bequeathed to Timothy 'my beste bible [I] was wont to weare in my pocket', which creates an impression of particular tenderness and intimacy on the father's part. When preaching about God's fatherly tenderness to his children, Hildersham frequently illustrated his point with the example of human parents' feelings for their own blemished offspring; such references would have had a special resonance for his hearers if Timothy was indeed disabled in some way. For example, when affirming that God did not reject his servants for any of their infirmities, Hildersham declared that 'even we that are evill stand thus to our little ones, that we cannot loath them, or neglect them for any out-breach, or looking asquint, or any other such like deformity; yea many a thing which in another mans eye is a great blemish (as the pocke holes in the face, or such like) to us seemeth none at all; yea the weaker and more feeble any of our children are, the more tender we are over them' (Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 454). See also, *ibid.*, pp. 11, 97, 192-3, 218, 391-3, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 61, 74, 80, 358, 660. He also states that, 'Men may beget children that are defective ... blind ... creeples ... fooles. But our heavenly father begets no such children, all his children are perfect, and have no such defect of parts in them', *ibid.*, p. 415.

demonstrate that they shared a sense of responsibility for him. This bequest of George Smith provided an avenue by which they could give something back, however symbolically, to the minister who had laboured for the good of Ashby for so many years.¹⁹⁶

6. Conclusion

Hildersham had the inestimable advantages, not granted to many godly ministers, of longevity and the continued support of a succession of powerful patrons. These doubtless contributed in no small measure to the unchallenged pre-eminence he was able to maintain in Ashby. In addition, by the time of his suspension in 1605, he had already preached hundreds of lectures and sermons in the town which had laid the foundation for his sustained spiritual authority amongst his parishioners. By performing the daily functions of his ministerial office, he had become part of the very fabric of society. In the minds of many, at least, and not only those who shared his religious opinions, he remained their *de facto* vicar, and his successors were regarded in some sense as merely temporary, keeping the place warm until he should be reinstated. They were not to know he never would be.

Hildersham himself regarded the bans on his preaching as the curtailment of the most fundamental function of his ministry, as his letter to Lady Barrington during his final suspension reveals; he speaks bitterly of ‘this unwelcome rest from the labours of my calling’.¹⁹⁷ Clarke asserts that he was ‘cast aside like a broken

¹⁹⁶ A more cynical reading, proffered when this paper on Hildersham in Ashby was delivered at an Institute of Historical Research Seminar, might be that the gift, being so small, could be considered as a calculated insult to the wealthy Hildersham. However, given the high regard in which the particular churchwardens and overseers held him, this seems unlikely.

¹⁹⁷ BL Eg MS 2645, f. 156.

vessel'.¹⁹⁸ However, Hildersham and other nonconformist ministers had far more agency than this victim narrative would give them credit for. They were far too pragmatic and resourceful, as well as engaged with their parishioners, merely to give up. What was written about the ejected Rowland Nevet of Oswestry, who died in December 1675, could equally apply to Hildersham: 'even after he was silenced for nonconformity, he continued among his people there to his dying day, doing what he could when he might not do what he would'.¹⁹⁹ Hildersham may have lost his pulpit but he did not lose his platform.

It is in the mundane details of Hildersham's personal life, his secular activities and the mutual relationships he fostered with his neighbours, as well as his preaching, that we should also look to explain his extraordinary influence. Too often it is tempting to regard the major or spectacular factors, such as gifted oratory or powerful political manoeuvring, when we try to account for the success or otherwise of the English Reformation, but Hildersham's life teaches us not to overlook the small and quiet things of daily routine and consistent, unremarkable, personal intercourse within a parish over many years. This might be expected to produce Maltby's 'prayer book Protestants', rather than what is often thought of as radical religion, but Hildersham once again demonstrates the slipperiness of such paradigms.²⁰⁰ Perhaps we should consider how long a minister lived in his parish and how deeply he was engaged with local society as of equal importance to his

¹⁹⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 153.

¹⁹⁹ From the diary of Philip Henry, cited in Matthew Henry, *The Life of Rev. Philip Henry* (ed. J. B. Williams, 1825), p. 271.

²⁰⁰ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

preaching and dispensing the sacraments when we wish to assess to what extent the gospel message took root.²⁰¹

²⁰¹ The importance of length of tenure can also be illustrated in the case of Southam in Warwickshire. A former puritan stronghold became a high church bastion through the long ministry of Francis Holyoake, see A. G. Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 363-364; and Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 67-69, 80, 148, 325.

CHAPTER 3

THE WORLD OF MINISTRY II: HILDERSHAM'S MESSAGE

This is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World [John 4:42] ... I say, their meaning could not be as their words seeme to import: but by *the World*, they meane all the Elect of God, that were to be gathered out of the whole world. This answer shall be cleared, and confirmed unto you in three Points: 1. That the World in this place cannot possibly be taken for all mankinde. 2. That by the World may well be meant the Elect onely, that are scattered throughout the World. 3. The Reason why the Holy Ghost (intending onely to teach that Christ is the Saviour of all the Elect) useth this Phrase to expresse it by, and calls him the *Saviour of the World*.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 328-9.

bee not satisfied in thy selfe, till thou be assured by faith, that God loveth thee with his speciall and particular love, that thou art one of the world of Gods Elect, *whom God so loved, that hee gave his onely begotten sonne* for thee

Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 401.

If the whole world were divided into thirty equall parts there would not bee found above five of them that doe so much as professe the name of Christ. And of those five, the Papists and Protestants (taken all together) will not make three. And of those three the number of the Papists whose persons I will not judge but their doctrines are damnable doth farre exceed the number of the Protestants. So that you see if none but the Church of Christ, shall have benefit by Christ, the number of them that shall have benefit by Christ is but very small in comparison of them that shall have no benefit by him at all.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 744.

Hildersham, by his own estimation, was first and foremost a pastor. His overriding concern was for the spiritual welfare of his congregation. The message that he delivered to them, in sermons and lectures, was therefore of the utmost importance to him, for it involved the salvation of their eternal souls. It was a message from God himself, and he was obeying a divine imperative in imparting it.¹ Hildersham was

¹ See JRUL EM 524 , 'A preparation to the lords supper A.H.', f. 105r, where Hildersham is recorded as saying that ministers 'are both the lords mouth unto us to deliver us his woord and the lords hand unto us to deliver us his sacraments'.

neither an original or innovative theologian, nor, it seems, a particularly dramatic or charismatic preacher: Clarke refers to his ‘grave and authoritative manner’.² Rather, he was typical of a certain kind of godly minister, mainstream and orthodox, and yet zealously evangelical. To examine Hildersham’s message, therefore, is to understand more fully not only his own priorities and intellectual mindset, but also to appreciate the sort of practical divinity that was emanating from similar pulpits throughout the country, and which was helping to mould the lives and thinking of at least some of those who were exposed to it.³ This was a world where the precise interpretation of the Bible mattered, and where fine hermeneutic distinctions were of critical importance. Even the term ‘world’ itself could be explicated in various ways, according to its scriptural context.⁴ This chapter seeks to enter this complex and multi-layered theological world, and to explore its shifting parameters through the lens of one of its respected and representative exponents. After looking at the context in which Hildersham’s surviving sermons were delivered, the chapter will explore some of the key issues and theological themes which emerge from his corpus and offer a brief case study of how this practical divinity was applied to two specific areas of piety, the Lord’s Supper and fasting.

² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 153.

³ For more on the networks of similarly-minded godly clerics, see Chapter 4, below. These included both conformist and nonconformist puritans.

⁴ In reformed theology, ‘world’ sometimes referred to the geographical planet, at other times to all the nations of the world, or yet again to that section of the population that, under the power of Satan, was opposed to the gospel. For an introduction to these concepts, see Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh, 1958 edn.), pp. 328-329. For examples of Hildersham’s use of ‘world’ in these three senses, see his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 47, 446, 449, 531, 695. Where interpretation became contested was in relation to those biblical texts where ‘world’ was used in connection with the atonement and its extent: did Christ die, at least potentially, for everyone in the world, or only for his elect? For a detailed analysis of these issues, particularly in the context of John Preston’s theology, see Jonathan Moore, ‘“Christ is dead for him”: John Preston (1587-1628) and English Hypothetical Universalism’ (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2000). For a discussion of Hildersham’s position on this subject, see below, pp. 106-113.

1. Hildersham's Sermons in Context: the Original Hearers

The sermons we have in print are based on manuscript copies that Hildersham had 'all written by himself, before he preached them', so they give a fair representation of his characteristic message and approach, although, of course, the published version cannot fully capture the felt experience of his original auditory.⁵ It is important to consider the original context in which Hildersham's sermons were delivered, for this is bound to have influenced their content to a certain degree. In fact, all but one of Hildersham's 267 printed sermons were given as midweek lectures in Ashby, and there are no extant copies of any of his Sunday sermons with which to compare them, to see if there was any significant variation in style or substance.⁶ To whom, then, was Hildersham

⁵ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 147. See above, Chapter 1, pp. 23-30, for details of Hildersham's printed works. For the early modern experience of listening to sermons, see Arnold Hunt, 'The Art of Hearing: English Preachers and their Audiences; 1590-1640' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2001); Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (eds.), *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750* (Manchester, 2000); and Susan Wabuda, *Preaching during the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 2002). The matter of possible censorship raises another issue; Tom Webster in his *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 69, claims that a passage on private fasting, which now exists as a separate manuscript, BL Add. MS 4275 f. 281, was excised from the printed text of Hildersham's *Fasting and Praier*, presumably either by his editors or the censors to make the work publishable. However, I have not been able to find evidence to support this suggestion. Anthony Milton, 'Licensing, Censorship, and Religious Orthodoxy in Early Stuart England', *Historical Journal*, 41:3 (1998), p. 640, n. 51, citing SUL, Hartlib MS 29/3 f. 20r, states that it was reported that Hildersham had omitted all material relating to the Sabbath from his *Lectures upon Psalme LI* because otherwise it would not have been passed for the press. Although there may be some truth in this observation, the volume still contains a considerable amount on the subject, especially pp. 699-711. For a consideration of this issue, see below, pp. 129-133.

⁶ The exception is a sermon preached in the private Hastings chapel in Ashby Castle in 1629, see above, Chapter 1, pp. 27-28. For a discussion of possible different emphases between lectures and sermons, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 39-40. Other sermons by Hildersham are recorded through the notes of his hearers, including those in the Commonplace Book of Gervaise Sleight of Derby, DRO 286 M/F 11, on Jeremiah 29:13 ['And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart']. According to Sleight, Hildersham taught that God 'does not totally absent himself' even when 'his children suffer'. Indeed, the purposes of affliction were that it 'bringes us out of love with sin' and that 'we might more fervently seeke him'. For more on Sleight, see below, Chapter 4, p. 181. BL Sloane MS 598, a volume entitled 'Dr Preston's Sermons', includes at fos. 8-9, notes on 'Mr Hildersham 13 Luke:3' ['Except you repent you shal al likewise perish'], where the main theme is that 'Our saviour uses both argument to stir up his hearers to repentance' and similarly the hearers therefore are exhorted to repent without delay. F. 23r also includes notes of a Hildersham sermon on '3 Phillip'. The catalogue

addressing himself on those Tuesday mornings in St Helen's church, between 1609 and 1631? The expectation might be that the voluntary nature of such gatherings would attract a more committed and perhaps wealthier type of hearer, than the normal Sunday services, where attendance was obligatory. Notwithstanding, the social spectrum of listeners was probably quite a broad one. It seems that Hildersham's patron, Henry, fifth Earl of Huntingdon, was a regular attender at the lectures on John Chapter 4; in his Epistle Dedicatory, Hildersham writes of, 'that encouragement I did receive from your lordship in the preaching of them ... by that worthy example also you gave unto all my Auditory in your constant and diligent frequenting of them'.⁷ In a manorial system like Ashby, social as well as spiritual benefit, therefore, could be gained by being seen to be there, when the earl was likely to be amongst the congregation. Although this undoubtedly swelled the numbers, there were concomitant problems: Hildersham often warned his hearers about the dangers of hypocrisy and presumption.

Hildersham recognised the greater opportunity and obligation that the better-off had to attend midweek sermons:

Such as are of wealth and ability to live of themselves, are more bound to frequent the publike exercises on the weeke day, then poorer men. Such as by their callings have more leisure and freedome from worldly employment, then such as have more necessary and important businesse.⁸

This assumption on Hildersham's part that there would be more of the wealthier and middling sort among his hearers is implicit in his regular exhortations to 'Masters and

records that these notes were made by 'D. Foote 17th century': Venn, Vol. II, p. 156, lists a Daniel Foote matriculating as a student at Trinity, but this was in 1645, too late to be the writer of these notes, unless in fact the preacher was not Hildersham himself, but his son Samuel.

⁷ 'Epistle Dedicatory', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A2.

⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 241.

governours' of families about their responsibilities for children and servants.⁹

Nevertheless, not all of those of higher rank were present on every occasion; the absence of those failing in their public duty to restrain and punish obvious immorality (presumably the magistrates or church wardens), was noted on one occasion: 'This reprove I will be briefe in, because they that offend in this kind, are not here present to heare me'.¹⁰

It is clear that, in fact, godliness, or a wish to be associated with the godly, was a more important factor than social status in determining who was present at the lectures. Although Hildersham rejected in principle the notion that midweek attendance was an optional extra - 'all that are able to doe it, whose necessities will permit them, are as well bound to goe to Sermons on the weeke day, as on the Sabbath' - he was enough of a realist to acknowledge that most of his hearers were spiritually-minded, or had a desire to be so:

Nay it cannot be presumed, but that in so great a congregation (specially of voluntaries, whom no law of man as on the Sabbaths, but their owne inclination, and love to the word draweth together) there are many tender hearts ...¹¹

It is likely, therefore, that at least some of his listeners were drawn from the poorer sort. Hildersham addresses servants directly concerning their duty to their masters, and gives advice to the godly poor about their approach to hard times.¹² He cites the

⁹ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 41-42, 295, 485, 629.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 187 (17 October 1626).

¹¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 242; *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 135.

¹² Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 495; 33-34. Much has been made by Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London, 1964), p. 285, and then taken up by William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), p. 124, of a remark made by Hildersham in his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 118, that 'true it is that the poore in all places are for the most part the most void of grace'. This has been taken as evidence to support the thesis that puritanism appealed mainly to the middling sort, and had an anti-poor bias. However, Hildersham's attitude to the poor was more complex and ambivalent than this quotation suggests, which in fact has been taken completely out of

example of the gospels to show that it is 'lawfull for Gods people of all sorts' to frequent the weekday exercises, and includes women in this context.¹³ It seems reasonable to expect that Ashby's nonconformists were regular listeners, and these included people like Robert Spencer, who was frequently in receipt of poor relief between 1625 and 1631.¹⁴

Sometimes, however, it appears that Hildersham's auditory was wider and more mixed than the normal godly constituency. He was not always preaching to the converted, or those who assumed they were. This was particularly true in the plague year of 1625-26, when official command and personal anxiety combined to swell the midweek congregations in Ashby.¹⁵ Hildersham can be found addressing both his unconverted hearers about their spiritual condition and rebuking regular worshippers about their fear that their prayers would be hindered by the presence of ungodly people in their midst.¹⁶ On another occasion, unusual enough to be remarked upon, men more likely to be found gaming and frequenting those 'tents of wickedness, I mean the ale-

context. These words actually form part of a caution qualifying his main premise that 'we must not content our selves to pity the poore, but we must also relieve them, and be ready to doe them good' (p. 116). But the poor were not merely objects of charity, they could equally be recipients of grace; 'They may belong to Gods election for ought thou knowest' (p. 119). The levelling effect of the gospel was such that 'all men claime a common interest in God; and therefore it concerneth one as well as another (the Tradesman as well as the Preacher, the Plowman as well as the Gentleman, the poorest beggar as well as the greatest Prince) to know him' (p. 492). Hildersham insisted that even the common, uneducated people were able to understand the plain truths of God's Word, see pp. 513, 768. Although Hildersham obviously believed that deference was due to social superiors, he often warned his hearers not to trust in superior parentage, status or learning, which in themselves could be stumbling blocks to salvation, see pp. 206, 217, 285, 286, 299, 768. For a balanced discussion of puritan attitudes to the poor, see Patrick Collinson, 'Puritanism and the Poor', in Rosemary Horrox and Sarah Rees Jones (eds.), *Pragmatic Utopias: Ideals and Communities, 1200-1630* (Cambridge, 2001), pp. 242-258.

¹³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 242.

¹⁴ LRO MF/5. Spencer was presented for nonconformity in 1615 and for standing excommunicate in every subsequent visitation to 1623, LRO ID 41/13/39-ID 41/13/56.

¹⁵ See pp. 138-146, below, for a more detailed discussion of fasting.

¹⁶ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 67. For further discussion of this issue, see below, pp. 143-144.

houses' on the Sabbath, were present in the church. Hildersham urged them to 'repent, and forsake this sin', explaining why he had dealt with this matter at some length:

Well, because I see many of you my neighbours here now, whom I know to be faulty this way, and whom it may be I shall not see here this twelve-moneth againe, I have the more willingly enlarged my selfe in the application of this point, and though I see small hope to prevaile with any of you, for *the belly hath no eares*, and the Ale-house haunter is usually a scorner, and derider of Gods Word; yet because I know that *that is impossible with men, is possible with God*; ... and God hath oft wrought by a Sermon, as great wonders as this commeth to ...¹⁷

The lectures at Ashby also attracted many hearers from further afield;

Hildersham deals with the subject of sermon-gadding in some detail on at least two occasions, and during another lecture refers to 'you that come farre'.¹⁸ Amongst those from outside Ashby were a significant number of his fellow-ministers, to whom Hildersham frequently directed particular applications.¹⁹ When the clerical presence was reduced, Hildersham cut short these points accordingly: 'which I have beene the briefer in, because I see there are but few of my brethren here at this time'.²⁰ It is obvious that Hildersham tailored his applications depending on whom he saw before him in the congregation. However, in general, he clearly calculated that the auditory would contain a mix of anxious saints who needed teaching and reassurance, and presumptuous hypocrites or 'carnal Protestants' who required rebuke and challenge.

¹⁷ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 231 (23 January 1627).

¹⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 252-254, 266-272; *Psalme LI*, p. 34. For further discussion of the subject of the ministry including sermon-gadding, see below, pp. 122-133.

¹⁹ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 271, 300. The presence of large numbers of ministers at the Ashby exercises is corroborated by the evidence of John Darrell, who claimed that the decision that he should accept an invitation to Lancashire was taken by sixteen ministers after a lecture in the town, see Darrell, *A True Narration* (n. p., 1600), p. 8, and anon., *The Triall of Maister Dorrell* (Middelburg, 1599), p. 13. For further discussion, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 47-48, and Chapter 6, below, pp. 272-280.

²⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 167.

2. Some Major Themes in Hildersham's Lectures

As his topical index for the series on John Chapter 4 reveals, the themes that Hildersham handles in his lectures range from the vast and sublime ('God', 'Faith') to the minutely particular ('Dalliance', 'Painting of the face').²¹ John Cotton, in his introduction to the volume, offers his own summary of its contents:

the scornfull vanity of corrupt Nature, the lothsomenesse and desperate danger of sin, the wonderfull power of Gods Grace in the conversion of a sinner, the tryall of a mans own deceitfull heart, the amiable life of Gods grace in the regenerate, the comfortable benefits of afflictions, sundry sweet consolations of a troubled spirit, the vanity of Popery, the necessity of a faithfull Ministry, the beauty of Gods Ordinances holily administered, and the resolution of sundry cases of conscience fitting these times ...²²

Despite the diversity of topics, however, it is clear that all of Hildersham's preaching was underpinned by a rigorous Calvinist theology which provides the foundation throughout. Other recurring themes such as worship, the ministry and anti-popery arise directly out of his view of God and Scripture.²³

2.i. The Calvinist Soteriological Heartland

Although Hildersham's sermons were fashioned for a particular pastoral application and do not in any way constitute a body of systematic theology, it would still seem a useful exercise to examine these sermons for evidence of his underlying soteriological

²¹ See 'A Table of some principall Points that are handled in these Lectures', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, (n. p.). It is an eclectic collection of some 185 headings which, although not exhaustive or objective, gives an indication of those areas that Hildersham wished to highlight. The later *Lectures upon Psalme LI* contains a similar 'Alphabeticall index of the principall matters contained in this Booke', with 128 headings, covering many of the same points.

²² John Cotton, 'To the godly Reader', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A3v.

²³ Worship, one of the most important themes in Hildersham's preaching, is dealt with more fully in Chapter 5, below, pp. 210-223.

framework. This is especially relevant since they were composed during a period of general doctrinal reappraisal and a crumbling of a supposed Calvinistic hegemony within the Church of England. Hildersham's own orthodoxy was challenged in the Wightman trial, and he had to defend himself against charges of heresy.²⁴ What Hildersham believed about such core issues as conversion, predestination, particular redemption, faith and assurance, would doubtless have been closely scrutinised by his contemporaries, both friend and foe. Looking at his soteriology will give a sense of what was important to Hildersham himself in his ministry.

Conversion

From the earliest days of the Reformation, the necessity of conversion had been one of the defining tenets of Protestantism, and fundamental to the fashioning of a distinctive evangelical identity.²⁵ The prime *raison d'être* of preaching was to bring about conversion in the hearers, and was the means God had ordained for it: 'it is the onely meanes the Lord hath sanctified to worke saving grace in his elect, and to bring them to eternall life', insisted Hildersham.²⁶ Conversion is clearly a dominant motif in John Chapter 4, with its narrative of the change of heart experienced by the Samaritan woman and her neighbours, but to accord it a proportional significance in any

²⁴ See below, Chapter 6, pp. 256-280, for a more detailed discussion of this episode.

²⁵ The historiography of conversion includes Peter Marshall, 'Evangelical Conversion in the reign of Henry VIII', in *idem* and A. Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 14-37; Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative* (Cambridge, 1983); John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 159-166; Owen Watkins, *The Puritan Experience: Studies in Spiritual Autobiography* (New York, 1972); Michael C. Questier, *Conversion, Politics and Religion in England, 1580-1625* (Cambridge, 1996). For two different New Testament models of conversion used by godly preachers, see Charles L. Cohen, 'Two Biblical Models of Conversion: An example of Puritan Hermeneutics', *Church History*, 58 (1989), pp. 182-196.

²⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 169.

exposition of Psalm 51, hinges upon the interpretation of verse 6 of the psalm. By preferring the older reading of the text, which suggests that David was looking back to an earlier time when God had imparted saving knowledge to him, Hildersham was able to stress the importance of conversion from this verse also.²⁷

For Hildersham, as for all traditional Calvinists, conversion was entirely a work of free and sovereign grace. As he declared, the ‘conversion of a sinner is the greatest miracle that ever God wrought’.²⁸ The grounds for this assertion lay in the fact that conversion entailed ‘the changing of our nature’, which was intrinsically opposed to everything in the gospel, lacking even any desire for grace.²⁹ Because the natural man was dead in trespasses and sins,

²⁷ The Geneva Bible, in line with other older translations, renders Psalm 51:6 ‘Beholde, thou lovest trueth: in ye inwarde affections: therefore *hast* [my emphasis] thou taught me wisdome in the secret of mine heart.’ In contrast, the Authorised Version translates the second part of this verse as ‘in the hidden part thou *shalt* [my emphasis] make me to know wisdom’, that is, putting God’s actions into the future tense. Critically, it is at this point in his exposition that Hildersham breaks with his rule of only using scriptural proofs, and actually cites some learned authorities in support of his position. It is as if he knows that he is doing something which could be regarded as textually controversial, so he seeks to defend his interpretation: ‘From the consideration of that truth of saving grace which God had wrought in him before he fell into these sinnes; in these last words of the sixt verse, *And in the hidden part, thou hadst made me to know wisdom.* For so I read the words. 1. because the original will beare this sense as well as the other; as might be shewed by many other places of Scripture (where words of the future tense are put for the preter-perfect tense) and as appeareth by the judgement of the most and best interpreters (that is to say, the Septuagint, the vulgar latine: *Pagin, Vatablus, Tremellius, Calvin, Bucer,* the Geneva translatours) who all understand the words to be meant of time past, not of the present or future time.’ [*Lectures upon Psalm LI*, p. 471]. How this verse is interpreted seems to provide an interesting litmus test for the kind of religion espoused by any preacher or writer: Samuel Smith, *David’s Repentance: or, A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the 51. Psalme* (fifth edn., 1620), p. 222, which has the same kind of experimental emphasis on conversion as Hildersham, also follows the same interpretative line (although, unlike Hildersham, he provides no explanation for his choice of the past tense). The conforming puritan Samuel Hieron, in *David’s Penitentiall Psalme Opened* (Cambridge, 1617), p. 177, likewise prefers the past tense. Conversely, Samuel Page, perhaps a more establishment figure with his stress on sacramental regeneration, in his *The Broken Heart or Davids Penance* (1637), p. 74, sticks with the AV future tense rendition. Although he gives due weight to the possibility of ‘*hast*’ and acknowledges those authorities who have thus translated the verse, he concludes ‘onely Montanus his interlineare readeth it in the future, whom our translators of the Kings Bible have followed: the originall doth beare it well, and I choose to see David in faith, then in feare, and therefore I embrace our reading: wherein David believes, that God will make him wiser hereafter’.

²⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 29. See also, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 515-516.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 26. See also, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 515-516, 519.

our conversion is called not the restoring of a sicke man, nor the healing of a lame man, but the *raising of a dead man*, Rev 20.6. And how can a dead man desire life, or use any meanes to attaine it ?³⁰

Human inability to save oneself and ‘free grace’ are stressed throughout Hildersham’s works, often being contrasted with Catholic soteriological error. However, in the later *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, delivered towards the end of the 1620s, it is the perceived growing threat from Arminian teaching on conversion from within the Protestant ranks, which is behind his renewed emphasis on ‘free grace’. Much of Lecture 105, delivered on 9 December 1628, is devoted to explaining and refuting the ‘Pelagian’ teaching of these ‘most dangerous seducers’ who, ‘whatsoever they pretend’, ‘impeach the grace of God, and give either all, or almost all the glory of this great worke, unto man himselfe’.³¹ This was because God, according to the Pelagians, only offered Christ to the individual, and persuaded him to have faith, but ultimately ‘leaveth it absolutely unto it[s] owne liberty whether it [the will of man] will receive Christ, and yeeld obedience unto God, or not’.³² After God had done his part, they said, ‘it lieth in the power of a mans own will, whether the grace of God shall be effectuell to his conversion or no, he is able of himselfe either to accept of it, or to reject it’.³³ For a Calvinist like Hildersham this ran counter to scriptural teaching that any person’s conversion was entirely due to God, who not only gave the grace to enable him to

³⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 28. The same thought is also expressed in *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 517.

³¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 523.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 524.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 524.

repent but ‘doth also infuse, and worke the grace of repentance in him, hee doth so change his will, that hee doth most willingly repent, and obey the call of God’.³⁴

In the light of this threat from ‘Pelagianism’, Hildersham mounts a spirited defence of the doctrinal heritage of the Church of England, a reformed ownership which he claims for the Calvinist cause of ‘free grace’: this was ‘the onely true Doctrine and religion of Christ’ because ‘it onely giveth the whole glory of mans salvation unto Gods free grace in Christ, but it abaseth man, and giveth him no matter of boasting or glorying at all’.³⁵

He goes on to issue a stern warning to his hearers/readers:

Wee have all cause to feare, that as heresie hath beene the scourge, whereby God hath formerly plagued, and vexed his Church, for the contempt of his blessed Gospell; so that heresie shall be the way whereby againe he will correct us, and by which Satan intendeth to make way for Apostacy, and to bring ruine and desolation upon the Churches of Christ.³⁶

Thus, Hildersham concludes, ‘Wee have therefore all need to bee exhorted to continue constant in the faith which wee have received’.³⁷ Clearly, it is Arminianism rather than antinomianism, which Hildersham considered as the single most serious challenge to the church’s orthodoxy at this time.³⁸

³⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 511.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 525. For a discussion of Hildersham’s ecclesiology and the full version of this quotation, see below, Chapter 5, pp. 201-210.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

³⁸ For the thesis that antinomianism provided a serious challenge to the church at this time, see David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil War England* (Stamford, 2004). For a discussion on R. T. Kendall’s thesis about anti-antinomianism, see pp. 113-118, below.

Election and Reprobation

The doctrines of election and reprobation, with the associated teaching on particular redemption (that the efficacy of Christ's death was limited to his chosen people), were also central to classic Calvinist theology. It is evident throughout his writings that Hildersham was an unwavering and orthodox predestinarian, subscribing both to a divine election and a corresponding reprobation.³⁹ These are the determining categories which underpin his whole theological approach, and which define the parameters of his spiritual world. His hearers are told, 'thou must one day feele either the thirst of Gods Elect, or that of the Reprobate'.⁴⁰ This divine decree was a touchstone which divided humanity; the doctrine of election served as 'an unspeakable comfort' to the elect themselves, but it was 'a fearefull signe of reprobation' among those who took advantage of this doctrine to be more wicked.⁴¹

The predestinating decree of God was described as the 'secret of all secrets', and yet, says Hildersham, it would be revealed to those who, with 'an honest heart desire to be taught of God'.⁴² Perseverance of the elect was due not to their own faithfulness, but because of 'The unchangeableness of Gods love and decree. No man hath received the Spirit, but onely such as God hath elected to salvation, and loved in

³⁹ Hildersham's predecessor at Ashby, Anthony Gilby, published a work on this subject, *A Briefe Treatise of Election and Reprobation, with certen Answers to the objections of the Adversaries of thys doctrine* (1575). The classic exposition of double predestination can be found, of course, in the writings of William Perkins. For a discussion of the doctrine of predestination in the English context, see Seán F. Hughes, 'The problem of "Calvinism": English theologies of predestination c. 1580-1630', in Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenberger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson from his Students* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 229-249.

⁴⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 43. See also, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 88, 104, 130.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

Christ before all worlds'.⁴³ In contrast, referring to the natural antipathy which post-lapsarian men had to the Word, Hildersham explained, 'That in all the places where the Scripture speakes of them, there the Holy Ghost sets a black marke upon them, and speaks of them as Reprobates'.⁴⁴ These reprobates tripped over the obstacles that were placed in their way, which thus helped to identify them as damned: 'And it is a certaine signe of reprobation in thee, that thou stumblest, and takest occasion to fall by such examples. Those whom God hath ordained to destruction, he will lay stumbling blocks before them, that they may perish'.⁴⁵ Indeed, hardness of heart could be interpreted as a divine punishment, stated Hildersham, quoting Romans 1:28, 'When God gives a man up to a Reprobate mind'.⁴⁶

Essentially, though, these writings are pastoral rather than controversial works, and Hildersham was well aware that the doctrine of predestination raised a number of practical objections and implications. In the *Lectures upon John*, he dealt openly with such questions:

If any man shall demand of me the reasons of this Doctrine: the cause why the Lord should thus love his Elect, and be so partiall towards them: that though he hates sinne in all, and hates the Reprobate, and damnes them for their sinne, yet he hates not his Elect for their sinnes, but loves them even before there is any grace in them at all, even before they have repented of their sinnes, I can give no other reason of it, but his owne good will and pleasure onely ... And in this it becommeth every mortall man to rest without inquiry any further ...⁴⁷

Naturally, the great pastoral question that concerned everyone was whether he or she was one of the elect. As well as challenging the presumption of the ungodly who

⁴³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 52.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 81. See also, Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 134.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

falsely assumed that they were among the elect, Hildersham also wanted to encourage the weak who feared that God's

speciall mercy belongeth to none but to his elect, and they are but a few ... And I have so lived as I see cause to feare, I am of that number, at least I cannot be sure that I shall find mercy with God, though I should turne unto him.⁴⁸

These latter are reassured,

That though 1. the Lord did indeed in his eternall counsell predestinate some unto life, and some unto perdition, 2. and that the number of the Elect bee small in comparison of the reprobate; yet hath no poore sinner that desireth to turne to God, any just cause given him to be discouraged from it by this Doctrine.⁴⁹

Although no revelation was given by God in this life to any particular person that he was a reprobate, clues to an individual's eternal destiny could be found in the reaction to the means of grace. Preaching, the means God had ordained 'whereby he will begin, and perfect the worke of grace in his Elect', provoked a polarised response in its hearers.⁵⁰ While the elect might not respond immediately to God's offer of salvation, it was certain that in due time they would be converted. Indeed, in the ordinary course of things, all those whom God intended to save should 'have the meanes of grace vouchsafed unto them, at one time or other'.⁵¹ All those who earnestly desired grace and sought mercy would be sure to find it. Contrarily, it was 'a fearfull signe of Reprobation, when God giving to a man the meanes of grace, denies him a heart to profit by them'.⁵² Therefore, a dangerously false presumption could be discerned in those who boasted, 'I may be Gods Elect child, though I never received good yet by

⁴⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 132. He deals with similar fears in *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 130-143.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁵⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 279.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 324.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 324.

any Sermon in my life'.⁵³ With an emphasis on the practical implications of these doctrines, Hildersham insisted that:

No man is to judge of his present or future estate, nor of Gods purpose towards him, by the secret will of God, but by his reveiled will ... We may not in this case, pry curiously, nor enquire into the secret counsell of God but reverently admire it ... Looke thou, & enquire thou into the reveiled will of God, and there thou shalt find enough to encourage thee to turne unto him, and to assure thee that thou needest not doubt to find mercy, and grace with him if thou canst now seeke it.⁵⁴

Espousal of the reformed doctrines of predestination would necessitate, in an orthodox Calvinist like Hildersham, a concomitant belief in a particular and limited atonement: that Christ died only to save his elect. His exposition of particular redemption is perhaps best illustrated in Lecture 71 of the *Lectures upon John*, with its classic exegesis of John 4:42 ('We ... know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the World'). Hildersham explains, 'by the world here, may well be meant the Elect only that are scattered throughout the world', so that the verse could in effect read 'Christ is the Saviour of all the Elect'.⁵⁵ In 'many places of Scripture', Hildersham maintained, 'the benefit of Christs death is restrained, and limitted to a peculiar and choise company'.⁵⁶ There is compelling evidence from the later *Lectures upon Psalme LI* that, despite his friend John Preston and others moving towards a position of hypothetical universalism, Hildersham had not altered his own stance in the interim; 'the mercy of God that reacheth to the pardon of mens sinnes, is not common to all,

⁵³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 326.

⁵⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 132-133.

⁵⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 329. See epigraph, above, p. 94.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 329.

this is restrained, and limited to a certaine number'.⁵⁷ As he affirmed, the people for whom Christ's death was effectual were 'not the common field, the vast wilderness of this wide world, but Gods severall and peculiar plot of ground'. Using the imagery of Canticles, it was 'A garden enclosed'.⁵⁸

Nevertheless, whatever his own personal convictions, in these later lectures we find an insistent emphasis upon a practical approach to the exegetical problems of 'world'. Although very aware of what he calls the 'controversie of universall redemption', which was becoming especially divisive within the Calvinist camp by the 1620s, he declared that 'I shall not need to enter into the controversie which hath much troubled the Church whether Christ died for all men'.⁵⁹ Such theoretical theological speculations about God's decree, as we have already noted, were not the proper concern of his hearers. What was important to them, and what was never a matter of dispute, was the practical effect of Christ's sacrifice. What was 'agreed on by all divines' (even hypothetical universalists) was that, in fact, all people were not saved by Christ's death:

⁵⁷ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 91 [misprinted in text as p. 87]. See also pp. 132, 220, 400, 401, 506, 520, 531, 609-610, 744-745. For more on Preston's theology see Moore, "'Christ is dead for him'".

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 610. Another image used, emphasising a place of light in surrounding darkness, was that of Goshen, within the land of Egypt (Exodus 10:21-23), see p. 531

⁵⁹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 745, 609. In this debate, distinctions were being postulated such as that Christ died for all, in the sense that his death was sufficient for all, but was efficient for only some. Another argument was that Christ died for all but only interceded for his elect. Preston made a distinction between Christ dying for someone and being dead for them. These theories became known as hypothetical universalism, because these divines did not suggest that everyone was in fact saved, only that the sufficiency of Christ's death was wider than was postulated in classic Calvinist theology. Moore discusses these debates in great detail in his thesis on Preston, "'Christ is dead for him'". My own view, and one shared by Moore, is that Hildersham, though careful not to voice an opinion on the controversy here, remained firmly in the particularist camp.

But this I say (wherein we all agree, and of which there is no controversie; and which is as much as need be said for the purpose we have now in hand) that certainly all men shall not have benefit by him, he hath not made all mens peace with God, he hath not undertaken for all men in particular nor satisfied Gods justice for them, his death is not effectuell for all men.⁶⁰

The benefits of Christ's death, those same divines concurred, were received 'by such onely as doe believe in him'.⁶¹ What concerned Hildersham was that the 'conceit' that 'Christ dyed for all men' was being used by carnal men to engender a false sense of security, when they reasoned, 'therefore I were a very beast if I should make any doubt of this, that Christ died for me'.⁶² It is in the context of challenging this 'most dangerous delusion of Satan whereby men are perswaded that all men shall have benefit of Christ' that we find Hildersham emphasising that the number of the elect was very few in comparison to the reprobate.⁶³ He uses it as a homiletical tool to persuade his hearers 'diligently to enquire whither wee our selves be of that small number or no; whether we can finde in our selves, those notes whereby Christ has marked his owne sheepe, and whereby hee will owne them for his'.⁶⁴ Interestingly, it is in an effort to quantify just how few would be saved that Hildersham attempted a numerical analysis of the world's population, which concluded that very few would ultimately receive any benefit from Christ, because very few had true faith.⁶⁵

However, when Hildersham is not addressing those who are falsely secure, but rather those who have weak faith, or who doubt that the promises of the gospel could

⁶⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 609.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 745.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 744. See also p. 331.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 744. See also pp. 91, 132, 400, 506, 531, 609-610, 744-745.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 746.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 744. This analysis is quoted as an epigraph on p. 94, above.

apply to them, we see him using the so-called ‘universal’ texts of God’s mercy to sinners, in order to inspire and solace them:

there is not the vilest sinner in the world, if he now feele his sins and desire to be reconciled unto God, but he may receive comfort, and encouragement from this Doctrine to turne unto God, and seeke to him for mercy.⁶⁶

It is God’s revealed, not secret, will that concerns them, and, Hildersham explained, ‘God hath reveiled in his Word, that Christ with all his merits, should be in the ministry of the Gospell offered unto all that feele themselves to be sinners’.⁶⁷ This had a very personal application to each of his hearers: ‘unto thee as well as unto any other is he offered, and thou art commanded to beleeeve he dyed for thee’.⁶⁸ All to whom Christ was thus offered should indeed ‘have benefit by Christ, unlesse his owne infidelitie, and rejecting of Christ do hinder him’.⁶⁹ Although Scripture taught that there would be reprobates within the visible church, ‘yet’, asserted Hildersham, ‘there is no particular person that lives in the Church, but we are to judge and hope he is one of Gods Elect’.⁷⁰

The worlds of the elect and the reprobate were indeed spiritually separate spheres, eternally fixed, but in time and space their boundaries were not always clear. For Hildersham, his role as God’s minister was to offer Christ to all in the gospel. No one knew for sure, of course, who the elect were, but the divine granting of a preaching ministry to a place was in itself a sign that God had a people there, and intended to save some of the population. As Hildersham put it, ‘the Lord of the harvest

⁶⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 130.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133. See also *Lectures upon John*, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 331.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 331.

never sent forth his labourers to worke in any field, when hee had no corne to get'.⁷¹ In one sense, we find him battling against the complacency bred by the very progress of the Reformation in England, at least that measured by the successful and widespread establishment of a preaching ministry throughout the land. Many of his warnings about impending national and local judgment are predicated upon the uninterrupted blessings of a gospel ministry which was now being taken for granted and unappreciated: 'Our long enjoying of the Gospell of Christ together with our long peace, and plenty makes us to esteeme lightly, and to grow weary of it, as Israel of old was of Mannah'.⁷² His animadversions about the 'removal of the candlestick' from England and its church, heightened by the perceived rise in Catholicism and the uncertain situation for reformed forces in Europe, led to a strong defence of the need for continued preaching in the country, and a countering of arguments that there had been too much of it already.⁷³

Faith and Assurance

This section will examine the argument of R. T. Kendall, that there was a shift in Hildersham's position on the relationship between faith and assurance, from 'an unsettledness in his earlier years but which seems to develop into a more consistent theology as he grew older'.⁷⁴ Kendall contends that 'the earlier writings show him sometimes describing faith as assurance, while those after 1625 find him repudiating

⁷¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 506. See also pp. 805-806.

⁷² *Ibid.*, pp. 778-789. See also pp. 506, 617, 722, 777.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, pp. 806-809.

⁷⁴ R. T. Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649* (Oxford, 1979), p. 90.

such a position'.⁷⁵ This thesis seems to be based upon a brief comparison of a few quotations taken from *The Doctrine of Communicating Worthily in the Lords Supper* and *Lectures upon John*, used to represent the 'early' Hildersham, and some from the *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, to demonstrate the 'later' Hildersham. On the face of it, it would seem a perfectly valid exercise to attempt to trace any developments in an individual's theological thought over a period of time, but there are a number of serious objections to Kendall's methodology, as well as to his conclusions.⁷⁶

The first of these doubts is technical and historical. Although the treatise on the Lord's Supper might reasonably be considered as an example of the 'early' Hildersham, since it was obviously written many years before its initial publication in 1609, the *Lectures upon John* were delivered between January 1609 and November 1611, when Hildersham was already in his late forties.⁷⁷ By this time he was obviously a very senior and well-established ministerial figure, and these sermons are usually regarded as the full-flowering of his mature thought. Besides, they were not issued in print until 1629, thus coinciding with the preaching of the interrupted series on Psalm 51, given between 1625 and 1631. If there had been a major shift in his soteriological position between the delivery and publication of the lectures on the fourth chapter of John's gospel, of the kind that Kendall posits, Hildersham would surely have wanted to amend his earlier manuscript prior to it going to the press. That this did not happen,

⁷⁵ Kendall, *English Calvinism*, pp. 90-91.

⁷⁶ Kendall's basic thesis of 'Calvin against the Calvinists' began to be challenged soon after the publication of his book. One of the earliest criticisms of his theological assertions and his methodology can be found in Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh, 1981).

⁷⁷ For an indication of when Hildersham wrote his treatise on the Lord's Supper, see William Bradshaw, 'To the Reader', in Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, sig. L2. For a fuller discussion of this work, including an earlier manuscript version, see pp. 138-145, below. Kendall mistakenly states that the lecture series on John commenced in January 1608.

it will be argued, is evidence of Hildersham's entirely consistent doctrine of faith exhibited throughout his published works.

Further flaws can be found in Kendall's textual analysis. He bases his argument for this supposed shift in Hildersham's soteriology upon a mere handful of quotations, which have been removed from their context as part of a complex and nuanced exegesis.⁷⁸ One of Kendall's prime specimens is a quotation from Lecture 72 of the *Lectures upon John*, where he states that, for Hildersham, 'Justifying faith includes being "certainly and undoubtedly persuaded, that Christ and all his merits doe belong unto him: hee may bee in this life certainly assured, that he shall be saved"'.⁷⁹ Although, as it stands, this would appear to indicate that Hildersham took assurance to be an indispensable component of real faith, in truth, when examined in its wider context of the lecture as a whole, things are not quite as simple as Kendall would have us believe. In fact, Hildersham does not say that he who has justifying faith *will* be 'certainly and undoubtedly persuaded' (as Kendall implies by prefixing his use of the quotation by 'being'), but that he '*may*' be 'certainly and undoubtedly persuaded'.⁸⁰ Rather than demonstrating a complete synonymy between faith and assurance in practice, Hildersham is thus expounding here a theological doctrine which he finds to be scripturally and theoretically correct. That he found it particularly necessary to outline and uphold the possibility of a full assurance of faith, can partly be attributed to this doctrine's binary opposition to Catholic teaching that such an assurance was

⁷⁸ Because Kendall considers a range of different 'Calvinist' writers, his work devotes only a few brief pages to each, thus of necessity rendering his analysis somewhat superficial and generalising, rather than a comprehensive and in-depth study of any individual's theology. Less than four pages are devoted to Hildersham. However, as he is the only historian that I have discovered who specifically discusses Hildersham's soteriology, I have spent some time considering his arguments.

⁷⁹ Kendall, *English Calvinism*, p. 91.

⁸⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 333.

unattainable in this life. In Lecture 72 he denies the suggestion that doubting is in itself a virtue ‘as Papists would have it’, and in Lecture 75 he goes on to show that the primary use of this tenet is for ‘the confutation of the Papists, who directly contradict this Doctrine, which hath beene so clearely and evidently confirmed unto you by the holy Scriptures’.⁸¹ If, then, a full assurance is something which is attainable, and for which it is worth striving, there is also an acknowledgment that it does not exist permanently or completely in the lives of all God’s elect. Indeed, immediately after stating that the believer may be undoubtedly persuaded of his salvation, Hildersham proceeds to give four ‘Cautions’, to ‘preserve you from mistaking and misunderstanding this Doctrine’.⁸² These include a recognition that, ‘Though we say, that every true Beleever may be certaine of his owne salvation; yet doe we grant, there are degrees of Faith and knowledge; that all Beleevers are not in the like measure certaine of their salvation’.⁸³ Even those who possess a weak faith may not despair, for ‘this weake, this little Faith, is as true a Faith, as effectuall to justification and salvation (though it yeeld not a man that measure of certaintie and comfort) as the other’.⁸⁴ He also argues that even those with the greatest measure of faith have some residual doubts and distrust, and, indeed, ‘He may be sure he hath no true Faith, that feeles not infidelity in himselfe’.⁸⁵ And even the strongest believer would have periods when he loses the sense of the assurance of his salvation.⁸⁶ Once again there is evidence of a

⁸¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John* p. 333; p. 341.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 333.

⁸⁶ It is in this context of a loss of a sense of assurance that Hildersham makes frequent references to the book of Canticles; see, for example, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 333, 347, 406, 478, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 9, 99, 136, 141, 142, 143, 150, 353, 354, 355, 375, 402, 409-10, 572, 622, 640. He does not often seem to use the words of Canticles as an expression of passionate love for Christ, in the way

sympathetic and nuanced appreciation of the spiritual realities experienced by his hearers/readers, as well as a powerful exposition of the biblical doctrine, all within the confines of a single lecture.

It is true that in his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, Hildersham seems to elaborate this theme more explicitly, in response to a perceived pastoral need, but this does not signal a change in his soteriology. To assert that faith is ‘a full perswasion, and stedfast assurance that Christ and all his merits belong to me’ is, declares Hildersham, ‘a dangerous mistake’ and he proceeds to explain that assurance is not faith itself but the fruit of it, and that ‘assurance of Gods favour is not of the essence, and being of true faith’.⁸⁷ However, Kendall claims that, after 1625, Hildersham cannot be found equating faith and assurance in the way he sometimes did in his earlier works, but demonstrably this is not the case. In the context of supplying motives for his hearers to ‘seeke without delay to know that you are through Christ justified in Gods sight’, Hildersham paraphrases Christ’s words to the Apostle Paul in Acts 26:18 as; ‘It is faith in Christ, such a faith as assureth a man that Christ is his, and that God is through Christ reconciled unto him, that sanctifyeth a man and nothing but that’.⁸⁸ But to argue that faith assures, as Hildersham does here, is not a contradiction of his central thrust that doubting was compatible with being in a state of grace, but is merely emphasising another facet of a complex doctrine for a different pastoral context.

that Samuel Rutherford or Samuel Rogers do; see, for example, Tom Webster and Kenneth Shipps (eds.), *The Diary of Samuel Rogers, 1634-1638* (Church of England Record Society 11, Woodbridge, 2004), p. 31. For further discussion of the use of such sensuous imagery, see Tom Webster, ‘Kiss me with the kisses of his mouth: gender inversion and Canticles in godly spirituality’, in Tom Betteridge (ed.), *Sodomy in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester, 2002), pp. 148-163. A paraphrase of Canticles by Hildersham was published posthumously in 1672.

⁸⁷ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 410-411.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 731.

Kendall also suggests that Hildersham is arguing that the ‘good grounds’ on which a person should ‘labour to be assured’, ‘appears to be our own godliness, or, at least, sufficient mourning over sin’. He concludes that Hildersham’s ‘apparent fear of Antinomianism prohibits even the joy of trusting Christ’s death alone’.⁸⁹ It is certainly the case that Hildersham places great emphasis upon genuine repentance, but it is never this which provides the core ground of assurance, except in the sense that mourning for sin is in itself a gift from God and thus a sign of the Holy Spirit’s work. The ‘signes and notes whereby we may know’ that Christ died for us, given in Lecture 120 of the series on Psalm 51 and referred to by Kendall, are by no means the only ones that Hildersham supplies; in Lecture 122, he goes on to insist that true assurance is not subjectively rooted, but ‘is grounded onely upon the most sure and infallible testimony of Gods holy Word’.⁹⁰ And, explains Hildersham, ‘The Scripture expressly saith, that whosoever with an humbled soule, that despaireth of all helpe by any other meanes, believeth and putteth his affiance in Christ alone, resteth and relyeth wholly upon him, shall certainly be saved’.⁹¹ As we have already seen, Hildersham’s overriding concern throughout is to defend the doctrine of ‘free grace’, and it is this emphasis, rather than the anti-antinomianism that Kendall seeks to highlight, which defines his position. To extract certain passages, as Kendall does, without an appreciation of the overall picture, merely results in a partial view of what is a very complex and nuanced whole.

⁸⁹ Kendall, *English Calvinism*, p. 93.

⁹⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 622.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 623.

The Heart

For Hildersham, as for his fellow puritans, the heart was the *locus* of all true religion. As he declared, ‘the chiefe and most proper seate of grace is the heart’.⁹² Genuine outward demonstrations of piety, although of great importance, were but the natural fruit of an inner change of heart or conversion, and so in this sense were only secondary. Lectures 79-94 of the *Lectures upon Psalme LI* are devoted to this subject of heart-based, experimental religion, and Lectures 39-45 of the earlier series on John’s gospel likewise carry a similar emphasis. Only if the heart was right, stressed Hildersham, was anything that a person did acceptable to God: ‘For the Lord is pleased with nothing that we do, unlesse it be done with a good heart’.⁹³ Indeed, Hildersham insisted, ‘This is all in all with God, the onely thing that hee requireth of us, let our hearts bee true to him, and hee hath enough’.⁹⁴ If the heart was ‘good’, then poor and imperfect services were acceptable to God, for he was concerned with the truth of our inward desires:

He is such a Master as standeth not so much upon our actions in his service as upon our affections. Though we be able to do very little, yet if he discern in us an unfeigned desire to do well, he is ready to accept it.⁹⁵

That the true desire for grace (otherwise defined in terms of having a ‘good’ or ‘honest’ heart) was the most significant marker of a person’s salvation was revealed by the fact that, when every other indicator of faith was stripped away and the very outer fabric of a godly life seemed to be in doubt, a bare desire for God might be the only

⁹² Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 479.

⁹³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 696. See also, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 64, 70, 101-102.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 366.

thing remaining to which the believer could cling. The possession of a real spiritual desire was therefore the ultimate ground of assurance and solace for the Christian, when everything else seemed to have disappeared:

Yea, this is almost all that the faithfull have, many times to comfort themselves withall, that they find in themselves an unfained desire to please God ... They must needs be sure therefore of grace, that have an unfained desire of it, for they have it already.⁹⁶

By making the presence of a genuine desire for God, originating in the heart, the test of whether saving grace was at work in any individual, Hildersham knew that he was laying himself open to charges of antinomianism, and also to objections that everyone must surely desire salvation rather than damnation: 'is there any man so mad that would not be saved?', such critics asked.⁹⁷ Hildersham conceded that, 'if every one that hath a kind of desire to be saved, might come to heaven, there would be but a few in hell'.⁹⁸ To answer the sceptics, he provides a more nuanced definition of the qualities inherent in the 'right' kind of desire, and does this by contrasting it with the features of the false type of desire that did not result in eternal salvation; it lacked earnestness, it was intermittent, it prevaricated, it arose only out of a slavish fear of God's wrath and a desire to avoid the consequences of sin, and it did not result in a reformed lifestyle.⁹⁹

A contrast is also drawn between true religion which was spiritual and inwardly based, and the mere performance of outward actions which was nothing but 'formality' or 'shew': 'God delighteth much more in the inward then in the outward worship we

⁹⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 8. See also *Lords Supper*, pp. 16-73, where the first requirement of a worthy reception of the Sacrament, was 'a sincere and right desire of it'.

⁹⁷ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, see pp. 8-10.

doe to him'.¹⁰⁰ However, any claim to be in a state of grace was spurious if the inner experience did not result in a visible outward change: 'If the heart bee upright and good, the speech will bee good, and the actions also'.¹⁰¹ In this context we find frequently delineated the characteristics of the hypocrite, that enemy of true religion, who, despite his emphasis on knowledge and outward observance, 'yet is there this defect in the goodnesse of the best hypocrite in the world, hee doth nothing with a good heart'.¹⁰² For, affirmed Hildersham, saving knowledge, 'swimmeth not nor floteth aloft in the braine onely, of him that hath it, but it soaketh and sinketh downe to the heart, it worketh upon the heart and affections of a man'.¹⁰³

It is this emphasis on an interior, experimental religion which identified so-called puritan spirituality, and which made it so difficult to demarcate in any kind of concrete or formal sense, for it could not be judged by outward manifestations alone. However, it is through this prism that we must view Hildersham's attitude to the related subjects of the conduct of public worship, his relationships with conforming ministerial colleagues and separatists, and also to the whole area of moral reformation, which are dealt with more fully in later chapters.¹⁰⁴ In worship, it was important that due regard was given to the outward forms or 'helps' set out in Scripture, including the sacraments and psalm-singing.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, although the use of the prayer book and liturgies were defended, it was the manner in which these things were used that

¹⁰⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 422. See also *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 45, 49, 53, 58, 64, 70, 72, 74, 80, 81, 101-2, 117, 119, 128.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 371. See also p. 414.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 727.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 488, 489, and see also p. 477.

¹⁰⁴ See below, Chapters 5 and 6.

¹⁰⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, see p. 407: p. 4.

counted; God could not abide ‘the prayers that are nothing but lip labour’.¹⁰⁶ As far as the reformation of manners was concerned, Hildersham wanted to see magistrates enforcing moral laws, because an external compliance with such edicts was pleasing to God and could avert temporal judgments.¹⁰⁷ But ultimately such moral improvement, though desirable in itself, was not enough without a ‘lively faith’ and a ‘good heart’.¹⁰⁸ The ‘civil man’ is often held up as the embodiment of one whose conduct was entirely lawful and honest in an outward sense, but who in the final reckoning fell short of the divine requirements: ‘an unblameable and a vertuous life will not serve the turne without [saving] knowledge’.¹⁰⁹

2.ii. ‘The necessity of a faithfull Ministry’¹¹⁰

In the topical index compiled by Hildersham for his *Lectures upon John*, ‘the ministry’ received the greatest number of individual entries, thus emerging as his single most important preoccupation here.¹¹¹ The second largest number of entries in the ‘Table’ comes under the category of ‘hearers’, so that, taken together, the whole experience of the Word, preached and received, assumes a vital place.¹¹² It is no less important in his other works.¹¹³ Indeed, in common with other godly ministers of the period,

¹⁰⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 310. See also pp. 68, 433.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, see pp. 692, 694.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 481.

¹¹⁰ John Cotton, in his prefatorial ‘To the godly reader’, sig. A3v, in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*.

¹¹¹ ‘A Table of some principall Points that are handled in these Lectures’, in, *Lectures upon John*. There are 43 entries under the heading ‘Ministers’ and another 14 under ‘Ministry of the Word’. A further 6 entries can be found under ‘Preaching’, and ministerial gifts are covered by 8 entries under ‘Gifts’.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Under the heading of ‘hearers’ there are 32 entries.

¹¹³ In the ‘Alphabetical Index’ to *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, there are 12 citations listed under ‘Ministers’, 24 under ‘Ministry of the Word’, 5 under ‘Preaching of the Word’, and 26 under ‘Hearers’. See also *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 53, 102-109, 112, 114-115, 117, and *Lords Supper*, pp. 8-12, 15-16, 50, 56-64, 134, 136.

Hildersham exhibits what could almost be described as an obsession with the role of the ministry, perhaps feeling the need for redefinition in the changed post-Reformation situation.¹¹⁴ The biblical passages centring on Christ's dealings with the Samaritan woman (in the fourth chapter of John's gospel) and the consequences of the prophet Nathan reproving David (in Psalm 51), provide fruitful sources of patterning for both the ministry and its recipients. It is important to remember that Hildersham's original audience was a mixed clerical and lay one, and he had instruction and application for both groups. In the *Lectures upon John*, Lectures 60-70 and 77-81 are almost wholly concerned with the work of the ministry, with other lectures, such as the thirteenth, being devoted to specific aspects of that calling. In the *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, Lectures 1-9 concentrate on this theme, especially the need for 'particular preaching' and the necessity to hear aright.

For Hildersham, the model relationship between minister and people was one of reciprocal obligation and privilege. In the divine economy, God's ministers had a special place because they were the chosen conduit to deliver his message of redemption through preaching: 'the Word of God, and the Ministry thereof, is the salvation of men'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, 'the onely means of regeneration is the Word preached'.¹¹⁶ But preaching, too, must be regarded as divisive, for not only was it the means of effectually calling the elect, it was also used to confirm the unbelief of the reprobate: 'when it is received into a corrupt heart it rotts it, and makes it worse'.¹¹⁷

Although preaching was considered to be the primary function of the ministry and the

¹¹⁴ This preoccupation has been recognised in the growing historiography relating to the reformed ministry, see above, Chapter 1, p. 6, n. 15.

¹¹⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 168. See also p. 66.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

preeminent instructive vehicle, catechising and the personal resolution of cases of conscience were not to be neglected.¹¹⁸ To fulfill this divine calling was an arduous undertaking, for which the minister was answerable to God. Hildersham prescribed a set of guidelines ‘out of Gods word’ that, if followed, would help to ensure a fruitful ministry: they also provide a summary of his own pastoral priorities and methodology:

1. We must be diligent and painefull, both in study and in preaching ...
2. When we teach we must labour to teach that (not wherein our selves may shew most learning or eloquence, but) which may be most profitable and of use to them we teach ...
3. Strive to teach in that manner, as may most profit thy hearers ... that is, apply thy doctrine always to the present estate and condition of thy hearers ...
4. Take heed to thy life, that thou do nothing to hinder the fruit of thy labours ...
5. Be earnest in prayer, that he would make thy Ministry fruitful ...
6. Enquire for fruit, and deale with thy people in private, to see how they profit by thy labours¹¹⁹

The blueprint here is for someone studious, hard-working, leading an irreproachable life, prayerful, and with a sensitive knowledge of the individual needs of his congregation. In other passages, Hildersham teaches that the minister must not be aloof or proud but, emulating Christ’s example, he should be accessible to those who wished to confer with him: ‘not to shew himselfe stately, or austere, or churlish, or strange to any of his hearers, that shall be willing to make use of him that way’.¹²⁰ Ideally, he should live near to the church itself, so that people would know where to

¹¹⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, see, for example, p. 205. See also, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 662, 790-791.

¹¹⁹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 290. The memorial erected in Ashby church to Hildersham by his son declared that he himself was honoured for ‘his sweet and ingenuous disposition, his singular wisdom in settling peace, ... and satisfying doubters, his abundant charitie, and especially for his extraordinary knowledge and judgment in the holy scriptures, his painfull and zealous preaching’.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

find him.¹²¹ To carry out his role properly, he must love his flock.¹²² By inference, and sometimes directly, Hildersham supplies a contrasting portrait of the ‘dumb and ignorant Ministry’ under which some had to live.¹²³ Non-preaching stipendiaries and non-residents were naturally castigated, but his criticism also included the ‘corrupt teachers’, derisively labelled as ‘the good fellow priest’.¹²⁴ This sort of preacher tickled the ears of his hearers with the kind of eloquence that appealed to their vanity, but neglected the duty of reproofing them plainly for their sin. Hildersham condemns such ministers with an unusually colourful metaphor: ‘they esteeme much more of the sauce and cookery, then they doe of the meate it selfe’.¹²⁵

As far as the hearers of the Word were concerned, they too had a number of responsibilities both to the message itself and to the ministers that delivered it. Auditors were urged to listen attentively to the sermon, having prepared their hearts in advance.¹²⁶ They were to accept reproof from the minister as if from God himself, and to love their reprover the more for so doing.¹²⁷ More generally, they were to love and esteem all faithful ministers, recognising their authority and giving them the honour due to their office.¹²⁸ Not only should people seek to live under a faithful ministry, but those in positions of opportunity, such as magistrates and ‘great men’, should strive to promote the establishment of godly ministers wherever possible.¹²⁹ God’s people should be prepared to contribute financially to the upkeep of such ministries, and

¹²¹ For a discussion of Hildersham’s house in Ashby, and the way in which it became completely identified with him, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 75-77.

¹²² See Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 66.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 136. See also pp. 252, 321.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.* See, for example, pp. 125, 295.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, see p. 105.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, see pp. 350, 317.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280. See also p. 247.

demonstrate by lives that had been reformed that they had truly profited by the teaching of their pastors.¹³⁰ They are instructed not to be partial, valuing one preacher, perhaps with greater gifts, above another, but to esteem all godly ministers equally.¹³¹

On the contentious issue of ‘sermon-gadding’ (a practice of which he himself was a recipient at Ashby), Hildersham offers his usual cautious and nuanced advice, in a lecture delivered on 18 June 1610.¹³² However, it seems as if some of his ministerial hearers, especially, were not happy about what evidently they perceived as his endorsement of the practice, and had taken him to task on the matter. A few weeks later, in the middle of Lecture 58, delivered on 17 July 1610, Hildersham is clearly responding to such feedback, as he returns to the subject in an attempt to clarify his position:

The second Use shall be to resolve us in a case of conscience, that concerneth many of you: what we are to thinke of the people that goe from their owne Pastours to heare others. This I had occasion to speake of, not long since; but I was not well understood then by some; and therefore intend now to deliver my minde more fully and plainely for the resolving of this doubt¹³³

Previously he had concluded that ‘Every Christian hath right and title to the gifts of all Gods servants, and therefore it is no sinne for them (when conveniently they may) to make their benefit of them’, although he had been careful to warn his auditory about despising ‘the Ministry of the meanest of Gods servants’.¹³⁴ Now, in Lecture 58, he speaks again, ‘First to the people that use to leave their own Pastours: 2. To the

¹³⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 315-318, 319.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 303, 305.

¹³² *Ibid.*, pp. 250-25 (Lecture 54).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

Pastours that are so left by their people'.¹³⁵ Here, he stresses that he was not giving general licence to sermon-gadding, but that in normal circumstances a person should listen to his own pastor, provided that he is 'a man whose gift is approved by Gods Church, and who is conscionable in his place, and of unblameable life'.¹³⁶ Such a minister should not be despised, even if his gifts were inferior to another's. Hildersham also places careful restrictions and cautions on lay people about going elsewhere to hear preaching.¹³⁷ Pastors are counselled to accept the practice of their parishioners hearing other ministers preach, if it is done for the right reasons and produces spiritual fruit in their lives.¹³⁸ Whether this expanded restatement of his views satisfied Hildersham's critics we do not know; however, he did not return to the subject during the course of these lectures.

Another area which aroused considerable controversy in practice was that of 'particular preaching' or 'close dealing'.¹³⁹ Hildersham himself preferred the epithet 'reproving of sin', which more accurately defined the practice since it could occur outside the pulpit and could also be delivered by 'private Christians' as well as the ordained ministry.¹⁴⁰ It is not surprising, given the scriptural source-material of both the fourth chapter of John's Gospel and Psalm 51, that this theme was a consistent and important one in both lecture series; Christ's dealings with the Samaritan woman, and

¹³⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 268.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 268.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, see p. 270.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 271-272.

¹³⁹ For a detailed consideration of this subject, see the work of Juliet Ingram, "'The Conscience of the Community': The Character and Development of Clerical Complaint in Early Modern England" (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2004), and 'A Cockpit of Contention: Particular Preaching in Post-Reformation England', a paper given to the Religious History Seminar at the IHR, 24 April 2007. For an incident allegedly concerning particular preaching in Ashby, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 48-57.

¹⁴⁰ See Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 114-115.

Nathan's censure of David provided perfect models of why and how such rebukes should be administered, and the manner in which they should be received by the guilty party. It is as much to encourage his reluctant ministerial colleagues to engage in particular preaching, as it is to urge their hearers to receive such reproofs in the right spirit, that Hildersham deals with this subject. Lecture 13 of the *Lectures upon John* is specifically devoted to the doctrine that 'they that would win soules to God, must plainly and particularly discover to men their sinnes'.¹⁴¹ But, in typical Hildersham fashion, his strong advocacy of the practice is qualified by a number of cautions about how it should be undertaken. The reproof must be issued 'Particularly and plainly, that the party may feele himselfe and his owne sin touched', and in public if the offences themselves were 'public and scandalous', but it might often be better done privately or indirectly, so that the 'credit and estimation of the person that sinneth may be preserved as much as may be'.¹⁴² 'A minister', advised Hildersham, 'is not always bound in plaine terms, imperiously, sharpely, and bitterly to reprove the sinnes he knoweth by his hearers', but should adopt the course most likely to prevail in each circumstance. He cites with approval Christ's use of 'a holy craft and cunning' to win the Samaritan woman.¹⁴³ The party at fault should be aware of his pastor's love for him, and that the reproof was issued for his spiritual benefit rather than out of any kind of malevolence. If the rebuke was rejected, this was evidence of a lack of grace in the heart; 'Many will object against the preacher thus, I know he meant me: and what call

¹⁴¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 63. It is important to note that in both biblical models, the reproving of sin directly results in the restoration of a relationship between the sinner and God.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 63-64.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

you this but malice? If he had loved me, he would have told me in private'.¹⁴⁴

Elsewhere, Hildersham explained that sometimes the application to an individual was unintended by the preacher, who knew nothing of his particular sin, so that it was purely the intervention of the Holy Spirit working to bring conviction.¹⁴⁵

Nevertheless, the printed text of the sermons largely supplies us with only a theoretical justification for 'close dealing'; if on delivery they contained actual examples of people being reprov'd for their sins, they have not survived the editorial process. There are, of course, many general rebukes for such matters as drunkenness, immorality and blasphemy, which may well have had a particular application in the context within which they were uttered, but of which we are not now aware. However, Lecture 136 of the series on Psalm 51, delivered on 29 December 1629, provides us with a unique (as far as Hildersham's published works are concerned) and extended example of collective particular preaching in action. After a general critique about the abuse of the Sabbath, he moves on to his second application which was 'more speciall, and concerneth this place principally'.¹⁴⁶ What follows is a systematic and detailed denunciation of the faults of his congregation related to their lack of proper Sabbath observance.¹⁴⁷ Although he concedes that these sins are not restricted to Ashby, he will not let his hearers off the hook by allowing them to think that he is referring to other people in the town and not themselves:

¹⁴⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 264.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, see p. 108.

¹⁴⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 705-706.

¹⁴⁷ It should be noted that this lecture was preached not on a Sunday but on a weekday, and so the congregation was likely to be somewhat different. It should also be remembered that by this stage Hildersham was no longer the vicar of Ashby, preaching every Sunday in the pulpit, so that he was speaking as an observer rather than the direct recipient of such malpractices.

The other part I must direct to you of this Towne and Congregation more specially. And yet not so to them of this Towne as if I thought none of you that heare me were to be blamed for these faults that I shall now reprove but onely they of this Towne, but because my selfe have discerned them and beene grieved and troubled in my soule for them in this place more then in any other.¹⁴⁸

After another scriptural defence of particular preaching, he goes on to give his assessment of Ashby's spiritual condition, both past and present, recognising the godly reputation it had gained:

Of this Towne my selfe can say that I have knowne the time, when it did shine as a light to all the countrey, and was famous among the Churches of Christ for the religious observance of the Sabbath day. And to this day (blessed be God) for the meanes of sanctifying the Sabbath by the publique ministry in our Church-assemblies, I dare say it is little or nothing behind any other Church in the countrey. And of many of the people also I may say that they doe as diligently frequent them; and our Congregations on the Lords day both in the forenoone and afternoone too, are as full and populous as can lightly bee found in any other place.¹⁴⁹

And yet a faithful ministry and a full church were not, apparently, enough for Hildersham. There were three main ways in which many of the people of Ashby profaned the Sabbath, according to Hildersham, and this lack of a proper observance was as bad 'as it is (I thinke) in any part of the countrey besides'.¹⁵⁰ The first of these was a failure to 'keep his rest and performe the duties of his worship that day cheerefully and reverently and spiritually'. This lack of a true heart in worship was manifested principally by the large number of people who fell asleep during the services:

You shall hardly come into any Church upon a Sabbath day where you shall see so many sleepers old and young, yea such as would bee thought to bee of cheefe credit among their neighbours not

¹⁴⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 707.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 708.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 708.

for morall honesty onely but even for religion too. And this I have (to my grieffe) heard many strangers observe and wonder at.¹⁵¹

The voiced opinions of visitors seem to suggest that this may be more than mere subjective rhetoric on Hildersham's part, but it does raise questions about what might have induced such somnolence. Although he accepted that 'To bee overtaken with drowsinesse and sleepinesse sometimes even in the Church even at a Sermon may well be an infirmity, specially in an aged man. And I were much to blame, if I should censure any man for this rigorously', he cannot condone the way in which the sleepers remained completely untroubled by their weakness and made no effort to fight against it.¹⁵² This was a sign of 'raining sin' rather than infirmity.¹⁵³

In his second point of complaint, Hildersham is rather more brief, but no less hard-hitting. The fourth commandment required a day devoted to public and private spiritual duties, and thus Hildersham attacks those who spent the hours of public worship elsewhere than in church:

And yet though (as I said before) our Church assemblies be as well frequented in this Towne by many as in any other place, and though there be never a Popish recusant amongst us; yet shall you hardly finde in any place more Atheist recusants, more than doe seldome or never come to Church, that doe so ordinarily and constantly serve the Devill in the Ale-house when we are serving God here in his house, then are to be found in this Towne.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 708. Sleeping in Ashby church was apparently not a new problem, for Hildersham had also referred to it (though in a less extended or directed way) in the earlier *Lectures upon John*, see pp. 125, 134.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 708.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 709.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 710. Despite the remark about the lack of popish recusants, which is borne out by the records, in 1625 the Ashby churchwardens said that they would not bother to re-present a persistent Romanist recusant from the dependent chapelry of Blackfordby, because they felt that the court was biased in favour of Catholicism and they stood little chance of getting a conviction, see LRO ID41/3/58 f. 10 (cited by C. D. Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire, 1558-1633' (MA thesis, University of Leeds, 1962), p. 178).

The third and final area singled out for reproof concerned the irreligious behaviour of young people and children on the Sabbath in Ashby, both inside and outside the church. This led Hildersham to opine, ‘You shall hardly finde (I believe) such open profession, of profanesse and contempt of the Sabbath in children and youth in all the country as in this Towne’.¹⁵⁵ During the services themselves, the ‘profanesse of the children laughing out and sporting and fighting in the Church ordinarily every Sabbath day’ was ‘a great blemish to our Church assemblies’, whereas in the streets their conduct was just as reprehensible, for which the parents and masters were to blame: ‘And surely amongst our youth such a shouting and hollowing may be heard as a man would thinke there were some Bull or Beare baited in our streets every Sabbath day’.¹⁵⁶ God did not treat children’s faults lightly, Hildersham reminded his listeners, but it was really the ‘parents and governours’, including respectable ‘Christian’ people, who were blameworthy, that ‘keepe them not in, but suffer them to do so’.¹⁵⁷ Also culpable were ‘the officers ... that have power and authority to redresse these things, and doe nothing in it’.¹⁵⁸ They would have to answer to God for the sins of those for whom they had responsibility. Much of Hildersham’s pessimistic rhetoric, of course, can be put down as no more than the familiar perfectionist standards of a godly minister.¹⁵⁹ The fact, too, that Ashby had gained a national reputation as a puritan centre no doubt made Hildersham more critical of any observable smugness or

¹⁵⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 710.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 710.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 711.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 711.

¹⁵⁹ Against the occasions where Hildersham criticises the town and nation for its ungodliness must be set those where he puts a more positive gloss on affairs, see, for example, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 43: ‘Of our Land (blessed be God) we may yet say, there is no nation in the world at this day, that hath so many righteous persons in it; or that hath the Gospell preached in it in that sincerity and power as we have. Nay, there is no City in the world where the Gospell is so faithfully and plentifully preached, nor wherein God is so purely worshipped, as in that City [i.e. London] that we meet together to pray for.’

immorality amongst the inhabitants. That the town was no worse than other places was simply not good enough for him.

2.iii. 'The vanity of Popery'¹⁶⁰

It has been observed that what united the broad spectrum of Protestantism during the late Tudor and early Stuart period was a fear of Catholicism, and a desire to counter its perceived influence with the people.¹⁶¹ In this regard, Hildersham could be considered typical of his generation, for anti-popery is a thread which runs throughout his sermons. References to Catholicism appear in over a third of the lectures on the fourth chapter of John's gospel and in the later *Lectures upon Psalme LI* the ratio is perhaps slightly higher: allusions to Catholicism occur in fifty-eight individual lectures.¹⁶²

Sometimes the references to Catholicism are little more than a passing comment, but in other instances the treatment is more extended when he feels the need to contrast Protestant truth with its erroneous Catholic counterpart. By the standards of contemporary polemic, the rhetoric is relatively restrained; these are not intended as

¹⁶⁰ The phrase is John Cotton's, in his, 'To the godly Reader', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A3v.

¹⁶¹ For the historiography of anti-Catholicism, see, *inter alia*, Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 73-82; Peter Lake, 'Antipopery: The Structure of a Prejudice', in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics, 1603-1642* (London, 1989), pp. 72-106; and Alexandra Walsham, 'The Fatall Vesper. Providentialism and Anti-Popery in late Jacobean London', *Past and Present*, 144 (1994), pp. 36-87.

¹⁶² Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 1, 10, 110, 119, 123, 125, 162, 175, 191, 191, 192, 202, 210, 227, 228, 229, 230, 233, 236, 243, 245, 248, 255, 260, 267, 275, 303-304, 309, 317, 328, 337, 348, 361, 379, 386, 434, 444, 446, 449-450, 468, 477, 478, 489, 497, 499, 523, 563, 580, 601, 616, 622, 626, 661, 694, 699, 710, 713, 719, 725, 766, 767, 771, 774, 777-778, 781, 782, 789, 796. See also, Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 97, 108, 137. In *Lords Supper*, Hildersham is particularly concerned to combat erroneous Catholic doctrine and practices relating to the Sacrament, see pp. 25-31, 36-39, 47, 48, 60-62, 64, 118, 119, 121, 122. Ian Green sees this need to counter Catholic teaching as a feature of earlier works in the pre-Communion handbook genre, but one which was in decline after the 1670s, presumably when it was regarded as less of a general threat, see Green, *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England*, (Oxford, 2000), p. 297.

controversial works, but are driven by pastoral concern that Hildersham's hearers be warned and equipped against popish superstition and error.

Many of the references to Catholicism are quite brief and specific, dealing with issues such as the doctrines of free will and the Corporal Presence, attitudes to second marriages and clerical celibacy, and practices such as confession to a priest, building grand churches, pilgrimage, relics, images and miracles.¹⁶³ Underlying all these differences is an essential disagreement on the nature of authority: 'The Papist grounds his Faith upon the testimony of the Church ... yet it consisteth onely of men who are subject to error ... But we ground our Faith onely upon the Word of God'.¹⁶⁴ However, there are several extended sections, when Catholics and their beliefs become the focus, rather than an adjunct of the argument itself. One of these occurs when Hildersham is dealing with the false worship of the Samaritans, and direct parallels are drawn between this and Catholic ritual. Although 'the Papists agree with us in many points of religion', he argues, they have corrupted the true religion with 'grosse Superstition and Idolatry', have discredited God's servants by 'strange slanders', and have hindered the spread of the truth by 'pretending great love and respect to the Saints departed'.¹⁶⁵ This is followed by a refutation of these particular errors and especially the authority of the papacy itself.

Another long section, which occurs in Lecture 31 of the *Lectures upon John*, is concerned with justifying 'our religion' against papist claims that it was new, 'and no elder than Luther'.¹⁶⁶ Here, Hildersham adopts a more defensive approach, as he

¹⁶³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 28, 31, 70, 94, 102, 156, 163, 245, 378.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37. Hildersham's text here is John 4:12.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

contends that the only ancient, and therefore true, religion is one based on the Scriptures, as indeed the Protestant faith was. In fact, the actual 'new' religion was the papal one, which had introduced errors into the pure primitive church. Elsewhere, too, he can be found defending his doctrine against Catholic attacks, such as the familiar 'slander' that the Protestant teaching on justification by faith alone led to antinomianism: 'good works are marveilously profitable', he asserted, and no man could be saved without them.¹⁶⁷ Similarly, when speaking about the unchangeableness of God's love and predestinating decree, he stresses the need for persistence in godliness, showing an acute awareness of Catholic charges that the doctrine of election produced 'licentiousnesse (as Papists slander it)'.¹⁶⁸ It would seem that Hildersham suspected a lingering residual persistence of belief in transubstantiation, at least amongst some of his hearers, when he launched an attack on the entire Catholic concept of miracles, and especially, 'the chiefe of all their miracles ... their sacrament of the Altar.'¹⁶⁹ However, the eucharist was consistently the major focus of Protestant-Catholic controversy, so he may just have been reflecting a key point at issue here.

What lay behind this insistent condemnation of Catholicism and its supporters? Part of the answer lies in a deep-seated belief in a 'natural popery that is in every one of our hearts'.¹⁷⁰ By this he meant that Catholicism, with its emphasis on a good works mentality and outward observances, appealed to the carnality of the 'natural' or unregenerate man. This produced a universal default tendency towards Catholicism, which required constant countering. The other reason for anti-popery featuring so

¹⁶⁷ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 50.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 449. See also p. 31.

¹⁷⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 434. See also, pp. 248, 274, 309, 618-619.

strongly in these discourses is a perception that the Catholic threat was a growing one. In March 1609, Hildersham could be found bemoaning ‘the great increase of Papists of late’.¹⁷¹ He warned that this recent rise in both the number and confidence of Catholics could cause ‘you sometimes to stagger, and thinke they have some truth on their side, if you be not better grounded and confirmed against them’.¹⁷² Although polemic had cast Catholics in the role of traitors ever since Elizabeth’s excommunication by the pope in 1570, and anti-popish sentiment had been stoked by events such as the Armada and the Gunpowder Plot, a fresh impetus to these feelings was provided in the 1620s and early 1630s. Indeed, it is apparent that in 1625-1631 Hildersham considered popery an ever-present threat, and in some senses a growing one. In May 1627, he declared that popery was ‘never worse than it is now’, and on 30 August 1631, he urged his hearers to watchfulness because of ‘the great increase of Papists that we daily heare of’.¹⁷³ Not only the proposed Spanish Match, but the attacks by Counter-Reformation forces upon reformed power-bases in Bohemia, Germany and France had led to a renewed demonisation of Catholicism as a foreign religion. Generally, as we have seen, Hildersham’s anti-popish rhetoric was relatively moderate, largely concentrating on the doctrinal features of that system, but in April 1626 he delivered a remarkable denunciation of Catholics as unpatriotic, bloodthirsty and traitors to their native land:

The Papists, who are notoriously knowne, to be so farre from seeking the peace and prosperity of their country, but they have many years uncessantly sought the utter ruine, and subversion of it,

¹⁷¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 36.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 36. The recent Gunpowder Plot seems to have confirmed these perceptions of increased Catholic boldness and threat, see pp. 12, 417.

¹⁷³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 304, 778; see also pp. 227, 496-497, 781. For a further discussion of the impact of international events upon English Protestants, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 193-198.

and the betraying of it into the hands of strangers, yea, such strangers as are the worst nation, *Ezek 7.24.* most bloody enemies. And this is not the fault so much of the men that professe popery, this is the fault of the religion itself. Their chiefe teachers, the Jesuites, (the common incendiaries of the world) teach them, they ought to do so, they shall merit heaven by doing so ... Other heresies, and religions there have bin (perhaps) that were as pernicious to the soules of men as Popery; that is, of the Gnosticks, and Arrians of old, of the Anabaptists, and antitrinitarians of late; But a religion so pernicious to states and Common-wealths, as popery is, was there never heard of in all the world.¹⁷⁴

Implicit in such invective, of course, was an assertion of his own loyalty to both country and church, and an identification with orthodox Protestantism against the true enemies of the gospel.

But the dangers were not only foreign or overtly Catholic. These later warnings against Catholicism were part of a wider, more general threat that Hildersham perceived against the Church of England and other reformed churches. Popery is often coupled in his discourse with ‘other heresies’ and ‘other seducers’, which, although he does not identify explicitly, it is clear that he sees emerging from within the Protestant ranks themselves:

Yet are there a number of other new, and strange opinions lately sprang up in our Church ... There are so many but I cannot name them all unto you though I would, and they are some of them so fantastical, some so blasphemous, and dangerous that I would not offend your Christian eares with rehearsing of them, though I could. Every yeare almost yeelds us some new conceit in Religion.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 123, and see also p. 563. For a similar reference to ‘our treacherous, and bloody Papists at home’, see also Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 137. These two sermons were preached within three months of each other in 1626. Hildersham’s anxieties in 1626 could well have been linked to imperialist victories in the Thirty Years War.

¹⁷⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 778.

Although the sectarians may have posed their own threat, it is apparent that what he perceived as the creeping Romanisation of the Church of England's doctrines and worship practices from within, was the real danger to be targeted.

3. Fasting and Feasting: a Case Study in Practical Piety

One of the distinctive features of puritan divinity was its attention to detail. No aspect of life was too great, or too small, to come under the direction of Scripture. No text was too obscure or insignificant to be dissected and applied, often with multiple levels of meaning. All of life was thus sacralised, and the godly became known derisively as 'precisians'.¹⁷⁶ The length of their sermons and printed works reflected this thoroughgoing approach. Whether it was contracting marriage, private Bible reading and prayer, bringing up children, or, as we have already noted, 'chambering' or 'painting the face', Hildersham, citing the appropriate scriptural proof, had something to say on the matter.¹⁷⁷ Even these more specific areas of worship or personal conduct were governed by the same underlying theological principles and grounded in the Word. This can be illustrated by an examination of Hildersham's two shortest works, one from the beginning and the other from the end of his ministerial career.¹⁷⁸ Both

¹⁷⁶ Hildersham recognises the scorn of those who use the term 'precisians', but defends those who live strictly in accord with the Scriptures provided that they are not hypocritical in so doing, see *Lectures upon John*, p. 276: 'if a man be in the right way, he cannot be too forward, zealous, or precise'. See also, *ibid.*, pp. 76, 77, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 7, 17, 235-236, 426, 446, 570, 581, 629, 699, 714-5.

¹⁷⁷ JRUL EM 524 f. 75, 'The effect of an exhortation in private to two parties at their contracting before the witnesses by Maister Hildersam'; JRUL EM 524 f. 96v, 'Concerning private reading of the word Arthur Hildersam'; JRUL EM 524 f. 99r, 'A. H. For preparation to prayer your heart must meditate'. For dealing with original sin and its effects in our children, see *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, Lectures 55-60, pp. 275-300.

¹⁷⁸ For publication details of Hildersham's *The Doctrine of Communicating Worthily in the Lords Supper* and *The Doctrine of Fasting and Prayer, and Humiliation for Sinne*, see above, Chapter 1, pp. 23-25, 27-28.

The Doctrine of Communicating worthily in the Lords Supper and Fasting and Praier were related to particular spiritual ordinances, which the godly had invested with their own brand of piety. The communion service, described by Hildersham as the ‘*visibile verbum*’ or ‘visible word’, was held in the highest regard by the faithful, who regarded preaching and sacrament as indivisible partners in the economy of divine grace: ‘for it is necessarie to receive this Sacrament when wee may, as it is to heare the word preached when wee may’.¹⁷⁹ Fasting, too, was a means by which great blessing had been experienced by godly assemblies, especially in earlier times.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 113; Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, pp. 80, 87; *ibid.*, p. 64. Arnold Hunt, ‘The Lord’s Supper in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 161 (1998), p. 55, says that the term ‘visible word’ was an Augustinian commonplace. A previous historiography which had played down the importance of any kind of sacramental piety in puritan spirituality *vis-à-vis* preaching, has received a very necessary corrective through the work of Margaret Spufford, ‘The importance of the Lord’s Supper to dissenters’, in Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 86-102, and Hunt, ‘Lord’s Supper’. Other contemporary godly works on the Lord’s Supper included those by William Bradshaw, William Pemble, Henry Tozer, Jeremiah Dyke, Samuel Bolton and Francis Roberts, but Hildersham’s was the earliest, see Green, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 297.

¹⁸⁰ Godly fasting had become one of the distinctive features of a so-called puritan culture, see, for example, the discussion by Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales, ‘Introduction: The Puritan ethos, 1560-1700’, in *idem* (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 20-22; Webster, *Godly Clergy*, pp. 60-74; John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 38, 57, 192; Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982). For an analysis of fasting in general, see Thomas Cornell Doumaux, ‘Fast Days and Faction: The Struggle for Reformation, Order, and Unity in England 1558-c.1640’ (PhD thesis, Vanderbilt University, 2008). For a discussion of the connection between fasting and exorcism, see Thomas Freeman, ‘Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in late Elizabethan England’, in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 34-63. For Hildersham’s involvement with fasting and exorcism in the 1590s, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 256-280. Other similar godly works on fasting included Thomas Becon, *A Fruitful Treatise of Fasting* (1551); William Wilkinson, *The Holie Exercise of a True Fast* (1580); Nicholas Bownde, *The Holy Exercise of Fasting Described Largely and Plainly out of the Word of God* (1604); George Downame, *The Christians Sanctuarie* (1604). Sermons linked to particular public fasting occasions included, John Dod and Robert Cleaver, *Foure Godlie and Fruitfull Sermons: two preached at Draiton in Oxfordshire, at a fast enjoyned by authority, by occasion of the pestilence then dangerously dispersed* (1610); William Crashaw, *Londons Lamentation for her Sinnes* (1625); and John Preston, ‘Sundry Sermons in Cambridge, for the weekely Fasts, 1625’, which was published posthumously as the first of three treatises under the title of, *The Golden Scepter held forth to the humble* (1638). Lectures 1-9 of Hildersham’s own series on Psalm 51, preached on the prescribed fast day of Wednesday rather than the normal lecture day of Tuesday, between 28 September and 21 December 1625, were also delivered as official fast sermons.

There are, of course, some obvious differences between the two works. The catechetical format of questions and answers is employed for the *Lords Supper*, as preparation before receiving, whereas *Fasting and Praier* consists of eight sermons delivered during the course of the fast itself. The *Lords Supper* was intended as a general guide to communicating ‘worthily’, but *Fasting and Praier* is firmly anchored in the particular context of plague and foreign wars occurring in 1625-1626.¹⁸¹ In mood and function, too, the two evidence a divergence. Hildersham describes the Lord’s Supper as ‘a heavenly banquet’ which should be celebrated with ‘inward joy and gladness of heart’.¹⁸² Conversely, a public fast was an occasion of deep mourning over sin, in the face of God’s revealed wrath and judgment. In the same way as ‘the people of Israel came to the house of God’, explained Hildersham, ‘to professe their sorrow for the extreme misery that the wicked Benjamites were most justly fallen into’, so ‘we do now’.¹⁸³

Nevertheless, a surprising amount of overlap emerges. One of the reasons why the nation was experiencing God’s anger in the form of plague in 1625, Hildersham declared, was that ‘the holy Sacrament is (in all places) so commonly prophaned, and those holy things given to and received (without difference) by such dogs and swine as have no care at all duly to prepare themselves thereunto’.¹⁸⁴ Both ordinances followed

¹⁸¹ See, for example, Sermon I in Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 1-26, which endeavours to get the people of Ashby to be affected by the plight of their plague-ridden brethren in London. For more on the context of the 1625 fast, and its meaning for the godly, see below, Chapter 4, pp. 163-166.

¹⁸² Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 129. See also, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 265. This is an echo of the Prayer Book reference to ‘a most godly and heavenly feast’, cited in Christopher Haigh, ‘Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England’, *JEH*, 51:4 (2000), p. 722. The image of the sacrament as a banquet was also used to support arguments that kneeling to receive was an inappropriate (as well as idolatrous) posture, see *Abridgement*, p. 77, discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, below, pp. 218-220.

¹⁸³ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 3. The biblical reference is to Judges 21:2

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

a similar emotional and spiritual trajectory: although the ‘chief use of a religious fast’ was ‘to humble and afflict the soule with sorrow, and grief’, such a process, if undertaken sincerely, would lead ultimately to spiritual comfort and ‘our hearts to rejoice, and be thankfull’ for ‘all Gods mercies’.¹⁸⁵ In the same way, proper reception of the sacrament required a man to ‘bring his heart to this unfeigned repentance’ for ‘his speciall sinnes’, before he could enjoy divine blessing.¹⁸⁶ This was achieved, in both cases, by a period of earnest prayer and self-examination, to ascertain one’s inner state before God; to ‘worke our hearts to this godly sorrow’, Hildersham instructed, ‘we must examine our hearts seriously and impartially’.¹⁸⁷ Indeed, one of the fittest times for such an exercise was ‘when wee prepare our selves to renew our covenant with God in the holy Sacrament’.¹⁸⁸ On each occasion the minister had an important part to play; before the eucharist was celebrated, ‘the people must also be willing to have their lives looked into, and their knowledge examined by their Pastor, and to make known to him their spirituall estate, that so with comfort and boldnesse, he may admit them’.¹⁸⁹ When a person was seeking to have his heart softened as part of the fasting mortification process, he should not be ‘unwilling to be admonished and reproved for sin in private by some faithfull friend, either Minister or other, but count it a great benefit, and desire it rather’.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁵ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 82.

¹⁸⁶ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 95.

¹⁸⁷ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 111.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

¹⁸⁹ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 9. Although many godly ministers would have assented in principle to such an examination, few, apparently, articulated it so clearly and in such detail as Hildersham, see Ian Green, *The Christian’s ABC: Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996), p. 554, and also his, *Print and Protestantism*, p. 300.

¹⁹⁰ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 106.

We have already seen the high view that Hildersham and the godly in general had of pastors and preaching.¹⁹¹ This is amply illustrated through the role ministers took in both fasting and the Lord's Supper. Not only were they to examine and reprove the people privately, but they were also to preach on both occasions. This was to happen before the sacrament was given, for 'no man ... can be worthy and fitte to receive the L. Supper, til he have first enjoyed the ministrie of the word, & bin an ordinarie and fruitful hearer of the same'.¹⁹² For, Hildersham explained, the ordinance 'can never doe us any good till wee have attained unto a true faith, which ordinarily is wrought by preaching'.¹⁹³ On 'dayes of humiliation' and fasting, too, ministers 'applied it [the Word] so effectually, that it wrought marvellously upon the peoples hearts'.¹⁹⁴

The state of an individual's heart was clearly vital as he participated in these ordinances, but it is important to remember that there was also a communal dimension. Love for neighbours and fellow-believers was one of Hildersham's stated prerequisite graces for receiving communion, and he stressed that a major purpose of the sacrament's institution was 'to confirme and increase our love one towards the other', as all joined together in the service.¹⁹⁵ Extraordinary prayer and fasting was needful when God's wrath was poured out because of the sins of a nation or community; until the 'sin of Achan' was dealt with, the whole family, town, or country would be

¹⁹¹ See above, pp. 122-133.

¹⁹² Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 85.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-59.

¹⁹⁴ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 52.

¹⁹⁵ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 96, and see also pp. 24, 94-110. One of the principal grounds for objecting to private communion was that it challenged this sense of the public and corporate expression of fellowship, see p. 43.

afflicted.¹⁹⁶ ‘What hope then we can have to prevaile in our fasts’, lamented Hildersham, ‘while no care is taken to find out Achan?’¹⁹⁷ But, he cautioned, ‘God never smites some, but to warne all’, and those who currently suffered with plague did so chiefly ‘for the instruction, and warning of others’.¹⁹⁸ Charitable giving for the needs of the poorer element of society was an integral part of both exercises; as Hildersham avowed, ‘works of mercy should always be joined with the works of piety ... for the reliefe of the poor members of Jesus Christ’.¹⁹⁹

In neither ordinance were godly ministers entirely at liberty to conduct affairs exactly as they might wish. Both occasions were hedged around by external regulations which limited the freedom of action of men like Hildersham.²⁰⁰ Ideally, they felt that the Lord’s Supper was for the converted only. As Hildersham explained, ‘No man can receive this Sacrament worthily unless he have a true justifying faith’.²⁰¹ Reception at communion was a seal for those who had already believed: ‘not to begin,

¹⁹⁶ The biblical reference can be found in Joshua 7:1-26, where Achan concealed banned items, taken in battle, under the floor of his tent, resulting in severe defeat for the Israelites at Ai. He subsequently confessed to Joshua, and was executed. For use of the metaphor here, see Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 47, 55, 69, 137, and also *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 124, 589.

¹⁹⁷ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 69. He goes on to elaborate that, ‘The idolater is an Achan; and so is the murtherer; and so is the adulterer, and so is the blasphemmer, and so is the drunkard. And there is power not in Joshua onely, but in every officer among us, yea in every man almost to find out our Achans, and bring them to punishment’.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Hildersham, *The Lords Supper*, pp. 132-133. For a similar injunction to be ‘mercifull and bountifull unto the poore’, see Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 26.

²⁰⁰ The Prayer Book, of course, prescribed a liturgy for the eucharist, and the rubric and canons stated that only ‘notorious’ sinners could be excluded from receiving. Hildersham refers to this in his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 187. For more on this issue, see Haigh, ‘Communion and Community’, pp. 722-725. When a national public fast was proclaimed, it was usual to issue instructions about how it should be conducted: in 1625, this was *A Forme of Common Prayer, Together with An Order of Fasting*, and in 1626, *A Forme of Prayer* [STC 16543]. It supplied a liturgy and prayers to be used, and stipulated that ‘there be but one Sermon at Morning prayer, and the same not above an houre long, and but one at Evening prayer of the same length’. Some godly ministers failed to observe these regulations, by including more and longer sermons, and were duly prosecuted, see LRO ID 41/13/58 f. 262. The case, relating to St John Burrows, from Thornton in Leicestershire, is discussed by Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p. 70.

²⁰¹ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, pp. 78-79.

but to confirme faith where it is already begun'.²⁰² At the fast, too, where 'many of these lewd men that are guilty of these foule sins, intrude themselves into our assemblies, and joyne with us in these holy duties', Hildersham reminded his hearers that '*the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination unto the Lord, Prov.15.8*'.²⁰³ This highlights the perpetual balancing act required by puritan ministers who served mixed congregations within the national church. The presence of the ungodly within the same assembly as the faithful provided both an affront and an opportunity. On the one hand, ministers endeavoured to maintain a godly discipline and ensure the purity of ordinances like the eucharist, often resulting in friction as 'formal professors' demanded their 'rights'.²⁰⁴ On the other hand, the attendance of the ungodly afforded great opportunities for education and evangelism. At the fast, Hildersham urged his hearers to make their peace with God, 'and to seeke reconciliation with Him', which could only be achieved by a full and free confession of sin, a resolution to forsake sin, and a striving '(by a living faith) to lay hold on Gods mercy in Christ, and to get His bloud sprinkled upon thy heart'.²⁰⁵ Likewise, before approaching the sacrament, Hildersham endeavoured to 'persuade everyone that professeth himself to be a Christian, to labour for a lively faith'.²⁰⁶ His aim, it is clear, was not to exclude any, but to incorporate all who would espouse a true faith. As always, hypocrisy, or mere outward performance of ritual, was the great opponent of genuine heartfelt religion:

²⁰² Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 79.

²⁰³ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 47. Nevertheless, Hildersham welcomed the attendance of the ungodly at the fast; not only because this could assuage temporal (as opposed to spiritual) judgments, but also for the opportunity it gave for their conversion, see above, pp. 99-100.

²⁰⁴ See Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, pp. 77-78, and also *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 569. For more of Hildersham's views on unworthy reception, see *ibid.*, pp. 112, 265-266, 590. It was usual for him to preach about the Lord's Supper every year as Easter approached.

²⁰⁵ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 20, 21.

²⁰⁶ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 91.

God was ‘an enemy to al sin’, Hildersham proclaimed, ‘especialy to hipocrisy, and the profain and careles using of any holy exercise’.²⁰⁷ But there were words of encouragement and signs for discerning the presence of true faith, for those of tender conscience who feared that they, too, were no more than hypocrites themselves, and did not possess ‘that saving sorrow of Gods elect’.²⁰⁸ Ultimately, though, Hildersham recognised that godly communion was an ideal for which it was worth striving, rather than an achievable expectation; the best that could be hoped for was that his campaign to counteract unbelief and ignorance would bear fruit. Pragmatically, at a later stage, he even seemed to gloss his earlier insistence that a saving faith was a necessary condition for a worthy reception by suggesting that if a ‘competencie of knowledge in the fundamentall Principles of Religion’ was present in a person, he might be ‘with comfort’ admitted to the sacrament, because ‘that man hath in him ... the matter and seed of regeneration’, despite no discernible ‘fruit of the Spirit in him’.²⁰⁹ In the final analysis, though, he could only assure the faithful that if ‘notoriously unworthy’ people were admitted to the sacrament ‘through negligence of the Church and pastor’, this would not deprive them of ‘benefit & comfort’, nor should it be a reason for them to stay away.²¹⁰ Nevertheless, acknowledging the mixed nature of the visible church was not to deny aspiration to the ideal; believers should desire to receive the sacrament in the company of those ‘whose holy profession and godly life we are well perswaded’, because of the corporate pledges of fellowship, and since ‘love and zeale’ were better stirred up ‘by the prayers and example of such as we knowe to be godly,

²⁰⁷ JRUL EM 524, f. 99r.

²⁰⁸ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 130-143, quote at p. 130.

²⁰⁹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 205. He still insists on the caveat that ‘his life be not scandalously wicked’.

²¹⁰ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 11.

then either by the wicked or such as we knowe not at all'.²¹¹ The state of the English church, then, made Hildersham deeply unhappy, but he devoted his best efforts of preaching, catechising and private dealing to achieving further reformation in his local situation. His foremost strategy was to pre-empt the arising of potentially difficult situations by a very proactive pastoral approach.²¹²

Hildersham's theology and praxis was formed in the mid-Elizabethan period, under the influence of such luminaries as Cartwright, Perkins, and Greenham. It was built on a Calvinist foundation of God's sovereignty, glory, grace and providence, and a contrasting awareness of human depravity. His approach was always a practical and pastoral one, as he worked out the implications of these doctrines in the parish situation. Hildersham remained consistent to his roots, despite subtle and powerful counter-influences, delivering an essentially unchanging two-fold message for the faithful and wicked. However, towards the end of his ministry, perceived threats from popery, both at home and abroad, and the rise of Arminianism, lent an increasingly apocalyptic emphasis to his warnings of impending judgment. It was surely no coincidence that the *Lectures upon Psalme LI* contained a significant number of references to the sufferings and faithfulness of the Marian martyrs, and that the theme of his final few sermons was maintaining 'constancy in the true religion'.²¹³ As he confided to friends on his deathbed, his fear was that 'Wolves would ere long come in

²¹¹ Hildersham, *Lords Supper*, p. 13.

²¹² For more on Hildersham's instruction of his congregation at the commencement of his lectureship, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 37-38. The diocesan courts record only one case relating to communion in Ashby during Hildersham's tenure, a failure to pay dues, see above, Chapter 2, p. 43, n. 41.

²¹³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 766-812, quote at p. 767. In the earlier *Lectures upon John*, there are no more than a handful of references to Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, but in *Lectures upon Psalme LI* there are eleven, some referring specifically to Bradford, Glover and Careless, see pp. 142, 152, 255, 267, 325, 461, 468, 475, 686, 733, 792. On p. 475, Hildersham cites actual page numbers in Foxe; he had his own copy of the work, which he bequeathed to his son-in-law, Gervase Lomax, see above, Chapter 1, p. 22, n. 76.

amongst them' and thus 'earnestly exhorted them to continue stedfast in the Truth,
which they had received'.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 154.

CHAPTER 4

THE WORLD OF GODLY SOCIABILITY

a little spark will keep heat, while it is on the hearth with the rest of the fire; but pluck it from the rest, and it will die straight:

every godly man loveth all such as feare God, (*Psalme 15.4.* and delighteth in their company... It shall be a great part of our happinesse in the life to come, to meet together with all the faithfull, and to stand in the assembly of the righteous;

Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 382.

Say not thou art a member of the Church of England, thou art not a member of the Church of France, or of Germany, or of Bohemiah; for all the Churches of the world that professe the same faith and religion are but one body.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 565.

The importance of the interconnections between those sharing a common godly faith has been widely acknowledged by many early modern historians of religion. Indeed, the networks of association that developed have been recognised as one of the defining features of a distinctive puritan culture.¹ Puritans saw themselves as a people set apart, and their fellowship was predicated upon a ‘little flock’ mentality which posited an embattled minority surrounded by the hatred of a wicked world.² Beginning with Patrick Collinson’s seminal work on Elizabethan puritanism, in which he detailed the growth of a movement within the established church, fostered by the universities and nurtured through exercises such as combination lectures and prophesyings, scholars

¹ See, for example, Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (eds.), *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700* (Basingstoke, 1996). Of particular relevance to this issue are Durston and Eales, ‘Introduction: The Puritan Ethos, 1560-1700’, pp. 1-31; and Patrick Collinson, ‘Elizabethan and Jacobean Puritanism as Forms of Popular Religious Culture’, pp. 32-57, which looks at communal religious exercises such as sermon-gadding and fasts.

² For the use of this particular phrase, and these sorts of arguments, see, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 427, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 132, 344, 400, 600, 610, 744.

have continued to explore the nature of godly sociability and its functions.³ Tom Webster, in particular, has shown the significance of the interdependence of godly clerics and, to some extent, laity in the early seventeenth century, and the strength of such collegiality, especially in the south-east.⁴ Polly Ha has argued for the continued existence of a shared presbyterian ideal amongst some of the godly in England, even after the suppression of the classical movement in the 1580s, whereas Tom Freeman has emphasised the role of godly fasting and exorcisms as means of reinforcing communal bonds during the same period.⁵ The significance of pious lay patronage in sustaining the whole edifice of godly communion has been stressed in the work of J. T. Cliffe and Claire Cross, as they have examined the place of influential puritan gentry families and the life of one particularly powerful example of patronage, Henry Hastings, the third Earl of Huntingdon.⁶ More recently, Peter Lake and David Como have drawn attention to a less public but equally influential arena of a puritan underground which flourished, especially in London, through the secret exchange of manuscripts, letters and private meetings, and which included more radical elements within the circles of godly association.⁷

³ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967). See also, *inter alia*, for the later period, John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1700* (Basingstoke, 1998), especially pp. 41-45, 192-197.

⁴ Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement c.1620-1643* (Cambridge, 1997).

⁵ Polly Ha, 'English Presbyterianism, c. 1590-1640' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006); Tom Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in late Elizabethan England', in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c.1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000).

⁶ J. T. Cliffe, *The Puritan Gentry: The Great Puritan Families of Early Stuart England* (London, 1988); Claire Cross, *The Puritan Earl: The Life of Henry Hastings Third Earl of Huntingdon 1536-1595* (London, 1966).

⁷ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy' and the Politics of the Parish in Early Stuart London* (Manchester, 2001); David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, 2004). Hildersham's relationships with the more radical fringes of puritanism will be explored in more detail in Chapter 6.

By exploring the nature and extensiveness of Hildersham's personal connections with his like-minded clerical brethren and lay patrons, this chapter will attempt to use the example of one particular godly minister to help our understanding of how the puritan brotherhood worked, as well as its purposes and effects. Hildersham is a good model to study, in that he is both typical and extraordinary: typical in that he was engaged with the full range of godly activities and associations, but also extraordinary because of his high social status and profile, his position of leadership amongst his peers, and the somewhat idiosyncratic nature of his ecclesiastical career. His longevity also enables us to bring together many disparate elements, and to examine if godly sociability changed in any ways over the 'Jacobethan' and Caroline periods. The varying tensions and threats to godly fellowship, both internal (doctrinal and personal) and external (political and ecclesiastical), which occurred during this time span, should not be overlooked. Focusing on the different levels and vehicles through which Hildersham interacted with his similarly-minded fellows – both formal and informal, public and private, local and national (indeed, international), vertical and horizontal – should provide a complex, coherent and integrated picture of what godly sociability actually meant to someone involved in that world.

1. Earliest Influences and Associations

For Hildersham, having been brought up within a strict Catholic household, the earliest exposure to the world of puritan sociability must have come when he was sent to Saffron Walden School in Essex. He attributed his conversion to the influence of the

school's godly Master, John Disborowe, who ensured that the 'grounds of the Protestant Religion' were clearly taught within the school's curriculum.⁸ No doubt such establishments were instrumental in introducing many boys like Hildersham from gentry families to the principles and practice of the reformed faith, as well as providing opportunities for informal friendship and fellowship.⁹ While historians have rightly stressed the universities' significance as the breeding grounds for a zealous Protestantism and close associations between fellow-students, Hildersham's case reminds us of the important preparatory role of the grammar schools. It seems likely, too, that for Hildersham as a youth, spending time in Essex, that most puritan of

⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 144. John Disborowe (or Desborough, according to Clarke), was a graduate of Trinity College, Cambridge, proceeding BA in 1564-5 and MA in 1568. He became Master of Saffron Walden School in 1573 and was buried in the town on 5 December 1607, see Venn, Vol. 2, p. 44. For more details of the history of Saffron Walden School, see *VCH Essex*, Vol. 2, pp. 518- 525; and anon., *A Short History of Saffron Walden School 1317-1928* (n. p., n. d.), available in Saffron Walden library. In neither of these sources is Hildersham named as one of the school's famous *alumni*. Hildersham's close friend and sometime curate, John Brinsley, who served as schoolmaster at the grammar school in Ashby (1599-1618) published the definitive work on the theory and practice of such establishments; *Ludus Literarius: or The Grammar Schoole* (1612). He later issued a further work on the subject, *A Consolation for our Grammar Schools* (1622).

⁹Sir Nathaniel Barnardiston and Sir Henry Vane were also said to have been converted during their schooldays, see Cliffe, *Puritan Gentry*, p. 16. William Gouge was 'possessed with an holy fear of God' as a scholar at Eton, see Samuel Clarke, 'The Life and Death of Doctor Gouge', in *idem*, *A General Martyrologie* (1677), p. 235. An example of a lasting friendship which begun in school days, can be found between Joseph Hall and Hugh Chomeley, who attended Ashby School together in the 1580s, and who both proceeded to Emmanuel College in 1589. According to Hall's account, they 'were for many years partners of one bed'. Hall went on to become Bishop of Exeter in 1627, and then Bishop of Norwich in 1641; Chomeley was recommended by Hall as master of Blundell's School (although he does not seem to have taken this up), and then, after Hall became diocesan at Exeter, Chomeley was appointed as bishop's chaplain and prebendary in 1628. When Hall came under criticism in the 1640s, Chomeley issued a pamphlet in his defence. For more details, see Levi Fox, *A Country Grammar School: A History of Ashby-de-la-Zouch Grammar School through four centuries 1567 to 1967* (Oxford, 1967), especially pp. 17-38 (quote at p. 20). William Bradshaw also went up from Ashby School to Emmanuel in the same year as the other two, and counted Hall as his 'old, true and loving friend', see Thomas Gataker, 'The Life and Death of Master William Bradshaw', in Clarke's *Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines*, p. 77. For Hildersham's involvement with Ashby School through the feoffees, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 78-84. Of course, all of these younger men (Bradshaw, in particular) would have heard Hildersham preach in Ashby, and been influenced by his brand of spirituality.

counties, would have brought him into contact with a range of godly people, including perhaps his relatives the Barrington family at nearby Hatfield Broad Oak.¹⁰

Hildersham went up to Christ's College, Cambridge, when he was thirteen years old, around 1576. It has been widely recognised that the universities, especially the Cambridge colleges, were the cradles of puritan divinity and also facilitated a network of alliances that were to continue long after the men had graduated. As Collinson has pointed out, the whole idea of a puritan movement was rooted in the soil of the universities.¹¹ Not only were the students immersed in godly learning, exposed to powerful expository preaching, and participants in formal exercises such as 'Commonplace', spiritual bonds were also formed with their peers and tutors through prayer and discussion.¹² This 'sense of belonging to a fellowship and a cause', says Collinson, was 'the stuff of the organised conference movement of the eighties and of the more spontaneous spiritual brotherhood of preachers which was the essence of the puritan 'church within the Church' in the early seventeenth century'.¹³

Cambridge in the late 1570s, when Hildersham arrived, was a place where the influence of the late Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Thomas Cartwright, was

¹⁰ For a more detailed discussion of Hildersham's relationship with the Barringtons, see pp. 187-189, below. It is possible that Richard Hildersham, Arthur's brother, also attended Saffron Walden School and was converted to Protestantism through the same means. Certainly, he too became an active puritan, and steward of the Barrington estates. His relationship with Arthur is considered more fully on p. 189, below.

¹¹ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 122. See also Victor Morgan, *A History of The University of Cambridge*, Vol. II, 1546-1750 (Cambridge, 2004); and S. Bendall, C. N. L. Brooke and P. Collinson, *A History of Emmanuel College, Cambridge* (Woodbridge, 1999).

¹² For the puritan attitude to learning, see John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning, and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1986), especially pp. 106-111.

¹³ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 122.

still very evident.¹⁴ Indeed, it was to Cartwright that, as a young graduate, Hildersham wrote in 1583, seeking advice on his theological studies.¹⁵ That the youthful Hildersham should desire the guidance of Cartwright is evidence of where his spiritual sympathies and preferences already lay. Cartwright's reply which, unlike Hildersham's original letter, has been preserved, has often been regarded as a model for reformed theological study, offering a detailed programme and informed advice. Hildersham appears to have paid close attention to the guidance, which was reflected in his own approach to learning and his emphasis on the centrality of the Bible: Cartwright stresses that 'the study of the Scripture itself ... shall keep his preheminece still, that the study of no other writer, how fruitfull soever, shall shut forth some daily reading or meditation therein'.¹⁶ He goes on to commend an equally balanced perusal of the Old and New Testaments, although he admitted that some books required 'oftener and more diligent study and attentive reading'.¹⁷ On commentators, Cartwright suggests the general principle that 'the new Writers are to be read before the old', and it is Calvin that he especially recommends.¹⁸ Hildersham is urged to keep the letter secret, or 'els let it smell of the fyre', a reminder that Hildersham was already entering that world where the shadow of ecclesiastical suspicion fell, and where caution and restraint were required.

¹⁴ For more on Cartwright, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/4820); A. F. Scott Pearson, *Thomas Cartwright and Elizabethan Puritanism 1535-1603* (Cambridge, 1925); and Polly Ha, 'English Presbyterianism, c. 1590-1640' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006).

¹⁵ Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (eds.), *Cartwrightiana* (London, 1951), pp. 108-115.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110. Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 153, records of Hildersham that, 'In the morning he read constantly a Chapter, whence he gathered some observations, and wrote them in a Book'. For Hildersham's declared intent to rely only on scriptural proofs, rather than those from learned authorities, in his lectures, see below, Chapter 7, pp. 310-311.

¹⁷ Peel and Carlson, *Cartwrightiana*, p. 111.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

This letter, too, is an indication that Cartwright, as well as Richard Greenham, should be considered among Hildersham's earliest and most important mentors.¹⁹ From Cartwright's reply, it is apparent that Hildersham had written to the great man not only 'painfully and carefully', but also in an apologetic and 'bashful' manner.²⁰ Perhaps recognising someone very much in his own mould, Cartwright seems to have been touched by the approach, calling Hildersham his 'Loving Brother' and reassuring him that he has 'no need of pardon' because of 'the common love wherewith our Saviour Christ hath loved us both, and put us in trust with the mystery of his Word'.²¹ In his personal manner and style, as well as in his theology and ecclesiology, we find Hildersham reflecting Cartwright's example. Both men, although consistent nonconformists, sought to give priority to the pastoral preaching of the Word. This correspondence seems to have initiated a real and lasting friendship between the two men, cemented no doubt when both were subjects of the 1590-1 purge by Whitgift on the puritan leadership, and concluding, it would appear, when Hildersham was named as one of Cartwright's literary executors at his death in 1603.²² Hildersham's admiration for, and his connection with, Cartwright gives him a link to the leadership and beginnings of the Elizabethan puritan movement. With his own influence in turn extending to a raft of younger disciples (such as his son Samuel, Julines Herring, and

¹⁹ For example, see Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *'Practical Divinity': The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 31-32. Greenham, of course, also played a formative role in Hildersham's career, which is discussed further below, pp. 158-159.

²⁰ Peel and Carlson, *Cartwrightiana*, p. 109.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 109. The margin apparently gives 'ministry' for 'mystery' in the body of the text.

²² It seems, however, that neither Hildersham nor John Dod, his co-executor, were actually named in the will, see Peel and Carlson, *Cartwrightiana*, p. 9. However, Clarke, who calls Hildersham 'a great admirer, follower, and Friend of Master Thomas Cartwright', states that Cartwright, 'left his papers to Master John Dod and him, to peruse and publish what they thought fit', see 'Life of Hildersam', p. 151.

Simeon Ashe), a chain of continuing tradition was forged that stretches from before the beginning of Elizabeth's reign to the civil war period and beyond.

Christ's College, itself, in the 1570s and 1580s, had a strong puritan element: Collinson identifies thirty-one puritans at the college during this period, including seven Fellows, and refers to the 'celebrated succession' of pupil-mongers there, that is, Edward Dering, William Perkins and Laurence Chaderton.²³ Chaderton, Lake's exemplar of 'moderate' puritanism and Collinson's 'pope of Cambridge puritanism', became a close friend of Hildersham and mentor to his 'intimate Friend', William Bradshaw.²⁴ It seems likely that Hildersham would have been one of the group that met with Chaderton for weekly conference.²⁵ Hildersham and Chaderton later cooperated with each other in the organisation of the Millenary petition and the Hampton Court Conference in 1603-4, at which Chaderton was one of the spokesmen but where Hildersham was excluded.²⁶ Influential men, like Bradshaw, John Cotton, John Preston, Samuel Fairclough, John Davenant, William Barlow and Ezekiel Culverwell, got to know each other through networks that developed at Christ's and more widely. The establishment of the puritan stronghold of Emmanuel College in 1584, of which Chaderton was the first Master, only served to encourage these bonds. Hildersham, at the university for more than ten years, was at the centre of such friendships, being introduced and making introductions, even after he had left the

²³ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 125. For the history of Christ's College, see John Peile, *Christ's College* (London, 1900).

²⁴ Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982); Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 125; Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 151. See also, Spurr, *English Puritanism*, p. 67-72. For Bradshaw, see Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw'.

²⁵ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 127.

²⁶ For a further discussion of these events, see below, pp. 169-171.

town.²⁷ It was through John Ireton, Fellow of Christ's and later rector of Kegworth in Leicestershire, that Hildersham was rescued from despair and the imminent end of his university sojourn after his father had disinherited him; Ireton contacted the Earl of Huntingdon on Hildersham's behalf and thus began the patronage which was to shape the remainder of his career. Another protégé of the earl, Nathaniel Gilby, son of Anthony, came up to Christ's from Ashby in 1578, and must have become acquainted with Hildersham in the ensuing period.

Local, national, and, in some cases, lifelong associations were thus being formed, in which those involved discussed theology, sought and gave advice on manuscripts, negotiated marriage alliances, witnessed business deals, and made recommendations to livings and lectureships. Perhaps most importantly, prayer was requested and promised, and the intercessory bond formed a powerful connection between godly brethren, especially at times of perceived difficulty. This is illustrated by an anecdote relating to the nervous beginnings of Hildersham's preaching career at Cambridge:

The first time he was to Common-place, he was much afraid; but observing that there sate a very godly man (his Friend) on the other side of the Chappel, he thought that that man prayed for him, which much encouraged him.²⁸

Not all university associations, however, were entirely uncomplicated and positive. Despite being chosen for a Fellowship at Christ's, Hildersham's appointment

²⁷ For example, John Preston (1587-1628) attributed his conversion to a Cambridge sermon by John Cotton in 1611. This initiated a close friendship, and Preston was wont to send his pupils to finish their studies in divinity with Cotton at Boston, Lincolnshire. Culverwell, whose sister was married to Laurence Chaderton, married as his second wife a Winifred Hildersham, who was probably Arthur's sister or niece. Winifred's first husband, Edward Barfoot, was brother to Arthur's wife, Ann Barfoot, see Chapter 1, above, p. 20, n. 67. For Fairclough and Davenant, see Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p. 20. For Barlow, see p. 166, n. 66, below.

²⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 145. Clarke explains that a 'Common-place' was 'a Colledge-exercise in Divinity, not different from a Sermon, but in length', p. 145.

was blocked by the master, Dr Barwell, and ‘his Competitor, Master Willet’ was subsequently preferred by the Visitors.²⁹ Nevertheless, there does not appear to have been any personal animosity between Andrew Willet and Hildersham, for Willet was later to praise Hildersham in the dedicatory epistle to his volume on the book of Samuel, calling him ‘Schismaticorum (qui vulgo Brownistae) Malleum’ or ‘The Hammer of the Schismatics, whom they commonly call Brownists’.³⁰ For his part, Hildersham obviously valued Willet’s writings, for Willet’s *Synopsis Papismi* was one of only three books specifically named and bequeathed in Hildersham’s will.³¹ Another contemporary at Christ’s was Francis Johnson, who was to espouse separatism in the 1590s and directly challenge Hildersham’s views on the Church of England.³² However, notwithstanding their ecclesiological disagreement, Johnson still referred to Hildersham as a ‘brother’ and explained to a lady who had been corresponding with him:

I should not by any meanes be drawn to write agaynst any, least of all against him who I understand wrote this letter unto you. For howsoever in these controversies of religion we do in judgment or practice differ one from another, yet for the knowledg I have of him, and the good gifts God hath given him, I do and shall always love him in the Lord.³³

²⁹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, pp. 145-146. Hildersham’s son Samuel was also involved in a later disputed election to a Fellowship, this time at Emmanuel in 1618. Samuel, however, was successful, despite an associated controversy, see Morgan, *University of Cambridge*, p. 360.

³⁰ Andrew Willet, ‘Dedicatory Epistle’, in, *An Harmonie Upon the Second Book of Samuel* (Cambridge, 1614). See also, Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 151; and John Cotton, ‘To the godly Reader’, in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A4.

³¹ LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632).

³² Johnson, *Treatise*. Johnson (1562-1618) proceeded BA from Christ’s in 1581 and MA in 1585, being elected to a Fellowship before Lady Day 1584. At Cambridge, Johnson was a supporter of the ecclesiastical polity of Cartwright, and although expelled from the university for ‘factious preaching’ in 1589, it was not until 1592 that he espoused separatist views, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/14877). For a further consideration of this subject, see Chapter 6, pp. 246-252, below.

³³ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 2.

There has been a suggestion that John Smyth, the so-called ‘se-Baptist’, another Christ’s graduate, may have been Johnson’s tutor but the dates do not correlate; however, he was certainly known to Hildersham who participated in the 1606 Coventry conference with him and others, to discuss withdrawal from the Church of England.³⁴ These early links that began at university help to explain the continued dialogue between men whose views had diverged, but who still considered each other as brethren, whom they hoped to win back through argument and persuasion.

Hildersham’s Cambridge career also provided the connection with Richard Greenham, the celebrated Elizabethan divine, famed for both his literary works and as an exemplar of pastoral ministry.³⁵ Greenham’s establishment of a household seminary for ministerial students at his living at Dry Drayton near Cambridge enabled men like Hildersham to spend time in a parish environment and to gain practical experience of pastoral life. Largely this seemed to have consisted of asking questions of Greenham, related especially to difficult cases of conscience and other thorny theological issues; students then noted down Greenham’s answers, many of which have been collected and preserved as Rylands English Manuscript 524.³⁶ It has been suggested that Hildersham, as one of Greenham’s disciples in the early 1580s, may have been the scribe of this manuscript, mainly on the grounds that other material attributed to him, dating from the same period, can be found in the same collection.³⁷ Even if this is doubtful, it is obvious from the folios authored by Hildersham that he had been a

³⁴ These issues are discussed more fully in Chapter 6, below.

³⁵ See Parker and Carlson, *Practical Divinity*.

³⁶ JRUL, EM 524. Parker and Carlson have reproduced and edited Rylands English Manuscript 524, folios 1-72, as part of their biography of Greenham, see *Practical Divinity*, pp. 129-259.

³⁷ For a discussion on this subject, see, *ibid.*, pp. 34-5. Parker and Carlson suggest that John Hopkins may be a more likely candidate for scribe, but that the issue is unlikely to be resolved with any certainty. The whole manuscript collection contains several different scribal hands, including the items attributed to Hildersham, and appears to be fair copies of original documents.

receptive student of Greenham. The exhortation to two parties contracting together before marriage, the treatise concerning preparation for prayer and its ordering, and the two works on preparation for the Lord's Supper reflect Hildersham's emphasis on practical divinity that owed much to his mentor.³⁸ If these treatises had been copied out by someone else, it is an indication that even at this stage Hildersham's thoughts were respected and considered worthy of preservation. Through Richard Greenham and his seminary, too, came further opportunities for fellowship with another circle of godly clerics. Many of these ministers themselves would, in turn, have taken younger men into their own homes and provided them with a similar practical experience.³⁹ Although there is no direct evidence to show that Hildersham himself went on to run a household seminary in Ashby in any formal sense, it is clear that many junior figures, such as Francis Higginson, Thomas Hooker and Simeon Ashe, did spend time within his household during the course of their careers, and came under his formative influence.⁴⁰

So, already by the age of twenty, we find a man like Hildersham, with no immediate family background of reformed religion, through the avenues of school and university, becoming an accepted part of these networks of godly sociability. Through the influence of such men as Cartwright and Greenham, his ecclesiological and pastoral models had been formed, and he could draw on a large group of similarly-

³⁸ JRUL EM 524 (1581-1584): 'The effect of an exhortation in private to two parties at their contracting before the witnesses, by Maister Hildersam' (f. 75); 'Concerning private reading of the word. Arthur Hildersham' (f. 96b); 'A preparation to the Lords Supper. A. H.' (f. 100); 'A larger preparation to the Lords Supper in form of a Catechism. A. H.' (f. 103).

³⁹ John Cotton, for example, ran a very well-known seminary in Boston, Lincs.

⁴⁰ See Webster, *Godly Clergy*, pp. 10, 22-35.

minded peers for mutual encouragement, support and advice once he entered the ministry. Some of the ways in which this was done will now be explored.

2. Local Associations

It is clear that by the time Hildersham came to Leicestershire in 1587, it was already noted as a puritan centre, largely because of the efforts and presence of Anthony Gilby and Henry, third Earl of Huntingdon.⁴¹ Not only in Ashby but also throughout the county, established and organised means of godly association had existed for some time. According to John Udall, the prophesyings in Leicestershire had been particularly strong, and ‘furthered knowledge greatly’.⁴² By 1576, according to a letter from Aylmer to Grindal, there were prophesyings at Ashby and Leicester, and possibly also at Medbourne. In addition, ‘posting Apostles that go from Shire to Shire, Exercise to Exercise’, provided preaching where there was a lack and linked the various centres throughout the Midlands, including Ashby.⁴³ When Thomas Cooper became Bishop of Lincoln in 1571, his concern for clerical education, his anti-Catholicism and his respect amounting to deference for Gilby, ensured that these exercises continued to enjoy his tacit approval, even during the period of official suppression.⁴⁴ It is evident, too, that although primarily designed to improve preaching, the laity were also

⁴¹ C. D. Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire, 1566- 1633’ (MA thesis, University of Leeds, 1962), provides a detailed survey of affairs in the county. For the background, see also Patrick Collinson (ed.), *Letters of Thomas Wood, Puritan, 1566-1577* (London, 1960). The introduction to this volume shows the importance of the connections between the Marian exiles, such as Gilby and Wood, and their influence on their return to England.

⁴² John Udall, *The State of the Church of England laid open in a Conference*, p. 29, cited in Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, p. 43, and see also p. 63.

⁴³ See *ibid.*, pp. 63, 71-73. One of these travelling apostles seems to have been Eusebius Paget; see also, Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 168-176, for the prophesying movement in general.

⁴⁴ See Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, pp. 63-64.

participating in the Ashby prophesying: to avoid accusations of secrecy, the church doors were left open and the people ‘did of themselves quietly come to pray with us, and to learn some good lessons in god’s schoolhouse’.⁴⁵ Of course, these exercises were meant to assist all of the clergy to be better preachers, but when, as in Leicestershire, they were dominated by puritans, the official fear was that many would be radicalised. Such gatherings did provide a means of association for discussing matters such as subscription, but the fact that only a single Leicestershire minister failed to sign the form of limited subscription in 1584 reveals that this was not necessarily the case.⁴⁶ Hildersham came on the scene at a time when the prophesyings had been suppressed officially, but their legacy must have continued; many of the local ministers remaining in office would have known each other well, and become used to seeking each other’s advice and submitting to each other’s judgments. Moreover, it is apparent that the preaching exercises continued at Ashby, Packington, and over the border in Burton on Trent and Repton into the 1590s and beyond, and that many ministers and lay folk travelled some distances to be present. Hildersham on several occasions in his lectures refers to the presence of clerical brethren in the auditory, and John Darrell, who had based himself in Ashby from 1592, describes a discussion with a group of sixteen ministers, including George More of Calke, after an exercise in the town.⁴⁷ The possibility of undertaking an exorcism was the issue on that occasion, and Darrell’s relation of his dispossessions includes accounts of communal fasting, prayer, and fellowship in houses. Hildersham is described as the mainstay of the lectures at

⁴⁵ BL Add. MS 27632 fos. 49r-49v, ‘The Ashby Remonstrance’, 1576, almost certainly authored by Gilby, quoted in Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, p. 67.

⁴⁶ The single exception was Geoffrey Johnson. John Ireton was a leading signatory. For a discussion of this issue, see Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, pp. 83-85.

⁴⁷ See above, Chapter 2, pp. 47-48.

Burton and Repton, and he also enlisted William Bradshaw's services in these places. Gataker's biography of Bradshaw supplies a detailed description of how the exercises at Ashby, Burton and Repton were conducted:

some one of them preached his hour upon the Scripture propounded the meeting before, and the rest or a certain number of them spent afterward, each one his half hour or thereabout on some other portion of Scripture, one being appointed to moderate, by minding each that spake, if occasion were, of the time, and to close up all with some succinct rehearsal of what had been delivered, together with an additament, if it seemed good, of somewhat of his own.⁴⁸

Through association with Hildersham at the Burton exercise, and after the Wightman episode in the 1600s, Henry Aberley, curate of Burton, moved to Ashby, where he remained for the rest of his life.⁴⁹ Although some of the formal functions of the prophesyings such as examinations of preaching may have been removed, it is clear that other features continued, notably listening to sermons, conferring and sociability. When Hildersham arrived in Ashby in 1587, the enduring presence of Widdowes as vicar would have provided a link with the immediate past. Other local clergy such as Henry Presbury, vicar of nearby Packington from 1558 to 1593, were in the habit of coming in to Ashby to the lectures and consulting with Widdowes at the same time.⁵⁰ John Ireton, too, had been rector of Kegworth since 1581, thus providing another means of continuity, and of introduction for Hildersham with the godly circles in Leicestershire; he, too, was involved in the group that worked with Darrell. Gabriel Rosse, Presbury's successor at Packington, also had puritan sympathies, and such was

⁴⁸ Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 66. Gataker reports that when Bradshaw could be persuaded to take the chair at these meetings, he was called 'The weighing Divine' due to his dexterity in balancing differing opinions.

⁴⁹ For more on Aberley, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 64-65, and below, Chapter 7, p. 289.

⁵⁰ For Henry Presbury, including his association with Widdowes, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 335.

the acknowledgement of Ashby's central role by this time, that he was prepared to countenance his nonconformist parishioners going to Ashby to receive communion there according to their consciences.⁵¹ Hugh Blithe, minister at Appleby, was sufficiently conformable, it seems, to be appointed Archdeacon of Leicester in 1591, but was on good enough terms with Hildersham to leave his son Timothy some books in his will of 1608.⁵² It would seem that by this stage, as a result of his preaching, his social status, and the close relationship he had developed with his peers, Hildersham's leadership of the local religious scene was acknowledged. Indeed, this was interpreted in a negative sense by the High Commission, when they pronounced in 1616 that Hildersham was 'the prime Ring-leader of all the Schismatical persons in that Countrey'.⁵³ This judgment, of course, conveniently overlooked the good relationships he maintained with many that could not in any sense be deemed 'schismatical'.⁵⁴

Fasting provides an interesting case study of a means of godly association that evolved over the years in response to external regulation. Official fasts had been proclaimed since Elizabethan times as a reaction to perceived national crises, but the godly had always insisted that true fasting required more than just a formal performance of outward ritual; real inward repentance combined with heartfelt prayer

⁵¹ For Gabriel Rosse, vicar of Packington from 1603-1610, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', p. 336.

⁵² C. W. Foster, *The State of the Church in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln* (Lincoln, 1926), p. 433. Foster also records that Blithe, a graduate of King's College, Cambridge, was 'a prebendarie in Windsor of the Queene hir Majesties guifte', in 1576, see p. 35. For Blithe's will, see LRO Leics. Wills, Appleby no. 76 (1608). Timothy Hildersham was bequeathed 'foure volumes of Saint Chrysostom'. For a more detailed discussion on Timothy, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 89-91.

⁵³ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150.

⁵⁴ For the broad range of Hildersham's relationships within Ashby, see Chapter 2, above. For a more detailed consideration of his nonconformity and his relationship with the established church, see Chapter 5, below.

was the biblical pattern for seeking God's face, they stressed.⁵⁵ Godly fasting, of both a public and private nature, had thus become a recognised component of puritan spirituality.⁵⁶ However, when, in the 1590s, it became associated with exorcism largely through the activities of the Ashby group centred around Darrell and Hildersham, it had attracted the negative attention of the authorities, and its unlicensed practice was outlawed in the Canons of 1604.⁵⁷ Hildersham, preaching in 1610, could refer to the great era of public godly fasting as something in the past; speaking of the sense of God's presence felt during times of solemn assembly, he concluded, 'This, you that can remember our publike fasts, can witness from your owne experience'.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, in July 1611, he was prepared to admit the continuation of the ordinance, albeit in a reduced and perhaps private application: 'It is true, fasting and prayer is not so much in use as of old it was: yet still is it used by many: and this hath great force to keepe away Gods judgements'.⁵⁹ There is much evidence that, indeed, the godly did not abandon communal fasting completely after 1604, with or without the licensing of a sympathetic diocesan authority; in Leicestershire, a series of presentments for unlicensed public fasting are a testimony to the continuance of the practice, as well as

⁵⁵ For an analysis of national fasts in the Elizabethan period, see C. J. Kitching, "'Prayers fit for the time": fasting and prayer in response to national crises in the reign of Elizabeth I', in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *Monks, Hermits and the Ascetic Tradition, Studies in Church History* 22 (1985), pp. 241-250. See also the sermon on fasting in, *Sermons or Homilies appointed to be read in Churches in the time of Queen Elizabeth, of Famous Memory* (London, 1817 edn.). For a further discussion on Hildersham and fasting, see above, Chapter 3, pp. 138-146.

⁵⁶ For the historiography related to fasting, see above, Chapter 3, p. 139, n. 180.

⁵⁷ See Canon 72, in Gerald Bray (ed.), *The Anglican Canons 1529-1947* (Church of England Record Society 6, Woodbridge, 1998), p. 363. For a discussion of the connection between fasting and exorcism, see Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance', pp. 34-63. This issue will be considered more fully in Chapter 6, below.

⁵⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 295.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 429.

to official opposition to it in the 1620s.⁶⁰

Notwithstanding, when plague struck in 1625, the year of Charles I's accession, a nationally-proclaimed fast provided an opportunity for the godly licitly to reclaim and reinvent this means of sociability. Hildersham, newly restored to his lectureship in Ashby after a suspension of nine years, preached a series of seventeen fast sermons.⁶¹ It is clear that, in what was for him a perilous test of his conformity, he was careful to do everything literally by the 'book' and also praised the king for calling the fast; however, it is also apparent from the contents of the sermons that what he was advocating was very evidently godly fasting.⁶² It was not the same, of course, as the old voluntary fasts, because everyone was obligated to attend, and Hildersham had to rebuke some of the godly members who obviously considered the presence of the profane an hindrance to their prayers:

Yet in publique and generall calamities they may be enjoyned to keepe a fast that have no such measure of grace in them. Yea it hath greatly furthered the efficacy of the prayers of Gods own people when in such a case all have come (tag and rag, as we say) to joyne with them in this service.⁶³

For Hildersham, as we have seen, the attendance of the unconverted was an evangelistic opportunity and he directs them to the need for genuine repentance and

⁶⁰ For an account of the controversy over fasting in Leicestershire, and presentments for unlawful fasts at Croft, Burrow, Thornton, Woodhouse, Frowlesworth, Wigston and Leicester during the 1620s, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', pp. 189-195. It appears that Pregon, the bishop's registrar, was sympathetic to the puritan position, but he was opposed by a faction grouped around Sir John Lambe. On a national level, Robert Bolton attributed the failure of the Spanish Match to the fervent fasting and prayer of the godly, see Bolton, *Threefold Treatise* (1634), p. 36, cited in Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p. 66.

⁶¹ Eight of these can be found in Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier* (1633), and the other nine are the first sermons in his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*.

⁶² The book in question was *A Forme of Common Prayer, Together with An Order of Fasting*, issued by royal authority in 1625. For Hildersham's praise of the authorities, and his endorsement of the official fast liturgy, see *Fasting and Praier*, pp. 37, 42, 46, 65. For a discussion of the content of his fast sermons, see above, Chapter 3, pp. 138-146.

⁶³ Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 63.

sorrow over sin.⁶⁴ So working within the external framework of the official exercise, he is able to invest the form with nuances of godly meaning, and also to provide a forum for communal association that operated on different levels.

Preaching, exercises, and fasting, then, supplied opportunities for the godly to fellowship locally, while the machinery of diocesan organisation itself provided other occasions for spiritual intercourse.⁶⁵ Visitations, church courts, and meetings within the Leicester archdeaconry and the Lincoln diocese as a whole, were times when people met together. It should not be forgotten that for much of the time, especially in the early days of his ministry, Hildersham was able to operate within the episcopal framework, protected as he was by a powerful patron and a sympathetic bishop. Many of those who went on to hold office within the church had been at university together, and in the late sixteenth century, at least, generally shared a common Calvinist theology. Thus, Hildersham could count as his friends men such as Bishops Joseph Hall of Exeter and Norwich and William Barlow of Lincoln, as well as Archbishops Ussher and Abbot.⁶⁶ At a local level, Hildersham served on a diocesan commission in 1599 set up to examine witnesses in the case of Anthony Nutter, rector of Fenny

⁶⁴ See Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, p. 117, and above, Chapter 3, pp. 143-144.

⁶⁵ Hildersham's relationship with the established church is considered in more detail in Chapter 5, below.

⁶⁶ For Joseph Hall, see p. 151, n. 9, above. In 1612 (?), James Ussher can be found relaying Hildersham's request to be remembered to Luke Challoner, one of his colleagues in Trinity College, Dublin. It appears that Hildersham and Ussher must have met up recently, probably in London, see C. R. Elrington and J. H. Todd (eds.), *The Whole Works of the Most Rev. James Ussher*, Vol. 15 (Dublin, London, 1829-64), p. 74. I am grateful to Professor Alan Ford for this reference. Barlow and Hildersham had apparently been friends from Cambridge days, and in a letter of 1612 to the Earl of Huntingdon, explaining that it was not in his power to protect Hildersham further, Barlow writes of Hildersham, 'for in truth I love him' and that he 'knows of mine heart and affection', HEH, HA2, transcribed in HMC, 78 *Hastings MSS*, Vol. II (HMSO, 1928), p. 55, and on microfilm as 'The Hastings Collection of Manuscripts from the Huntington Library. Part One: Correspondence 1477-1701'; see also, Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990), pp. 225-226. George Abbot, too, though unable to support Hildersham against the king's 'indignation', writes to the earl in 1613 that he would 'bee most glad to receive him' if he subscribed, HEH, HA2.

Drayton, who had been accused of denying communion to a parishioner.⁶⁷ Ironically, the drive against nonconformity in 1604-1605 brought together a group of men at a diocesan level who had qualms about subscription; thirty-three ministers in total appeared over the course of nine hearings held between 3 October 1604 and 16 January 1605 and on subsequent similar occasions. Doubtless they had opportunities to meet and discuss their position outside the formal proceedings, and some perhaps travelled together on the road.⁶⁸ This solidarity is borne out by the petition they drew up and signed, presented to the king at Hinchinbrooke in 1604/5.⁶⁹ The real sense of unity in the face of official opposition must have made the later defection by one of the group, John Burgess, who not only embraced conformity but wrote a book defending it, particularly bitter. His protestations about his earlier participation obviously felt like a betrayal of friendship to Hildersham, who, it seems, ‘with great regrate & greif’, felt the need to set the record straight, even during his final illness.⁷⁰ To his ‘fellow Brother; Doctor Burgesse’, Hildersham, ‘upon his sicke bed’, protested, ‘his conscience knows, that I know he speaks untruly’.⁷¹

⁶⁷ LRO ID 41/4/174, and see also Chalmers, ‘Puritanism in Leicestershire’, pp. 100-102. Anthony Nutter, rector of Fenny Drayton from 1582-1605, was a fellow nonconformist, who had appeared before the Star Chamber in 1592, and was suspended with Hildersham in 1605.

⁶⁸ Foster, *State of the Church*, pp. 363-371.

⁶⁹ *Abridgement*. See also B. W. Quintrell, ‘The Royal Hunt and the Puritans, 1604-1605’, *JEH*, 31:1(1980), pp. 41-58.

⁷⁰ See Thomas Hooker, ‘Preface’, in William Ames, *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies in Gods Worship* (Amsterdam, 1633). Hooker claimed that Hildersham had left his comments in writing, ‘under his owne hand upon record, which I now have by me’ and that ‘These be the dying words of that deare servant of God [Hildersham], as I have them to shoue in black and white’.

⁷¹ *Ibid.* Hildersham apparently refuted Burgess’s claim on page 19 of the preface to his *An Answer Rejoynd* (1631) that he had ‘trusted too much to the quotations of the *Abridgement*’ by noting that this was ‘manifestly false’, since the timing of the publication of the *Abridgement* made this claim impossible. Hildersham also rejected Burgess’s assertion on page 20 that he had originally been chosen as one of the disputants at Hampton Court, for ‘Who will imagine, they would ever chosen him to be one of the 3 to dispute for them, if he had professed to them at that tyme, that he had nothing to say against the unlawfulness of them [the ceremonies]’. For more on Burgess, see below, Chapter 5, p. 229.

As well as these friendships with peers, Hildersham was regarded increasingly as a patriarchal figure on the local scene, which ensured that his influence continued despite the suspensions of later years. Younger men like Francis Higginson, son of John Higginson, rector of Claybrooke, and sometime lecturer in Leicester, sought him out and was persuaded to nonconformity by his counsels.⁷² By 1630, Hildersham figured so prominently in the collective mindset of the local godly that he even featured in the nocturnal subconscious of one of them. William Morton, a Leicester preacher, related his dream of 19 May 1630 in which he and John Bryan, another Leicester lecturer, were arrested for murder; ‘well’, he continued, ‘within a while came Mr Brettaine of our College to visit me and tells me that Mr Hildersham the elder had bin labouring what he can for me’.⁷³ But Hildersham’s local connections were not limited to the boundaries of Leicestershire. As we have seen, Ashby’s geographical proximity to Staffordshire, Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire meant that he was equally well known in these areas. Men like Anthony Nutter, who was a member of the Warwickshire classis centred on Southam, provided a link with that area, and Gilpin, rector of Brinklow in the same county, in old age ‘loved dearly to tell

⁷²Higginson, educated at Jesus and St John’s Colleges in Cambridge, became vicar of Claybrooke, Leicestershire, where his father had previously been minister, about 1615. After his arrival, he came under the influence of Hildersham and his views on nonconformity. By 1618 he had moved to Leicester to serve as lecturer at St Nicholas’ church, a centre of Leicester nonconformity. During 1619-20 he became caught up in a dispute with John Walcote, prebendary of St Margaret’s, Leicester, and a leading Arminian, over a range of nonconformist offences. By 1627, Higginson had been deprived, but Bishop Williams allowed him to continue preaching both at Leicester and Belgrave where there were no resident incumbents. However, he became increasingly discontented under renewed pressure from the authorities, and offered his services to the Massachusetts Bay Company, sailing for Salem in April 1629, where he died in August 1630, see, C. E. Welch, ‘Early Nonconformity in Leicestershire’, *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 37 (1961), pp. 34-38, and *ODNB* (ref: odnb/13237). See also Chapter 7, below, pp. 296-297.

⁷³ PRO, SP. 16, 540 (iv), p. 446, cited in Welch, ‘Early Nonconformity’, p. 39, which supplies the information that William Morton, probably a Leicester man, became a preacher at Leicester after graduating from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge. He lodged with John Angell, a pupil of Francis Higginson at St Nicholas’ parish, Leicester. In 1634 he became town lecturer of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

stories' of his acquaintance with 'those eminent men Mr. Arthur Hildersham, Mr. John Ball, Mr. John Dod, Mr. Lancaster, and others of that stamp.'⁷⁴

3. National Associations

The extensive networks of godly connections that Hildersham had built up from his university years and his local activities provided the basis for a wider, national fraternity. There were a number of ways in which this brotherhood was fostered, and two means in particular, conferences and letter-writing, will be considered here. The two were, of course, often connected; the organisation of conferences required correspondence to be sent beforehand and often generated letters in the aftermath, while missives were also sent when face to face contact was not possible. Both illustrate the importance of dialogue and fellowship to the godly community, and the strength of its ties. Patronage, another vehicle which allowed the faithful to support each other, will also be explored.

Conferences were held between godly members at many levels, but the largest and most well-known of those in which Hildersham participated were those associated with the Millenary Petition and the Hampton Court Conference of 1603-4. Here, the focus will be on the organisational machinery required to gather the necessary information and mobilise support to buttress the campaign, rather than the subject matter of the initiatives.⁷⁵ That Hildersham, along with Stephen Egerton and Edward Fleetwood, was 'chosen, and chiefly instructed to manage that important businesse, to

⁷⁴ Samuel Palmer, *The Nonconformist's Memorial*, Vol. II (second edn., 1777), pp. 481-482.

⁷⁵ Some of the concerns that motivated the petitioners are considered in detail in Chapter 5, below, pp. 203-223.

prosecute the Petitions, to solicit the cause; and if required, to dispute it', indicates that by this time he was regarded as one of the leading lights of puritanism.⁷⁶ Exactly why Hildersham was selected and by whom is not specified; it may have been his strategic location in the Midlands, the involvement of Sir Francis Hastings on the political side, Hildersham's logical mind, or his extensive connections. Whatever the case, and possibly all these factors contributed, Hildersham must have been very busy in the summer of 1603 and subsequently, soliciting signatures, collecting and collating information about the state of the church. A survey for the deanery of Doncaster was found amongst his papers, and the survey of the church in Staffordshire has also been attributed to him.⁷⁷ He was also one of the thirty men at the assembly of puritan ministers representing the counties, which met parallel to the main Hampton Court Conference, and was one of the three men, along with Egerton and Fleetwood, who communicated the instructions of that assembly to their representatives there.⁷⁸ Hildersham would have been one of the three spokesmen at the conference proper, he declared, if 'the King himself, had not expressly excepted against him'.⁷⁹ Despite this and the largely disappointing outcome, the whole episode provided a significant

⁷⁶ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 146. For more on the process leading up to Hampton Court, and the conference itself, see Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 448-467; *idem*, 'The Jacobean Religious Settlement: The Hampton Court Conference', in Howard Tomlinson (ed.), *Before the English Civil War* (Basingstoke, 1983), pp. 27-51; Frederick Shriver, 'Hampton Court Re-visited: James I and the Puritans', *JEH*, 33:1 (1982), pp. 48-71; and Arnold Hunt, 'Laurence Chaderton and the Hampton Court Conference', in Susan Wabuda and Caroline Litzenger (eds.), *Belief and Practice in Reformation England: A Tribute to Patrick Collinson from his Students* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 207-228. For the text of the Millenary Petition itself, see Bray (ed.), *Anglican Canons 1529-1947*, pp. 817-819.

⁷⁷ BL MS Add. 4293, fol. 41, labelled 'out of Mr. Hildersham's papers – paper 9th', cited in Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 503, n. 18. The Staffordshire survey is also cited by Collinson, from the original in DRW, which was published by Albert Peel as, 'A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire in 1604', *English Historical Review*, 26:102 (1911), pp. 338-352.

⁷⁸ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, p. 456.

⁷⁹ Thomas Hooker, in his Preface to Ames, *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies*, quotes from 'notes' he had, made by Hildersham in his final illness, to counter allegations made by John Burgess, see p. 167, above.

opportunity for the godly leadership to meet and confer, although under pressure differences of opinion emerged. The seven hundred and fifty signatures to the petition, gathered hastily, were an indication of the strength of puritan feeling across the country, and the potential size of the constituency for godly clerical sociability at that time.

It is worth noting at this point the importance of London itself to the operation of any kind of puritan movement, whether overt or underground. With its system of lectureships and connections to its political supporters in parliament and at court, London remained the centre of national puritan networks.⁸⁰ In the months leading up to Hampton Court, Hildersham would surely have had to spend time in the capital, as he did during the periods of his suspension, especially when he was in hiding from the judgment of the High Commission, after November 1616. Clarke records that he concealed himself 'for a long time in the City'; that 'his adversaries could not meet with him' is testimony to the web of loyalty that existed. These networks closed ranks to those they did not recognise, so that Hildersham could disappear seemingly without trace into an underground world of puritan secrecy.⁸¹ And yet John Hartley, one of the elders of the English Congregation in Leiden, was, during this time, able to discover Hildersham's whereabouts, and deliver letters to him.⁸² Hildersham's patron, Katharine Rediche, had a house in Hampstead, where he spent some time, falling seriously ill of a fever there in August 1624. He was also a close friend of Stephen Egerton of Blackfriars, one of the leading puritan ministers in the city. It was

⁸⁰ For the lectureships, see Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent, 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970).

⁸¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 150. For more on the overtures of the church at Leiden, see p. 194, below.

Hildersham, 'being in company with some of the better sort of the Inhabitants of Black-Friars, who complained of their want' of a preaching minister, who recommended William Gouge as one 'whom he judged very fit for them' in 1608.⁸³ This reveals his familiarity with affairs in London, as well as the way in which the networks were activated. The circle around Prince Henry, too, was for a time to offer real hope for the future to the godly, and Hildersham, it seems, was well-acquainted with that set. One of the links here was Sir Robert Darcy, 'a Kentish Knight, a very religious Gentleman', who had married Alexander Rediche's elder daughter, Grace. Darcy was 'in great favour and repute with that Illustrious Prince Henry, of rare parts, and great hopes, of whom this land was not worthy'.⁸⁴ Thomas Gataker relates how, as a young lecturer at Lincoln's Inn, preaching afternoon sermons against Catholicism, two of his audience, the 'religious knight' Sir Robert Darcy and the 'young Lord Harrington' were impressed, got hold of his sermon notes, and showed them to Prince Henry, then keeping his court at St James's. In response, Henry invited Gataker to come and preach before him, and used Gataker's 'worthy friend Mr Hildersham' to convey and press the invitation. In the event Gataker felt too 'bashful' to accept.⁸⁵

⁸³ Clarke, 'Life of Gouge', p. 238. See also Seaver, *Puritan Lectureships*, pp. 225-6; and Nicholas Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism c. 1530-1700* (Manchester, 2001), p. 116. Tyacke calls the parish of St Anne's, Blackfriars, 'a veritable epicentre of Puritan activity in the early years of King James'. Egerton, who had been at Blackfriars since 1583, gave up his lectureship there in 1607, due to his nonconformity, but continued as curate until his death in 1622. Gouge, a less extreme nonconformist, remained at Blackfriars until 1653.

⁸⁴ Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 62. This biography, p. 62, supplies more information about Darcy, including that after his marriage to Grace Rediche, 'a very gracious gentlewoman according to her name, not inferiour to her Husband, either in piety or in sincerity of affection to Master Bradshaw', he lived with his in-laws at Newhall until the death of his father. He had an extensive library, to which Bradshaw was given free access. He died in 1618. For more on the Rediche family and their patronage of Hildersham, see pp. 190-193, below.

⁸⁵ Thomas Gataker, *A Discours Apologetical* (1654), p. 37. For more on Prince Henry, see Roy Strong, *Henry Prince of Wales: England's Lost Renaissance* (London, 1986).

But London was by no means the only place where the godly met each other. Collinson calls the Hampton Court Conference ‘the end of a movement’, but puritans continued to meet to debate specific issues, albeit often in smaller, more dispersed groups.⁸⁶ One such conference in which Hildersham participated was held in 1606 at the Coventry home of Lady Isobel Bowes, to discuss the issue of separation from the church. Others present included John Dod and Richard Bernard, as well as the more radical John Robinson, John Smyth and the layman Thomas Helwys.⁸⁷ Later conferences included ones to consider the validity of emigration, and although Hildersham had died the year before such a meeting in 1633, his contribution to the debate was not forgotten, nor his influence with men like Cotton and Higginson.⁸⁸ Hildersham was not directly involved with the feoffees for the impropriations movement of the 1620s, but he was clearly well-informed and supportive of the steps being taken, as evidenced by references in his lectures.⁸⁹

These associations were facilitated and underpinned by a huge volume of correspondence. It is almost a commonplace to note that letters were a prime means of

⁸⁶ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 428-467.

⁸⁷ For Lady Isabel Bowes, see Christine M. Newman, “‘An Honourable and Elect Lady’: the Faith of Isabel, Lady Bowes”, in Diana Wood (ed.), *Life and Thought in the Northern Church*, Studies in Church History Subsidia 12 (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 407-419. For more on the conference, see below, Chapter 6, p. 253.

⁸⁸ See Webster, *Godly Clergy*, p. 156. This conference, at the home of Henry Whitfield, involved various ministers, including Thomas Hooker and John Cotton.

⁸⁹ See Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 359, 479. For more on the feoffees for the impropriations, a committee consisting of clergy, lawyers and merchants set up in the mid 1620s to raise money to buy back impropriated church tithes, see Patrick Collinson, ‘England and International Calvinism 1558-1640’, in Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism 1541-1715* (Oxford, 1985), pp. 208-209; and Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism*, pp. 121-122. A prosecution in the Court of Exchequer in 1632-33 successfully claimed that the reacquired impropriations were not returned to the parishes concerned, but that the money had been used to hire preachers. Tyacke (p. 121) quotes Laud’s diary on the subject of the dissolved feoffees: ‘they were the main instrument for the Puritan faction to undo the Church’ and also that ‘most of the men they put in were persons disaffected to the discipline, if not the doctrine, too, of the Church of England’. Hildersham’s friend, William Gouge, was one of the leaders of this fund-raising initiative (see Clarke, ‘Life of Gouge’, p. 241), as were Richard Sibbes, John Davenport, and John White of Dorchester.

establishing and sustaining social and family networks. The godly, especially, seemed to have been prolific letter-writers, and many examples of such epistles survive, covering a variety of themes such as pastoral advice, personal piety, theological discussion and practical issues like marriage arrangements.⁹⁰ There is little doubt that Hildersham engaged in this sort of epistolary activity, but any edition of his collected correspondence would be a very slim volume indeed; unfortunately only one original holograph letter from him is extant, and only a handful of letters to him have been preserved.⁹¹ Whether a similar fate befell his letters as those of Bradshaw, a 'bundle' being 'torn by Rats in his absence', or they were deliberately destroyed because of their sensitive nature, or simply have been lost over time, is not clear.⁹² Nevertheless, from the fragmentary remains of Hildersham's correspondence it is possible to construct a fairly representative picture of how the godly used this form of communication.

⁹⁰ Many such letters have been collected and published, for example, Sargent Bush, Jr. (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Cotton* (North Carolina, 2001); Arthur Searle (ed.), *Barrington Family Letters 1628-1632* (London, 1983); Collinson, *Letters of Thomas Wood*; Claire Cross (ed.), *The Letters of Sir Francis Hastings 1574-1609* (Frome, 1969); N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds.), *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter*, Vols. I and II (Oxford, 1990 and 1991). Edward Dering, Lady Mary Vere and Samuel Rutherford were other notable exponents of the genre.

⁹¹ BL Egerton MS 2645 f. 156, Hildersham's letter to his relative Lady Barrington of March 1630; BL Add. MS 4275 f. 273, letter from Humphrey Fenn to Hildersham, undated; BL Add. MS 4276 f. 157, letter from Walter Travers to Hildersham, March 1625; BL Add. MS 4275 f. 48, letter of Robert Bolton to Hildersham, 10 April 1628; BL Add. MS 4275 f. 154, letter of John Cotton to Hildersham, 1628 (?). A letter from Thomas Cartwright to Hildersham of 1583/4 exists in two copies, one in Corpus Christi College, Oxford, MSS. ccxciv. 137-146 (a copy of the first page also in the same collection, cccxii. 154), and what Peel and Carlson reckon may be the original in Trinity College Dublin, MSS. 295. This letter is reproduced in Peel and Carlson, *Cartwrightiana*, pp. 109-115; for further discussion see p. 153, above. A letter from Hildersham to a 'gentlewoman' is quoted and answered by Francis Johnson in his *Treatise*; for a detailed consideration of the issues raised see Chapter 5, pp. 204-209. Clarke's 'Life of Hildersham' quotes part of a letter of 1615 from John Preston to Hildersham, and another from Cotton of 1629, see pp. 151-153.

⁹² Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 75.

That the seeking and giving of spiritual advice was a key function of letter-writing has already been seen in the letter of Cartwright to Hildersham.⁹³ This was, apparently, also the reason for the gentlewoman penning her epistle to Hildersham from prison in the 1590s; she sought the guidance of a respected godly minister on the matter of whether it was right to separate from the Church of England.⁹⁴ The less experienced, unsure, perhaps lay, Christian, would seek the counsel of someone known to be more mature and learned in the Scriptures to resolve their own doubts or uncertainties. In this particular case, in which Hildersham's reply to 'Mrs N' was published by Johnson, it does not seem as though the lady was actually acquainted with Hildersham, but only knew of his repute in godly circles. Nevertheless, she was confident to approach him, considering him to be a member of that invisible brotherhood that recognised each other.⁹⁵ This was also the case with Robert Bolton, who wrote to Hildersham on 10 April 1628, beginning his letter, 'tho I bee not knowne unto you, yet I love & reverence your blessed & worthy partes'.⁹⁶ Both of these were private letters, but if the matter dealt with was of a more general interest, as with the whole issue of whether or not to separate from the church, such manuscripts were frequently passed around within the godly community, with copies often being made. Obviously this happened with Hildersham's reply to Mrs N, for Francis Johnson took

⁹³ See p. 153, above. This thread is also very apparent in the correspondence of John Cotton: see, for example, Bush, *Correspondence of John Cotton*, pp. 105-108, 113-118, 126-128, 181-185, 188-192.

⁹⁴ Johnson, *Treatise*.

⁹⁵ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, p. 7, contains the very helpful definition of puritanism 'as that which puritans saw in each other'.

⁹⁶ BL Add. MS 4275 f. 48. Robert Bolton (1572-1631) was born in Blackburn, Lancs., and a graduate of Lincoln College, Oxford. He was over thirty before he was converted, and not ordained until he was thirty-five. He spent twenty years in the parish of Broughton, Northants. He was the author of several popular godly works, including, *A Discourse about the State of True Happinesse* (1611); *Some Generall Directions for a Comfortable Walking with God* (1625); *Instructions for a Right Comforting of Afflicted Consciences* (1626); and *Four Last Things: Death, Judgement, Hell and Heaven* (1633).

it on himself to refute it point by point, and also to make it public by printing it without Hildersham's authorisation. It is also interesting to see how this movement from the private to the public sphere occupied by letters was taken one step further when the form was used to address directly a wider audience, through the genre of the published 'open letter'.⁹⁷ Of course, these works were more like a treatise than a true letter, but they tapped in to the familiarity and respect accorded to the epistolary tradition in godly piety.

The implications of a tender conscience naturally preoccupied many puritans, and they often wrote requesting or promising prayerful support in times of difficulty, as well as seeking practical advice about what course of action to take. Thus, Humphrey Fenn's letter, addressed 'to my verie rever' & beloved brother Mr Arthr Hildersam, preacher of Gs word at Ashby', refers to a form of words to be used in his licence so that it contained 'only that which agrees with the word of God'.⁹⁸ Here the two men are grappling with casuistry, trying to see if they could square their consciences with the subscription required by the established church. Above all, Fenn wished to avoid 'such Romish stuffe, fitter for that strumpet than the spouse of Chr[is]t'. The problems arising from nonconformity also featured in Hildersham's letter to Lady Barrington of March 1630, when he laments that, 'Now is the tyme come wherin not my selfe only but all of my judgment are cast out as men utterly

⁹⁷ Several of these 'open letters' feature in Ian Green's list of best-sellers, in his *Print and Protestantism in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2000), Appendix I, for example, Robert Boyle, *Some Motives and Incentives to the Love of God* (1659); Stephen Crisp, *An Epistle to Friends* (1666); Thomas Delaune, *A Plea for the Non-Conformists* (1684); John Eachard, *The Grounds and Occasions of the Contempt of the Clergy* (1670); Clement Ellis, *The Gentile Sinner; or England's Brave Gentleman* (1670); Elizabeth Joceline, *The Mothers Legacie, to her Unborne Childe* (1624); Dorothy Leigh, *The Mothers Blessing: or, the Godly Counsaile of a Gentle-Woman* (1616); John Sprint, *The Christian Sword and Buckler* (1623); William Wake, *Preparation for Death* (1687).

⁹⁸ BL Add. MS 4275 f. 223 (undated). For more on Humphrey Fenn, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/9280) and Chapter 2, above, p. 35, n. 11 and Chapter 5, below, pp. 230-231.

unprofitable and unfit to [give] any further service in his church'.⁹⁹ Quite possibly further letters dealing with such a sensitive and controversial topic were deliberately destroyed, as Cartwright had urged Hildersham in his letter of 1583.

Godly ministers often encouraged each other to publish their sermons or treatises, and again in Hildersham's correspondence this subject emerges as an important reason for writing. Both John Preston's letter, and the one by John Cotton, quoted by Clarke in his 'Life of Hildersham', deal with this issue. Preston's letter to Hildersham, dated 28 November 1615, expresses the opinion that the lectures on the fourth chapter of John's gospel should be published: 'for putting them to the Presse, I do not only think that they are worthy of it, but so far as any intreaty of mine might prevail, I should press you to it, as depriving Gods Church of a very great Benefit, if you should refuse.'¹⁰⁰ Cotton, in a letter to Hildersham from Boston in February 1629, apparently reported 'the great satisfaction' many Dutch readers had got from reading copies of these lectures, and passed on the entreaties of 'Timotheus Van Ul-eren' that Hildersham 'put forth his Sermon on Psal. 51. and other his lucubrations.' Cotton added his own persuasion:

be intreated to hearken to the desires of so many at home and abroad, and give them leave to be doing good, whilst the rest are preparing. You have cause to love the lord your God with all your might, and therefore, since those Sermons might be shewing your love to God in working his work, before their fellows, do not hold back any part of their Service to the Church, for the present time.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ BL Egerton MS 2645 f. 156. This letter is also reprinted in Searle (ed.), *Barrington Family Letters*, pp. 61-62.

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 152. In fact, it was to be another fourteen years before the *Lectures upon John* were first published.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 152. For more on Van Vleteren, see p. 195, below.

Clarke then reports that, ‘This his Request he Renewed, in another Letter of July 23. 1629’.¹⁰² The sending of a Preface he had written to the *Lectures upon John*, requested by Hildersham, had been the reason for an earlier letter from Cotton, in which he had expressed the hope that this,

might be of some use to stir up yonge men like my selfe, to a more advised and fruitefull Reading of those labours of yours, wch I doubt not will much increase the fruite of your Reckoning, when you are gathered to Rest.¹⁰³

Sometimes correspondence was used to transmit news of remarkable or strange providences, and a series of letters were written, circulating the information widely amongst the godly fraternity. One rather curious example, in which Hildersham is reported to have participated, is a sequence of eye-witness accounts and epistles originating in the spectacle of a groaning ash tree in Brampton, Lincolnshire, in 1606:

I have a Letter by me, saith Mr. *Clark*, dated *July 7. 1606.* written by one Mr. *Bovy*, to a Minister in *London*, where he thus writes: ‘Touching News, you shall understand, That Mr. *Sherwood* hath received a Letter from Mr. *Arthur Hildersham*, which containeth this following Narrative: That at *Brampton* in the Parish of *Torksey*, near *Gainsborough* in *Lincolnshire*, an Ash-Tree shaketh both in the Body and Boughs thereof, and there proceeds from thence sighs and groans, like those of a Man troubled in his sleep, as if it felt some sensible torment. Many have climbed to the top thereof, where they heard the groans more plainly than they could below. One among the rest being atop, spoke to the Tree; but presently came down much astonished, and lay groveling on the Earth speechless for 3 hours, and then reviving, said, *Brampton, Brampton*, thou art much bound to pray. The Author of this News is one Mr. *Vaughan*, a Minister, who was there present, and heard and saw these Passages, and told Mr. *Hildersham* of it.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 152.

¹⁰³ BL Add. 4275 f. 154. This letter is also reprinted in Bush (ed.), *Correspondence of John Cotton*, pp. 124-125. Bush suggests a date of Spring 1628 for the letter.

¹⁰⁴ Nathaniel Crouch [R. B.], *Admirable Curiosities, Rarities, and Wonders in England, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1682), pp. 137-138. An illustration of the tree appears facing p. 188. I am grateful to

Subsequently the Earl of Lincoln ordered one of the boughs of the tree to be cut off and a hole to be bored in the trunk, but the incomprehensible voice continued unabated. Beginning with 'Mr Vaughan' who first witnessed the tree, the account passes through five hands before reaching 'Mr Clark'. The episode illustrates how news could quickly be spread, but it also shows the stature of Hildersham himself within the community. His role in the letter-writing saga was obviously important to the narrator in validating the truth-claims of his story, as an authority who could be trusted.

Practical matters such as domestic visits, money, gifts and marriage arrangements also featured in Hildersham's correspondence, as was typical of the genre. In Hildersham's letter to Lady Barrington, he thanks her for the gift of a 'fair silver bowle' and all her remembrances of him.¹⁰⁵ He also mentions sending her a copy of his *Lectures upon John*, which he felt bound to do in return for 'the many kindnesses which I have of old received', both from herself and her late husband.

Unable to visit her for the past five years, due to 'the employment I have had heer in

Professor Alexandra Walsham for bringing this reference to my attention. Apart from Hildersham, it is difficult to be sure about the identity of the other participants: the marginal reference to the source is to Samuel Clarke, but the specific reference in his writings has not been located. 'Mr Sherwood' could well be Richard Sherwood, nonconformist rector of Thurlaston, Leicestershire, who had acted with Hildersham in the examination of witnesses in the Anthony Nutter case of 1599 (LRO ID 41/4/835) and was deprived of his living along with Hildersham on 10 April 1605, see Foster, *State of the Church*, pp. cxxxii, 363-366. 'Mr Vaughan' could possibly be Francis Vaughan, vicar of Bilsby, Lincolnshire, since 1590, see Foster, *State of the Church*, pp. ci, 150, 179; and Joseph Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (Oxford, 1891), Part I, Vol. IV, p. 1535. 'Mr Bovy' remains a mystery. This episode, occurring so soon after the silencing of Hildersham and other nonconformist ministers in the diocese of Lincoln, resonates with overtones of divine warning about impending judgment. The *Valuatio Beneficiorum* of 1603-4 for the Archdeaonry of Lincoln recorded that 'Torkesey in this deanrie is an impropriac'on & likewise Brampton & the ij Hardwickes And the church of Brampton is pulled downe & all the people resorte to one church in Torksey & the vivinge mighte be made competent by deduc'on from theis impropracions & by makeinge them all on parishe', see Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 360. Whether these facts had any bearing on the exhortation to Brampton to pray in 1606 is not clear.

¹⁰⁵ BL Egerton MS 2645 f. 156. Hildersham bequeathed this bowl to his son Nathanael, who had delivered it to his father, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632). It may also be the same 'Guilt Boule' left by Hildersham's son-in-law Gervase Lomax to his wife, Sarah, Hildersham's daughter, in his will of 1647, see NAO PR/NW.

my ministry', he expresses the hope that during 'this unwelcome rest from the labours of my calling I shall now have leasure and opportunity to see your Ladyship and all your good children once again'.¹⁰⁶ Cotton, in his letter to Hildersham, also refers to a recent visit made to his home, writing that 'My wife & selfe commend our hearty love to you, and to Mrs Hildersam, with thanks to you both, since we last enjoyed you'. Hospitality, of course, provided a very important means of sustaining fellowship, and this was frequently extended to the bearers of the letters, if they had travelled some distance. Interestingly, two of Hildersham's letters, the one to Lady Barrington, and one to Walter Travers (of which only his reply is now extant), reveal the carrier to be Hildersham's youngest son Nathanael.¹⁰⁷ Very little is known about this young man, and he disappears from the Ashby scene after Hildersham's death, but it is clear that to be entrusted with these missives he enjoyed his father's confidence, perhaps also transmitting more personal messages verbally. He was also commissioned to carry out a parish errand of finding treatment for a lame girl in London, which suggests he may well have had some connections with the south-east.¹⁰⁸ The bearer of Cotton's letter is named as 'Mr Winter', and Cotton uses the opportunity to seek Hildersham's help in promoting 'his suite to Mrs Martha Temple, so farre as you shall see Gods hand making way for him'.¹⁰⁹ Cotton proceeds to give a testimonial to Winter's learning and piety, concluding that he had 'generally found Approbation of all here (for ought I

¹⁰⁶ Hildersham had recommenced his lectureship in Ashby in the summer of 1625, but had been again suspended in March 1630, for failure to wear surplice and hood while preaching.

¹⁰⁷ BL Egerton MS 2645 f. 156 and BL Add. MS 4276 f. 157.

¹⁰⁸ LRO MF/ 5, 28 August 1631.

¹⁰⁹ BL Add. MS 4275 f. 154. Bush (ed.), *Correspondence of John Cotton*, p. 125, supplies the information that 'Samuel Winter (1603-1666) had been admitted sizar at Emmanuel College in 1622/3 and later "placed himself under John Cotton" at Boston. He might at this time have been master of the Boston Grammar School (Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, IV, 440). From 1651 to 1660 he was provost of Trinity College, Dublin.'

heare) even of those who are not wont to thinke well of every good man'.¹¹⁰ Robert Bolton's letter to Hildersham of 1628 also concerned matrimonial matters; in this case he was seeking a testimonial regarding 'what is the outward estate of one Mr Sligh, who lives at Ash in Derbyshire'. For, Bolton goes on to explain, 'It is reported, you were intimately acquainted with his Father, and therefore conceived, you can tell what both the outward & spiritual state of the young Man is, what you know herein I am desired by a speciall friend to know from you'.¹¹¹ A good marriage with a similarly-minded partner was vital for living a godly life and establishing a household based on biblical principles, so these preliminary enquiries about suitability were important to ensure the right sort of match was arranged. Often, of course, this involved preachers marrying the sisters or daughters of their fellow-ministers, which strengthened the bonds of godly sociability, adding blood and family ties to spiritual ones.¹¹² This blending of 'outward and spiritual' concerns is also evident in the financial support that the faithful gave to those of their own in need; Walter Travers' letter to Hildersham in March 1625 thanks him for 'fyve pounds as part of the legacy wch the

¹¹⁰ BL Add. MS 4275 f. 154.

¹¹¹ BL Add. MS 4275 f. 48. 'Mr Sligh' is likely to be Gervase Sleigh, second son of Gervase Sleigh of Ashe, Sutton-in-the-Field, Derbyshire, admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge, in 1623 aged 15. He received his MA in 1630, and was admitted to Gray's Inn in 1628. After ordination he became rector of Radbourne, Derbyshire, in 1634, and died in 1641, see Michael Cahill, 'The Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield 1603-1642' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), p. 121. Sleigh's Commonplace Book contains notes of sermons by Hall, Preston, Hildersham and others, see DRO 286 M/F 11. The Sleigh family also had direct connections with Ashby; there is a record of the marriage of a 'Jarvis Sleigh' on 3 November 1592 in the parish church, see LRO DE1013/1, and Edmund Sleigh, originally from Derby, later became a leading figure in the town, serving on the school feoffees between 1633 and 1657. He was an uncle of Joseph Hall, who helped him financially during his studies at Emmanuel College, see Fox, *Country Grammar School*, p. 19.

¹¹² Ezekiel Culverwell's second wife, for example, whom he married on 23 October 1598 at St Margaret Lothbury, London, was a Winifred Barfoot, née Hildersham, who could either have been Arthur's sister or niece. I am grateful to Mr Brett Usher for drawing this connection to my attention. Winifred's first husband, Edward Barfoot, had been the brother of Arthur's wife, Ann. Arthur's granddaughter, Anne Lomax, married the preacher Francis Tallents; for more details, see Chapter 7, below, pp. 307-308. For more on this clerical endogamy, or 'priestly tribalism', see Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: the Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 115-119.

lately deceased Mr John Swayne gave to be bestowed upon poore ministers'.¹¹³ In his will of 1623, John Swayne of Staffordshire appointed Hildersham to be the executor of this bequest, obviously trusting his judgment and knowledge of other ministers' needs. Although this gift to Travers seems to be the only surviving example of someone benefiting from this particular legacy, many other impoverished ministers, perhaps adversely affected financially by their nonconformity, no doubt had reason to be grateful for such generosity.¹¹⁴

These networks providing emergency financial relief for poor ministers are a reminder of the importance of godly patronage in general. Especially in cases like Hildersham's, where principled nonconformity frequently threatened his livelihood, the support of people willing to supply practical assistance, as well as a protection in their homes, was vital to the continuation of a godly ministry. The noble and gentry families that favoured the puritans provided political pressure in parliament, presented men to the livings and lectureships they held, and appointed suspended or threatened ministers as chaplains and tutors in their households. For Hildersham, disinherited in his youth by his father, the backing of patrons such as the earls of Huntingdon, and the Barrington and Rediche families, was crucial to maintaining his ministry and helps to explain how he was able to remain such an influential figure despite frequent

¹¹³ BL Add. MS 4276 f. 157. For John Swayne's will, see Tyacke, *Aspects of English Protestantism*, p. 115. This will of 1623 (PRO, Prob/11/141 f. 143) bequeathed £50 for 'relief of poor ministers & preachers of the gospel'. Hildersham was known to Swayne, through the Rediche family of Newhall, Staffordshire, where he was one of their tenants, see p. 193, n. 156, below.

¹¹⁴ See also gifts from the Ashby Overseers accounts, LRO MF/5, no doubt encouraged by Hildersham, for example, 3 May 1629, 'to a minister his wife and 3 children 1s 6d'; 24 May 1629, 'to a minister 3s 4d'; 5 July 1629, 'to a poore ministers wife 2s'; 19 September 1630, 'Given to a minister 12d'. In addition the following collections were recorded in 1631, 'Collected for Mr Frank minister of Normsley in Cont. Hartford by a letter of request – 9s'; 'Collected for Mr Gater of Heather by letters of request Aug 21 – 10s 8d'; 'Collected for Amos Bedford minister of Maunton in the County of Linc the sum of thirteene shillings & nine pence. July 8 day'. Other collections for named individuals may also have been for ministers, but this is not specified.

silencings. Hildersham, of course, had the additional benefit, not given to many godly pastors, of being closely related to his most important patrons, which supplied an extra claim on their support. However, it should be stressed that these relationships were mutually beneficial; in return for their assistance, patrons received the practical services of educated men who could act as secretaries and tutors, as well as fostering godly piety in their households through leading family prayers and sermon repetitions. Having their own source of private spiritual counsel on tap, not unlike a Catholic confessor in some respects, became very important to some, especially godly gentry women. As Hildersham himself, concerned to offer comfort and encouragement to ‘such as are Patrons to good Ministers, as relieve and countenance them’, put it, ‘no goode worke you doe, will give that assurance of Gods blessing in outward things, as this’.¹¹⁵ Tracing Hildersham’s involvement with his patrons will help to show how these sorts of relationships contributed to the survival of a coherent puritan movement at a time when this was challenged by ecclesiastical opposition.

Henry, the third Earl of Huntingdon, was dubbed ‘the puritan earl’ for his devotion to the godly cause, and, as Claire Cross has shown, invested much time and money in the promotion of a preaching ministry, not only in Leicestershire but throughout the country.¹¹⁶ Indeed, Camden initiated the rumour that the dire state of the earl’s finances was due to him wasting ‘his patrimony much by relieving (at his great cost) the hotter spirited ministers’.¹¹⁷ Hildersham surely had this sort of criticism in mind when he defended godly patrons in 1610:

¹¹⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 318.

¹¹⁶ Cross, *Puritan Earl*.

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Cross, *Puritan Earl*, p. 98. Cross argues that there were many other factors responsible for the earl’s financial difficulties, see pp. 61-111.

I have heard it oft said of some, that their bounty unto Ministers did undo them; but I could never heare it proved. I doubt not, but such might fall into decay (for Gods promises for earthly blessings are all with this condition, so far as shall be good for them) but this, doubtlesse, was not the cause of it.¹¹⁸

The earl's 'bounty' to Hildersham began in about 1578, when the young Arthur's university career was threatened by his father's disinheritance.¹¹⁹ As Hildersham's mother and Henry Hastings' mother were cousins, it was natural that John Ireton should apply to the earl on behalf of Hildersham, encouraging him with the words, 'Be not discouraged ... thou hast a Noble Kinsman, whom I will acquaint with thy case: and I doubt not but he will provide for thee'.¹²⁰ From that time on, the earl supplied the financial and spiritual support that was the backbone of Hildersham's career; he paid for the rest of his university stay, and in 1587 'by the ... Right Honourable Earle, he was called to be, and placed Preacher at Ashby de la Zouch', in succession to Anthony Gilby. Six years later he presented him to the vicarage there.¹²¹ Crucially, as Clarke informs us, even as lecturer, 'the impropriate Tithes of the same Parish [were] settled upon him for his life by the said Earl, and continued to him by the favour of the two succeeding Earls, George and Henry, untill his death'. This generous provision would have ensured Hildersham a secure means of income, even when he was suspended from the vicarage after 1605, and given him a strong position in relation to the incumbents who succeeded him.¹²² The continuing support of the house of Hastings was fully acknowledged by Hildersham in the preface to his *Lectures upon John*, dedicated to the fifth Earl, which appeared in print in 1629:

¹¹⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 318.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 1, above, p. 15.

¹²⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 145.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146. For more on Hildersham's ministry in Ashby, see above, Chapters 2 and 3.

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 146.

I might have opportunity by this Dedication of them, to give publike testimony unto the world, of my duty and thankfulness unto your Honour, and unto your Noble House; unto whom (next under God) I doe owe whatsoever poore abilities he hath beene pleased to give unto me, for the service of his Church.¹²³

Hildersham also made it clear that the earl's support was not merely financial, but thanked him for 'that worthy example also you gave unto all my Auditory in your constant and diligent frequenting of them [the lectures]'.¹²⁴ This very visible backing, combined with Hildersham's own social status, meant that few dared to challenge him locally, and if they did, the personal loyalty of the earls was something upon which he could rely. Aid was also extended to Hildersham's family; his son, Samuel, received twice-yearly maintenance from the fifth Earl during his undergraduate years at Cambridge, and later served as a chaplain to the family when it seems as if he was having problems being preferred to a living.¹²⁵

It was not only the earls themselves, but also other members of the Hastings family, that showed kindness to Hildersham. The *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, published in 1635, were dedicated by Samuel to 'The Right Honourable and Religious Lady, Katharine Countesse of Chesterfield' in 'testimony of his humble and thankfull acknowledgement of her noble favour and respect shewed to the Author both living and dying'.¹²⁶ Although Katharine Hastings had married in 1605, she had obviously

¹²³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A2.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, sig. A2v.

¹²⁵ HAF 7/22 accounts '29 October 1609 Mr Hildersham's sones allowance for half a year', HAF 6/3 accounts 1606-1613, '3 April 1610. To Mr Hildersam ... for his sonne 68s 6d' and HAF 7/3 accounts '13 April 1611 to Mr Hildersham for his sonnes allowance £3-6-8'. I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Fincham for these references. For a letter of 3 July 1626, in which the fifth Earl recommends his 'chaplain and kinsman' for the living of Loughborough (apparently unsuccessfully), see *HMC Series 78 Hastings II*, p. 70. For Samuel's gratitude on being appointed rector of West Felstead in 1632, see the dedication to his patron William Cokayne, in Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, sig. A2.

¹²⁶ Samuel Hildersham, Dedicatory Epistle, in Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*.

maintained her interest in Hildersham, and, it seems, had visited him or sent tokens of her regard during his final illness in 1632.¹²⁷ Hildersham, unlike some such as Thomas Pestell, was always careful to show the proper deference to the Hastings family; although related, he never forgot his place in the social hierarchy and couched his communications to them in suitably respectful language.¹²⁸ All the more surprising, then, to find a reference to some sort of disagreement with Sir Francis Hastings, brother of the third Earl, and a zealous lay supporter of the puritan cause, especially in parliament. In a letter to his cousin, Francis Barrington, a mutual relation, written in 1609, the year before his death, he can be found requesting his cousin's services as an intermediary to help patch up a rift that had occurred with Hildersham:

And for my part I will boldie and confidentlie saie to you for my Cossin Hildersonn, as Jehu saide to Jehonadab; if his hart bee upright to mee, as mine is to him, let him give mee his hand, and I will receive him into the chariot of my love with hart and hand. I write not this fawninglie, nor fainedlie, but out of a desire to settle true love and affection betweene us and with a full purpose to do him right.¹²⁹

The whole tenor of the letter suggests that Francis Hastings was acknowledging the fault to be his, and was endeavouring, 'to conclude a full peace with all men, that I maie take way to my last home with peace of conscience'.¹³⁰ As Cross remarks of Hastings' temperament, 'he did not always succeed in subduing the authoritarian side

¹²⁷ For more on Lady Katharine Hastings, see Chapter 1, above, p. 28, n. 100.

¹²⁸ For Pestell's quarrel with the fifth Earl, when he seemed to forget his place, see Christopher Haigh, 'The Troubles of Thomas Pestell: Parish Squabbles and Ecclesiastical Politics in Caroline England', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (Oct. 2002), pp. 409-410. Significantly, according to Haigh, he tried to flatter Hildersham, recognising his friendship with the Hastings family, in an attempt belatedly to curry favour, see p. 420.

¹²⁹ BL Egerton MS 2644 f. 172, quoted in Cross (ed.), *Letters of Francis Hastings*, pp. 110-111. Cross assumes that the Hildersham in question is Arthur, but it could have been his brother Richard, who was steward of the Barrington estates at Hatfield Broad Oak, and who was equally committed to the godly cause. If it was Richard, this would seem to make sense of Francis Hastings asking Francis Barrington to intercede.

¹³⁰ Cross (ed.), *Letters of Francis Hastings*, pp. 110-111.

of his character'.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the letter is a reminder that the godly on occasions disagreed with each other, and fallings out occurred. Sometimes this was over theological issues, but the dashing of puritan hopes after James I's accession must also have caused divisions about the best way to proceed thereafter.

Hildersham's close involvement with the whole Hastings family is also demonstrated by the sermon he preached in their private chapel in Ashby on 4 October 1629.¹³² Although not officially a funeral sermon, of which Hildersham did not approve, it was delivered the day after the burial of Lady Sarah Hastings, mother of Henry the fifth Earl.¹³³ It took as its text Ecclesiastes 11:8, 'But if a man live many yeeres, and rejoyce in them all; yet let him remember the dayes of darknesse, for they shall be many. All that cometh is vanity', and Hildersham's theme is how to make a godly death. Over three generations, then, Hildersham had been engaged with the family in a relationship of reciprocity; his spiritual service to them at times like bereavement was part of his side of the equation.

The Barrington family, like their Hastings' cousins, were also related to Hildersham, as has already been noted. They, too, were patrons of the godly from their estate at Hatfield Broad Oak, Essex, and played an important part in the puritan community of that county.¹³⁴ Richard Hildersham, Arthur's brother, was steward of

¹³¹ Cross (ed.), *Letters of Francis Hastings*, p. xvii.

¹³² This sermon was published with Hildersham's *Fasting and Praier* (1633), but has a separate title page and pagination.

¹³³ LRO Ashby Parish Register, DE 1013/1, p. 148r. For the death of the third Earl, see Claire Cross, 'The Third Earl of Huntingdon's Death-Bed: A Calvinist Example of the *Ars Moriendi*', *Northern History*, vol. xxi (1985), pp. 80-107.

¹³⁴ On Essex as a puritan stronghold, see, for example, William Hunt, *The Puritan Moment: The Coming of Revolution in an English County* (Cambridge, Mass., and London, 1983); Webster, *Godly Clergy*; *idem*, 'The godly of Goshen scattered: a puritan clerical conference in Essex in the 1620s and its diaspora' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 1993); and Patrick Collinson, John Craig and Brett Usher (eds.), *Conferences and Combination Lectures in the Elizabethan Church* (Woodbridge, 2003).

the Barrington estates, and committed to campaigning for the cause of reform.¹³⁵ Lady Joan Barrington's account book, commencing in 1629, records Christmas gifts of cakes and capons to Richard, suggesting a level of intimacy and affection.¹³⁶ The same source also reveals the presence of two other Hildersham women within the Barrington household, one at least of whom, Margaret, who died at the end of 1635 or the beginning of 1636, was a widow.¹³⁷ The other was a 'Mrs Johan Hildersham'. One of these ladies was paid a regular legacy of six pounds per annum, the other received gifts of 'pullets' and sometimes money.¹³⁸ Arthur Hildersham himself features in Lady Barrington's accounts between January and March 1629; the records show the purchase of a silver bowl given to him by his aunt, at a cost of three pounds, and also the acquisition of three copies of his book on John, at seven shillings each.¹³⁹ It seems very likely that the Barringtons, with the support of the earl of Huntingdon and his wife, had taken a part in arranging Arthur's marriage to Ann Barfoot of Lambourne Hall in Essex, which occurred on 5 January 1591; having been disinherited by his father, the help of other influential relatives would have been important in assisting him to make an advantageous match. Robert Barfoot, Ann's grandfather, who had made money as a merchant and mercer in London, held the manor of Lambourne, but

¹³⁵ See Quintrell, 'The Royal Hunt and the Puritans', pp. 145-146, on the petition of the Essex gentlemen presented to the king on 20 November 1604, ostensibly from 'two hundred yeomen about Royston' but naming no county, pastor or parish, calling for mercy for ministers troubled by the approaching deadline for conformity. Quintrell says that Richard Hildersham was its draftsman, and that he was subsequently examined by the Council.

¹³⁶ ERO D/DBa A15, p. 25r (28 December 1631), p. 33v (26 December 1632).

¹³⁷ ERO D/ABW 53/100 Will of Margaret Hildersham, 20 January 1636. This will, which makes reference to Richard Hildersham, and is witnessed by a 'Mary Hilham', is very brief and only involves the disposition of small personal items such as gloves, linen, a gown, towels, sheets and 6 pewter dishes.

¹³⁸ ERO D/DBa A15, pp. 11v, 17r, 21r, 22r, 27r, 30r, 31v, 33v, 35v, 39r, 44r, 47r, 51r, 55r.

¹³⁹ ERO D/DBa A15, pp. 3r, 3v. For Hildersham's letter acknowledging the gift of the bowl, see pp. 179-180, above.

it was her father, Thomas, who had built the Hall in 1571.¹⁴⁰ No doubt Thomas Barfoot would have desired to improve the social status of the family by arranging good marriages for his children to those with established lineages; his son and heir, Edward, who had died by 1590, had already married into the Hildersham family.¹⁴¹ If the Barfoots had godly sympathies, as seems likely, then both spiritually and socially they would have come within the orbit of the Barrington gentry at Hatfield Broad Oak, so that marriage possibilities with the extended family would have opened up.¹⁴² There is no record of the marriage of Arthur and Ann taking place at Lambourne itself, or, indeed, at Ashby, so that it is possible that it was celebrated at Hatfield Broad Oak, although the records are no longer extant.

Richard Hildersham, Arthur's brother, as well as providing the link with the Barrington family, also proved useful to him in other ways. It seems that he possessed Arthur's complete trust; not only did he make him an executor of his will, but during Arthur's lifetime, Richard was able to act on his brother's behalf in legal and financial transactions, when he himself was *persona non grata*. When Alexander Rediche wanted Arthur to have the profits of certain lands in the parish of Manchester in 1609, he channelled this through Richard.¹⁴³ Arrangements like this may help to explain

¹⁴⁰ For the Barfoot family and the history of Lambourne, see Philip Morant, *The History and Antiquities of the County of Essex*, Vol. I (London, 1768), p. 172; *VCH Essex*, Vol. IV, pp. 72-86. Thomas Barfoot's will, proved in 1592, can be found at PRO, Prob/11/79. He left ten pounds each to his three daughters, Elizabeth, Alice and Ann, which suggests that more generous provision had already been made for them through marriage settlements. By contrast, his sons received much greater amounts.

¹⁴¹ PRO, Prob/11/79. Edward Barfoot had married Winifred Hildersham, by whom he had three children, Thomas (bp. 24 January 1587, Lambourne), Winifred, and Katherine (bp. 13 September 1584, Lambourne). By 1590, when his father made his will, Edward had died. His widow, Winifred, was married for a second time to Ezekiel Culverwell, see p. 181, n. 112, above.

¹⁴² The preamble to Thomas's will is fairly brief and conventional, but is certainly pious. He also made generous charitable bequests to the poor. Edward's will describes himself as a 'gentleman' of Hatfield Broad Oak.

¹⁴³ JRL CRU/677. Richard promised to transmit all the profits made over to him to Arthur. Ezekiel Culverwell was a witness to this transaction.

why, in the aftermath of Arthur's condemnation by the High Commission and the imposition of a two thousand pound fine, processes to enquire of the Sheriffs of Leicestershire about his estate resulted in the answer 'They could find none'.¹⁴⁴

The Rediche family provided another significant source of patronage for Hildersham. Their main family seat was at Newhall in Derbyshire, just over the border from Ashby, and very close to Burton on Trent, where Hildersham lectured, and Stapenhill, site of one of the famous exorcisms performed by Darrell. Alexander Rediche, from an ancient Lancashire family, was described by Clarke as Hildersham's 'bosom friend'.¹⁴⁵ He had married Katharine Dethicke of Newhall, who had become her father's heir when her brother Francis had died without issue. Katharine's mother, Elizabeth, came from the renowned Longford family, and her elder sister Matilda (or Magdalen), a very devout woman, had married Francis Hastings in 1567 after the death of her first husband, Sir George Vernon.¹⁴⁶ Elizabeth herself was to marry a second time after the death of Katharine's father Humfrey Dethicke in December 1599, her new husband being Lord Edward Ferrars. Although Lady Ferrars was a 'staunch papist', it was a commitment to the godly cause that drew the Rediches to

¹⁴⁴ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 150.

¹⁴⁵ JRL CRU/662. Alexander Rediche was baptised in October 1563, the same month and year as Hildersham himself. He was the son and heir of John and Margaret Rediche of Lancashire. John died when his son was five years and ten months old (21 August 1569), and Alexander became the Queen's Ward. He died, aged forty-nine, in June 1613. He was the presenter of a petition on 7 December 1604 to the king, signed by twelve senior Lancashire gentry, on behalf of ministers recently granted special concessions at Hampton Court. The organiser of the petition was James Gosnell, a former Hastings chaplain at Ashby, see Quintrell, 'Royal Hunt', pp. 48-49.

¹⁴⁶ Francis Hastings' Epitaph on his wife's death, c. 1596, extolling her godly piety and support of preachers, is reproduced in Cross (ed.), *Letters of Francis Hastings*, pp. 64-67. Francis Hastings was responsible for forging links between many of the godly gentry around Ashby and South Derbyshire, including the Rediches, which resulted in such petitions as the one presented in 1604, see Quintrell, 'Royal Hunt', pp. 48-49.

Hildersham.¹⁴⁷ They are usually remembered as the patrons of William Bradshaw, the details of which are supplied by Thomas Gataker in his biography, but it was Hildersham who had already enjoyed their favour and who introduced the younger man to them.¹⁴⁸ After Bradshaw's death in 1618, Hildersham continued his close friendship with Katharine Rediche; in 1632, she 'survived him not above eight daies, the grief for his death hastening (as it was supposed) her end'.¹⁴⁹ Gataker, who was aided by Bradshaw's son John and Samuel Hildersham in drawing up his account, describes Katharine as:

a very tender-hearted Gentlewoman, much addicted to hospitality, and of very remarkeable devotion and piety, reported by those who were inwardly acquainted with her more retired courses, to have been wont constantly to spend privately twice a day, at several set times an hour at least, in meditation and prayer mixed oft with many tears.¹⁵⁰

A detailed picture emerges of a godly household, with 'private exercises at set times performed in the Family' and two preaching services every Sunday in the chapel, conducted by Bradshaw when he was in residence.¹⁵¹ It is clear that Hildersham filled a similar role when he stayed with the family. Clarke tells us that,

In all places where he did reside, or whether he came occasionally, he was alwaies helpful in Family-Prayers, in expounding the Scriptures read, and in the repetition of the sermons preached in the Publique Congregation, being also willing by private conference to instruct the ignorant, to

¹⁴⁷ Gataker's 'Life of Bradshaw' recounts the story of Lady Ferrars' initial hatred of Bradshaw, and her refusal to stay in the house at Newhall when he was in residence. However, ultimately she was won over by his 'mild and moderate demeanure, and his meek, kind, and lowly carriage', and became a keen hearer of his sermons, see p. 60.

¹⁴⁸ See Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 54.

¹⁴⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 153.

¹⁵⁰ Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 75.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

satisfie the doubtfull, to settle the wavering, to comfort the dejected, and to encourage all sorts in the exercises of Religion.¹⁵²

And Hildersham certainly did spend much time in the Rediche household; the availability of a bolt-hole just over the county and diocesan boundary, and also in their home in London, was vital to him, especially during his periods of suspension and when he was in hiding from the authorities. Clarke says that he was ‘much in the house of his ancient and dear Friend’, and it was in the Hampstead home of Katharine Rediche that he fell seriously ill of a fever in 1624.¹⁵³ Although it might appear strange that Alexander Rediche made no bequest to Hildersham in his will of 1613, it is clear that financial support was made during his lifetime; under an arrangement made in July 1609, Rediche made over the lease of lands and tenements valued at three hundred pounds in the parish of Redich, Lancashire for the ‘tearme of Threescore yeares’, to Richard Hildersham, for the benefit of his brother Arthur.¹⁵⁴ A ‘messenger, farm of tenement in Stanton Mead’ in Derbyshire, assigned to Richard and his son Thomas in Arthur’s will, may also have been a gift from the Rediche family.¹⁵⁵

That this relationship was mutually beneficial both to Hildersham and the Rediches is evidenced not only in the spiritual help that he gave to the family. In more practical areas, too, Hildersham was able to provide assistance; he was an executor of Alexander’s will, and after his patron’s death, it seems he supplied legal and technical

¹⁵² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 153.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 153-154.

¹⁵⁴ JRL CRU/677. According to Gataker’s biography of Bradshaw, the Rediches were besieged by financial problems, which necessitated frequent visits to London to try and sort out their affairs, and explains the reason why the original allowance to Bradshaw was so small (‘ten pounds by the year, his diet, fire, candle, and all kinds of attendance’). Later, however, they built a small house for Bradshaw at Stanton Ward, near Newhall, see Gataker, ‘Life of Bradshaw’, pp. 56-62, quote at p. 56. An inventory taken of Alexander Rediches’s ‘goods and chattels’ on 14 June 1613, shows a sum of £1434-15s-2d for Newhall, see JRUL CRU/539. Katharine Rediche’s will was made on 30 October 1631, see JRUL CRU/542.

¹⁵⁵ LRO Leics.Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632).

support to the widow. In the complex arrangements surrounding the marriage of Katharine's daughter Sarah to Clement Coke, son of Edward Coke, the Lord Chief Justice, Hildersham acted on Katherine's behalf in the assignment of certain manors in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire.¹⁵⁶

A look at the involvement of Hildersham with his important patrons, then, reveals a delicately-balanced reciprocity. This helps to illuminate how a puritan piety was fostered within gentry households even as it was being driven from public platforms, and explains how it was able to emerge as a coherent and strong force when external conditions changed.

4. International Associations

Underpinned by a theology which emphasised the worldwide unity of the body of Christ, and with its roots in continental Europe, it is not surprising to find an international dimension to the reformed faith.¹⁵⁷ Links which had been forged by the Marian exiles in Frankfurt and Geneva continued to be important, and Holland remained a place of sanctuary for more radical Protestant elements from England. Nor was this a one-way process, as the presence of the stranger churches in London demonstrated.¹⁵⁸ In the seventeenth century, the New World was the destination for

¹⁵⁶ JRUL CRU/65, 28 March 1614. A 'John Sweane' is mentioned as one of the tenants, see pp. 181-182, above. This arrangement was apparently not executed.

¹⁵⁷ See the quotations from Hildersham as epigraphs to this chapter, above, p. 148. See also Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism 1541-1715* (Oxford, 1985).

¹⁵⁸ See Ole Peter Grell, *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London: The Dutch Church in Austin Friars, 1603-1642* (Leiden, 1988).

waves of puritan emigrants, but the close ties with the homeland were maintained.¹⁵⁹

For Hildersham, as for many English Calvinists, the model of ‘the best Reformed Churches’ was one held up as the standard for good ecclesiastical practice.¹⁶⁰ The elect, then, knew no national boundaries, and ‘were to be gathered out of the whole world’.¹⁶¹ By letters, and occasional meetings and visits, this extended sociability was sustained; Hildersham’s experience of this was not untypical and provides a window on this world.

During his troubles of 1616, Hildersham was approached by John Hartly, one of the elders of the English Congregation at Leiden, bearing ‘Letters of Credence from the Congregation’ there. Hartly’s mission was to offer Hildersham the pastorate, and, apparently, only his wife’s reluctance to ‘go over the seas’ prevented his acceptance.¹⁶²

There is no doubt, however, as this offer showed, that Hildersham was held in high esteem in Holland, and that he had ties not only with the English exiles there, but also with indigenous Dutch Protestants. Willem Teellinck, often known as ‘the father of the Dutch Nadere Reformatie’, spent nine months in England lodging with a godly family in Banbury in 1604, and counted John Dod and Hildersham as his spiritual mentors.¹⁶³

Their influence was particularly evident in the emphasis of the Dutch Second

¹⁵⁹ See, for example, Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (Boston, 1994); Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York, 1963); and Susan Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims; New World Settlers and the Call of Home* (New Haven and London, 2007). Hildersham’s connections and influence in New England will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7 below, see pp. 296-297, and p. 315, n. 111.

¹⁶⁰ For the use of this phrase, see, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 68.

¹⁶¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 328.

¹⁶² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 150. Many others, such as Ames and Hooker, did, of course, go.

¹⁶³ ‘The Dutch Second Reformation’. Willem Teellinck (1579-1629) married an English woman, Martha Greendon of Derby, and was pastor of a church in Middelburg from 1613 until his death in 1629. He was the author of sixty manuscripts. For details of his life and ministry, see Joel R. Beeke (ed.), ‘Introduction’, in Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness* (Middelburg, 1621), translated by Annemie Godbehere (Grand Rapids, 2003), pp. 11-29. See also F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden, 1965), pp. 127-133. I am grateful to Dr Katie Wright for discussing Teellinck with me.

Reformation on domestic piety. Teellinck visited England again in 1610, to renew fellowship with these godly brethren, and during this stay he also preached at the Dutch Congregation in Austin Friars. By 1629, this congregation was pastored by Timothy Van Vleteren, a close friend of Teellinck's son, Maximilian (1602-1653).¹⁶⁴ Van Vleteren became a correspondent of John Cotton, and wrote to him expressing the enthusiasm felt in Holland for Hildersham's works. In a letter of 3 February 1630, Cotton duly conveyed Van Vleteren's comments to Hildersham, that,

he had sent sundry of the Books on John 4. to Ministers beyond the Seas, who do read them with such great satisfaction, that the said Dutch Minister did, in the name of many others, intreat Mr Cotton, to beseech Mr Hildersam to put forth his Sermon on Psal. 51. and other his lucubrations.¹⁶⁵

Although further works by Hildersham were only published posthumously after his death in 1632, the encouragements of such as Van Vleteren may have been a spur in persuading Hildersham to begin the process of preparing more papers for the press. Whatever the case, many of Hildersham's writings were translated into Dutch and enjoyed considerable popularity and influence amongst the godly community there.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Timothy Van Vleteren was from a Dutch family, although born in Sandwich, Kent. Before becoming pastor in Austin Friars in 1628, he ministered at Souteland, near Middelburg. He had known Maximilian Teellinck when Teellinck was pastor at Fleissing, only a few miles distant. He remained pastor in London until his death in 1641, see Bush, Jr., (ed.), *Correspondence of John Cotton*, pp. 39-40, 135-138. For more on Van Vleteren, see Grell, *Dutch Calvinists*, pp. 59-60, 189, 199-201.

¹⁶⁵ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 152.

¹⁶⁶ Dutch translations of Hildersham's works included Bradshaw and Hildersham, *Bruylofts-kleed der tafel-ghenoten Christi. Dat is twee tractaten ...* (Leeuwarden, 1639), translator J. Nisenerum (*A Preparation for Receiving the Sacrament. With a Profitable Treatise...*); *Fonteyne des levens* (Arnhem, 1634, 1646, 1656, 1659, 1669), translator D. V. Lauren (*Lectures upon the fourth of John*); *Theologica practica, dat is een verklaringe over de ... LI Psalm* (Utrecht, 1657, 1659), translator C. a Diemberbroeck (*Lectures upon Psalme LI*); *Salomans goede raad* (Bolsward, 1658), translator S. v. Haringhouck (Sermon on Eccles. 11:8 in, *The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier*); *Leere van vasten, bidden, en vernedering om de zonde* (Bolsward, 1659), translator N. Hajonides (*The Doctrine of Fasting and Praier*); *Twee godtvruchtige meditatie: ... van't ghevoelen der sonden; ... van't remedie tegen sonden* (Arnhem, 1669, 3rd edn.), translator D. v. Laren (source not found). I am grateful to Eric Platt for these

Hildersham, as other Calvinists, felt intimately connected with his brethren in Europe. It is interesting to trace the development of these feelings, as the political and military situation for the reformed faith worsened with defeats on the Continent as the seventeenth century progressed. Hildersham exhibits a growing concern for the fate of Protestants in Bohemia, the Palatinate and La Rochelle, in particular, during the 1620s, which can be traced in his sermons. In the earlier *Lectures upon John*, preached between 1609 and 1611, there are no specific references to overseas churches, but by the time that the *Lectures upon Psalme LI* were delivered, from 1625 to 1631, their afflictions have become a major theme.¹⁶⁷ On 18 April 1626, Hildersham warns of the threat to the state posed by ‘our bloody enemies’, but by 27 February 1627 the application to his hearers is more specific; ‘Specially it will be hard for such as we are, that have enjoyed so long peace, and ease and prosperity to endure any sharpe affliction, such as our poore brethren in the Palatinate, Bohemia, Germany and France have done’.¹⁶⁸ God’s people in England should not be complacent, and think that those abroad were worse sinners than themselves, but should realise that their time for judgment could be next; ‘God hath set a time for Bohemia and for Germany and for the Palatinate, and so hath he set a time for England also certain’.¹⁶⁹ Two sermons in particular, Lecture 112 (3 March 1629) and Lecture 113 (17 March 1629) are devoted to the theme of explaining God’s ‘marvellous severity’ ‘of late shewed towards’ his people in these places.¹⁷⁰ Hildersham’s main argument is that it was ‘unlawful’ to

references. It is obvious, of course, as Van Vleteren’s comments show, that many Dutch ministers were reading Hildersham’s works in English prior to their translation into Dutch.

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 117, 250, 263, 337, 345, 467, 504, 544, 558-560.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 117, 250.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 345.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 558.

think that these judgments had been due to the particular sinfulness of these churches.

‘O take heed therefore’, he stresses,

of judging of those poore Churches that have so strangely perished, or of any other persons to have been hypocrites, and void of true grace; or to have bin greater sinners, either then our selves, because of the miseries they have endured.¹⁷¹

However, he does allow that it was lawful to interpret such divine severity as a direct punishment when any sin was ‘notoriously’ apparent. Interestingly, he seems to have detailed information about some of the continental churches and their particular failings:

Nay, for as much as those poore Churches of Christ in the Palatinate, and Germany, and Rochel, have bin notoriously knowne to offend generally in the ordinary profanation of the Sabbath; the sin that God saith was a chiefe cause of the Iuwes captivity ... In the contempt of the ministry ... Forasmuch as I say, they have bin notoriously knowne to offend generally this way (besides the loosenesse of their lives in drunkennesse, and lasciviousnesse, professing outwardly religion ... it is not unlawfull for us to impute all this marvailous severity of God towards them unto their sins.¹⁷²

This raises the question of how Hildersham was apparently so well-informed about the spiritual conditions in these congregations. He himself mentions ‘currantoes’ as being avidly read by his hearers, and there were also many soldiers returning from the continental wars who passed through Ashby.¹⁷³ Letters, too, between ministers in the

¹⁷¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 560.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 559.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 566. ‘Currantoes’ or curantos were the forerunners of newspapers and started to appear in the early seventeenth century. For more information, see Joad Raymond, *The Invention of the Newspaper* (Oxford, 1996); Matthias Shaaber, *Some Forerunners of the Newspaper in England 1476-1622* (Philadelphia, 1929); and Michael Frearson, ‘The Distribution and Readership of London Corantos in the 1620s’, in Robin Myers and Michael Harris (eds.), *Serials and Their Readers, 1620-1914* (Winchester, 1993). The Overseers’ Accounts for Ashby contain many entries showing money being given to soldiers, for example, LRO MF/ 5, 7 September 1628, ‘to two soulders – 8d’, 14 September 1628, ‘to two souldiers – 6d’, 21 September 1628, ‘Given to a solder by my lordes appointment – 3s 4d’, ‘to three solders – 13d’, 12 October 1628, ‘pd for two soldiers – 6d’, 9 November 1628, ‘Given to a

various countries must have been an important source for gathering news. Samuel Loumeau, one of the Calvinist pastors in La Rochelle, for example, is known to have corresponded with his English brethren, and the picture that Hildersham paints of drunkenness and contempt for the ministry accords closely with a more recent historian's account of an 'enduring popular anticlericalism' and a 'vibrant urban calendar of mocking corporative festivals' in that city.¹⁷⁴

Hildersham's response to the news of the distresses that had befallen the believers abroad was to urge his own listeners to be fully involved with their plight, for, as he reminded them, they were all part of one body.¹⁷⁵ They should do this by informing themselves as well as they could about their situation, by praying earnestly for them and giving financially to their relief.¹⁷⁶

Hildersham's associations, then, with the faithful were multi-layered, ranging from the briefest of interactions to deep, lifelong friendships. Not all were cordial, but even differences were discussed as family matters. The mutual support that such

soulder – 2d', 16 November 1628 – 'To a soulder – 3d'. These types of bequest continue regularly into 1629, 1630, and 1631. On 4 October 1629, 6s 8d was 'Paid towards the relief of maimed soldiers in the hospitall', and similar payments were made on 10 January 1630, 28 March 1630, and 8 May 1631. The payment of 8d on 9 October 1631 noted that it was for 'the soldiers tht had a seal of the K of Bohemia & of the prince of Orrenge'.

¹⁷⁴Loumeau was a pastor in La Rochelle from 1594 to 1629. For a sample of Loumeau's letters to English correspondents, see Georges Musset (ed.), 'Documents sur la Reforme en Saintonge et Aunis XVIe et XVIIe siecles', *Archives Historiques de la Saintonge et de l'Aunis*, 15, (1888), pp. 25-145. Unfortunately these extracts do not reveal whether or not Hildersham himself was one of Loumeau's correspondents, but it seems likely that he was in touch with some who were, or that he obtained his information from another similar source. For a recent analysis of the situation in La Rochelle, see Kevin C. Robbins, *City on the Ocean Sea: La Rochelle, 1530-1650* (Leiden, New York, Koln, 1997), quotes at p. 183. See also, David Parker, *La Rochelle and the French Monarchy: Conflict and Order in Seventeenth-Century France* (London, 1980). La Rochelle fell to the French Crown after a fourteen-month siege on All Saints' Day 1628, after a disastrous intervention by Buckingham and the English fleet on 20 July 1627. Hildersham's first specific mention of the city comes on 27 January 1628, but he refers to troubles in France on 27 February 1627, see *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 544, 250. I am grateful for the help of Dr Penny Roberts on the issue of La Rochelle.

¹⁷⁵ See Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 565.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 562-567. The financial response to this message can be witnessed in LRO MF/5 Overseers' Accounts for Ashby, record for 1631, 'Collected by a brief for the exiled ministers of the Palatinate Mai 15 - £3-7s'.

relationships provided was vital to the spiritual and often material well-being of those involved. Over the course of time, as opportunities for large scale conferences diminished and fasting was restricted, Hildersham's experience demonstrates that the godly were able creatively to reinvent new forms of sociability, as well as to employ established means such as letter-writing, as they had always done. With the support of a web of these associations which extended beyond national boundaries, a section of society which often felt itself to be misunderstood and persecuted managed not only to survive such antipathy but also to thrive on it.

CHAPTER 5

THE WORLD OF THE ESTABLISHED CHURCH

those assemblies that enjoy the Word and Doctrine of salvation, though they have many corruptions remaining in them are to be acknowledged the true Churches of God, and such as none of the faithfull may make separation from.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 165.

I doe hereby declare and protest that I doe continue and end my daies, in the very same faith and Judgement, touching all points of religion as I have ever been known to hold and profess, and which I have, both by my Doctrine and Practice and by my sufferings also given testimony unto.

Will of Arthur Hildersham, 1631.¹

he [Hildersham] was an excellent textuary, of exemplary life, pleasant in discourse, a strong enemy to the Brownists, and dissented not from the Church of England in any article of faith, but only about wearing the surplice, baptising with the cross, and kneeling at the sacrament

William Lilly, *History of his Life and Times*, p. 6.

Arthur Hildersham was a minister of the Church of England. At no time did he separate from it, or, apparently, ever seriously consider doing so, despite his frequent suspensions. Indeed, he was renowned for his resolute opposition to the separatist cause, being styled ‘the Hammer of Schismatiques’ by a contemporary, Andrew Willet.² The world of the established church was therefore his world; in his sermons he habitually refers to the Church of England as ‘our’ church, and it is clear that he perceives his spiritual identity in terms of belonging to, and participating in, a national

¹ LRO, Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77, also cited in Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 151.

² Cited by John Cotton, in his introduction to Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A4. Willet himself was a notable conformist puritan. For more on Willet, see above, Chapter 4, pp. 156-157.

mission of preaching and pastoral care.³ As Kenneth Fincham has argued, evangelical churchmanship was the dominant strain in the Elizabethan and Jacobean church, thus allowing a sort of ‘evangelical conformity’ to emerge, of which Hildersham was very much a part.⁴ It was this kind of milieu which enabled him, even at a time when such an interpretation was most contested, to construct a narrative history of the Church of England that presented it as an undifferentiated, mainstream Calvinistic preaching agency:

And so doe I testifie, and confidently avouch and protest unto you, that that Doctrine and religion which hath (through the marvellous goodnesse of God) beene taught in this famous, and Orthodox Church of England, now by the space of these seventy yeares, and in the profession whereof wee all now stand, is the onely true Doctrine and religion of Christ. Because it onely giveth the whole glory of mans salvation unto Gods free grace in Christ, but it abaseth man, and giveth him no matter of boasting or glorying at all.⁵

Despite Hildersham’s gloss on English church history, however, differences and divisions certainly existed within the institution over theology, ecclesiology and emphasis. Nevertheless, these would have been regarded as matters of internal debate, and Hildersham’s case clearly illustrates why the old binary of ‘Anglican’/‘Puritan’ has been rejected as spurious.⁶ The label of ‘nonseparating nonconformists’ for Hildersham and those who shared his position, although more useful and convenient,

³ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 298, 348.

⁴ Kenneth Fincham, ‘Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud’, in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church, c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 133-134.

⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalm LI*, p. 525, and see also p. 110.

⁶ For the classic statement of the Anglican/Puritan binary, see John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: the Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640* (Stanford, 1964) and also R. L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981). For works which challenge this polarity, see, for example, Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans? Presbyterianism and English Conformist Thought from Whitgift to Hooker* (London, 1988); and Peter Marshall, *Reformation England 1480-1642* (London, 2003), especially Chapter 5. For a recent publication which questions this position and returns the debate to the Anglican/Puritan divide, see Charles W. A. Prior, *Defining the Jacobean Church: The Politics of Religious Controversy, 1603-1625* (Cambridge, 2005).

was not one that Hildersham would have recognised, and surely was not how he perceived his own ecclesiological or spiritual identity.⁷ He regarded himself simply as a minister of the Church of England, which, despite its remaining corruptions, was a true church of Christ.

As Lake, Questier, *et al*, have reminded us, all the labels and categories that have been proposed are porous and problematic, as well as often being polemical in origin.⁸ ‘Radical’ and ‘moderate’ are shifting and slippery paradigms. Conformity and orthodoxy, too, were constantly being redefined, and, as these authors have pointed out, conformity was frequently not an event or state but a process, being negotiated and modified over a period of time in response to a series of factors.⁹ There is no denying, however, that Hildersham’s relationship with the established order within the Church of England was at best often uneasy and sometimes deeply problematical and ambivalent. His struggle to maintain what he saw as a middle way, between popery on the one hand and separatism on the other, was attacked by opponents from both sides as inconsistent and logically flawed. Conversely, he insisted that he ended his days in ‘the very same faith and Judgement, touching all points of religion as I have ever been known to hold and profess’.¹⁰ An exploration of Hildersham’s beliefs and career trajectory will offer us a model of one type of possible response to the shifting demands for subscription and conformity, and a lens through which the enforcement

⁷ The term ‘nonseparating nonconformist’ was at the time directly related to Henry Jacob’s congregational polity, although Webster and others have subsequently tended to use it more widely. I am grateful to Dr Polly Ha for a discussion on this point.

⁸ Lake and Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, see p. v, ‘Section I: Orthodoxy as Process’ and ‘Section II: Conformity as Process’.

¹⁰ LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77, Will of Arthur Hildersham.

and negotiation of those demands can be viewed. In the process, the changing and complex nature of the Church of England itself will be illustrated.

This chapter will, firstly, consider Hildersham's doctrine, the intellectual basis of his position, through an examination of his writings and lectures, and then go on to look at the practical implications of such a stance in his relationship with the church.

1. 'My Doctrine': the intellectual basis of Hildersham's position

For Hildersham, as for all reformed Protestants, it was vital to establish what was a true church and what constituted true worship. The theological debate surrounding these two associated issues was predicated on the commonly-agreed premise that the Roman church was a false, even anti-Christian, institution with idolatrous and non-scriptural forms of worship, and therefore must be rejected and condemned.¹¹ This shared negative assumption was accompanied by a continuing discourse amongst Protestants about the nature of the true church. Although the Church Fathers were closely studied on the matter, the Bible alone was to be the foundation of the true church, and provide the divine model for reformed worship. As Collinson has reminded us, in the words of William Chillingworth, 'The Bible, the Bible only I say, is the religion of Protestants'.¹² Hildersham, too, reiterated this fundamental tenet; 'the written word of God onely is to be the rule of our life and religion'.¹³ Right at the end of his ministry, he again insisted on the same governing principle: 'If thou holdest

¹¹ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 667, where he calls the Church of Rome a 'synagogue of satan'. For a more detailed discussion of Hildersham's anti-popish teaching, see Chapter 3, above, pp. 133-138.

¹² Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982), p. viii.

¹³ Hildersham, cited in Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 1.

nothing in Religion but that thou canst warrant and prove by Gods Word, then holdest thou the truth'.¹⁴ The whole spectrum of Protestant thought was united on this foundational basis, but its detailed interpretation was not always to prove straightforward, particularly in the area of ecclesiology.

1.i. A True Church

Hildersham appeared to embrace what Webster has called 'the pre-Bucerian doctrine of the church', which depended on two marks, right doctrine and proper administration of the sacraments, as opposed to the 'three mark doctrine', that also required proper discipline.¹⁵ There was agreement, ideally, that all three were desirable, but the lack of a correct polity did not render a church invalid in the view of men like Hildersham. To regard right discipline as an essential mark of any true church led logically to separatism, and was the prime bone of contention between those who took this path, and the majority of puritans who remained within the national church, hoping for future reform. Hildersham can be found defending this position, that the Church of England was a true church, in a letter he wrote in the 1590s in response to an imprisoned gentlewoman, 'Mrs N', who had sought his advice on the issue of separation. Francis Johnson, a fellow-prisoner of the lady, had replied to Hildersham

¹⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 767.

¹⁵ Tom Webster, *Godly Clergy in Early Stuart England: The Caroline Puritan Movement c. 1620-1643* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 294. Webster quotes John Rogers, *A Godly and Fruitfull Exposition of the First Epistle of Peter* (1650), p. 237, on the subject: 'That company that hath the Doctrine of the Prophets and Apostles soundly preached in all substantiall Points, and the Sacraments for substance according to Christ's institution, is a true church of God, though there be blemishes therein'. Hildersham held an identical position, although he preferred the word 'corruptions' to 'blemishes'.

on her behalf, and then published the exchange of letters.¹⁶ Here we find Hildersham embracing the ‘two mark’ model; while admitting that ‘divers corruptions remayne in our church which were derived to us from the Papists ... yet are they not of that nature that can make it an Antichristian church’.¹⁷ He distinguishes between doctrine and discipline, stressing that if the former was sound, then a church could not be condemned as false. Later, he was to emphasise this point even more clearly to a congregation in Ashby: ‘those assemblies that enjoy the Word and Doctrine of salvation, though they have many corruptions remaining in them are to be acknowledged the true Churches of God, and such as none of the faithfull may make separation from’.¹⁸ Evangelical preaching, then, which proclaimed biblical doctrine, was the real key to determining the status of a church; as Hildersham rebuked ‘Mrs N’, ‘If our pastours offer to lead you unto salvation through no other doore then Christ, how dare you that say you are Christ’s refuse to be guyled by them’.¹⁹ Conversely, Johnson argued that the absence of a proper scriptural church order prevented the transmission of true doctrine, and that, in fact, a distinction could not be made between teaching and governance. For Hildersham, if preaching and preachers were still operating in any church, it remained a true church, and ‘till God hath forsaken a

¹⁶ Johnson, *Treatise*. Although Hildersham’s letter was published within Johnson’s treatise without his consent, there seems to be no evidence that Hildersham publicly repudiated it, or even criticised Johnson for his actions. Moreover, his friend John Cotton, in the preface to Hildersham’s *Lectures upon John*, sig. A4, praised the providential wisdom of God for ‘bringing to light such a beame of the Light of his truth by the hand of an adversary, against the Author’s mind’, which dealt Johnson ‘and his Cause such a deadly Wound in open view as neither himself nor all his Associates can be able to heal’. This verdict of Cotton’s is also quoted by Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 151. For more on Johnson, the context of this episode, and his relationship with Hildersham, see Chapter 4, p. 157, and Chapter 6, pp. 246-249. For a discussion of a similar debate on the validity of the Church of England parish system that was taking place between 1596 and 1599, between Johnson and Henry Jacob, a nonseparating Congregationalist, see Stephen Brachlow, ‘The Elizabethan Roots of Henry Jacob’s Churchmanship: Refocusing the Historiographical Lens’, *JEH*, 36:2 (1985), p. 240.

¹⁷ Johnson, *Treatise*, pp. 17-18.

¹⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 165.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 17.

Church, no man may forsake it'.²⁰ Gospel preaching was God's gift, and a sign that God was still gracing an assembly with His presence, for it guaranteed that 'men may be assured to find and attaine to salvation'.²¹ This was because the Word was never granted merely to harden or bring people to judgment, but 'to worke the salvation of some'.²² For these reasons it was wrong for the 'Brownists' to separate from the Church of England, and Hildersham strongly condemned their action. Nevertheless, he showed some sympathy for the reasons behind their stance, if not for the conclusions to which it led them. The Brownists had a point, he admitted, about the 'generall increase of all filthy and abhominable sins in the land' which gave 'just cause of feare' that the 'candlestick', the symbol of God's continuing presence in his church, represented by preaching, would be removed.²³ If this were to happen, the Church of England would cease to be a true church, and the warnings about the imminent danger of this happening grew more intense and apocalyptic in Hildersham's work as time went on.²⁴

Although the divine gift of preaching was the central reason for Hildersham's advocacy of the Church of England, he also defended other aspects of its constitution and ministry to Mrs N. In response to her contention that 'all the ministers in England work upon the consciences of men by virtue of an Antichristian office and calling', Hildersham's fundamental argument was that the office of priesthood in the English church, despite the popish connotations of the title, was 'the very same in substance

²⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 166.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

²⁴ The image of the golden candlesticks and the messages to the seven churches can be found in Revelation 1:10-3:22. For Hildersham's warnings about the removal of the candlestick in England, see, for example, his, *Lectures upon John*, p. 167, and his, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 617, 778, 806. See also Chapter 3, above, p. 146.

with the Pastors office described in the word' and that it differed from the Roman priesthood 'as much ... as light doth from darkness'.²⁵ He pointed to the biblical functions of preaching, teaching, admonishing, and administering the sacraments that the English priesthood exercised and were established by law in England. For Hildersham, then, this was a mere problem of nomenclature (which could be avoided by using the biblical terms pastor or minister), but Johnson disagreed: he set out a lengthy comparison of the English priestly office with both the Catholic priesthood and the scriptural pastorship, concluding that the English and the Roman priesthoods were essentially the same. By referring to the *Ordinal*, Hildersham moved on to the manner of calling to office of ministers, and endeavoured to show that 'our Law agreeth with the law of God', in that candidates must demonstrate their ability to teach, be approved of by 'the people and flock', and be admitted before a 'solemne assembly'.²⁶ He does concede, however, that 'there is great want in our Church in the due execution of these things: but that is the fault of the men, not the calling'.²⁷ Nevertheless, the 'substance' was that which 'the word prescribeth'. Hildersham did not defend the office of bishop, but instead turned to a personal account of 'what moved me to seek a calling from them, and what perswadeth me to think that the calling I have received from them is not wicked and unlawfull'.²⁸ His first reason reveals a typical puritan casuistry as well as a basic erastianism. Being persuaded in 'my conscience' that:

²⁵ Johnson, *Treatise*, pp. 79, 94.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

the Lord had a true Church in this Realme even at the beginning of her Maiestyes raigne, which being assembled out of all the parts of the Land in Parliament, did commit this authority to ordeyne Ministers unto the Bishops and knowing out of the Word of God that every true Church hath this power and authority to ordayne Ministers: I considered with myself that though the Church offended in committing this power and authority unto them that by the Law of God were not capable of it, yet I might without sinne seek and take the Churches ordination at theyr hands: as I may reverence and take the benefit of the Princes power and authority which is of God, though it be committed unto and exercised by men that by the Law of God are not capable of it.²⁹

Thus, although the bishops let the side down by being incapable of exercising the power committed to them, this did not negate the authority vested in the church itself.

For Hildersham, it would have been better to be without bishops, but for the sake of preaching the gospel, he was prepared to live within a flawed system. In the light of Polly Ha's work on the continuance of an English presbyterianism after 1590, it is intriguing to speculate on Hildersham's real feelings on such issues of ecclesiology.³⁰

He was, after all, a very close friend of Cartwright, and a supporter of the *Admonition to the Parliament*, and he included Walter Travers, the leading light of English presbyterianism, as another intimate acquaintance.³¹ William Lilly claimed that the people of Ashby continued to be 'presbyterianly affected' by Hildersham's influence.³²

Hildersham's own son Samuel, and others of his disciples, such as Simeon Ashe and Julines Herring, were to become fully committed to the presbyterian cause after his death. Though we lack any conclusive evidence regarding Hildersham's specific ecclesiology, it does seem likely that at heart he would have preferred a classical type

²⁹ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 117. For an interesting discussion of erastianism in the Elizabethan church, see Patrick Collinson, 'If Constantine, then also Theodosius: St Ambrose and the Integrity of the Elizabethan *Ecclesia Anglicana*', *JEH*, 30:2 (1979), pp. 205-209.

³⁰ Polly Ha, 'English Presbyterianism, c.1590- 1640' (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006).

³¹ For Hildersham's correspondence with Travers, see Chapter 4, above, pp. 181-182.

³² Lilly, *Life and Times*, p. 6.

of system, rather than a modified episcopacy, but this was a lesser priority for him than preaching. When hopes for reform seemed to have been crushed in the 1590s, as long as he was able to resolve his conscience that the current system was not 'unlawful', he negotiated a way to live with it. Even so, he excuses rather than advocates episcopacy, and when he speaks of being patient with those 'not yet persuaded' that the 'discipline' was necessary, it conveys the impression of one personally thus convinced but prepared to wait and work behind the scenes for a gradual ideological transformation amongst the ranks of his clerical brethren.³³

The other main reason, apart from preaching, that Hildersham advances for persisting with support for the Church of England as an institution, is that 'the best reformed Churches' continued to recognise it as a true church; rather than condemning the English church, those on the Continent had stretched out the hand of fellowship to their 'sister'.³⁴ No individual or 'private member' therefore had the right to judge that any church was antichristian. They might dislike the corruptions present in the church, and refuse to subscribe to them, but they did not have the authority to account all the churches as 'heathens or publicanes', as long as they had the Word and the sacraments.³⁵ Although he does not go into any details, Hildersham suggests that the faults to be found in the Church of England were nothing compared to those present in the separatist assemblies: 'there is nothing practiced amongst us so contrary to the discipline as there is amongst you'.³⁶

³³ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 59.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

To maintain such a ‘two mark’ ecclesiological position required also a firm conviction of the right administration of the sacraments. This explains why men like Hildersham and William Bradshaw were so insistent that the people were taught properly prior to communicating, and that they displayed true knowledge, repentance, faith, and charity. Hildersham’s treatise on the Lord’s Supper, which outlined six preconditions for receiving, was written to educate his people ‘on his first coming unto them’.³⁷

1.ii. True Worship

The governing principle, then, for evaluating what constituted a true church was the authority of scripture. This was equally the case in the associated area of deciding what was true worship, but to an even greater degree, in that the Bible has considerably more to say on this subject. Both of Hildersham’s major published lecture series are based on biblical passages which contain verses dealing specifically with the matter of worship, so he can be found addressing the subject in great detail. In Lecture 34 of the series on John, Hildersham articulates his own doctrinal position: ‘doe neither more nor lesse in my service then I have appointed. Say that we doe that in his service which he hath not forbidden, yet if he hath not commanded it, we highly offend him’.³⁸ This strict adherence to the ‘regulative principle’ of scriptural interpretation meant that he rejected the concept of adiaphora in worship; though some things might be of less

³⁷ See Hildersham, *Lords Supper*. This treatise is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, above, pp. 138-146. For a discussion on the tensions that could arise over the administration of the communion, see Christopher Haigh, ‘Communion and Community: Exclusion from Communion in Post-Reformation England’, *JEH*, 51:4 (2000), pp. 721-740.

³⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 161.

importance than others, nothing was indifferent.³⁹ Unless the Bible actually prescribed a particular element or form of worship, then it was to be shunned as a ‘fancy and idol’.⁴⁰ ‘Count it thy wisdom’, Hildersham urged, ‘to cleave so precisely to the Word as (in the matters of Gods service) not to do any thing which thou canst not finde warranted by the Word’.⁴¹ In the later lectures on Psalm 51, Hildersham continued to advocate this dogma: ‘In nothing are wee so precisely tied to the direction of the Word, as in the matters of the worship of God.’⁴² Anything else, even if it was not formally forbidden by Scripture, was a human invention, or ‘will worship’.⁴³ This division, between those who upheld the regulative principle, and those who accepted the looser ‘normative principle’ (which allowed the inclusion in worship of anything not positively banned by the Word), became a major fault-line in Protestantism, and was one of the main reasons that the stricter sort were labelled as ‘puritans’ or ‘precisians’. It was Hildersham’s unwavering allegiance to this definitive principle in worship that lay at the heart of his problems in the church; unless his conscience could find scriptural warrant for any matter deemed enforceable by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, working on the premise that there were things indifferent that it was

³⁹ This concept was articulated clearly in William Bradshaw, *English Puritanisme* (1605), p. 1, and William Ames, *Medulla theologica* (Amsterdam, 1623), see Horton Davies, *Worship and Theology in England: Vol. 1, from Cranmer to Hooker, 1534-1603* (Princeton, New Jersey, 1970), pp. 51-70, 255-293. Davis himself refers to it as ‘*Sola Scriptura* as Liturgical Criterion’ (p. 258). The term ‘regulative principle’ itself is of more recent origin, and is now widely used, particularly in presbyterian circles. It can be found, for example, in Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 376-377, 416, 420. Noll cites its usage in Ralph J. Gore Jr., ‘Reviewing the Puritan Regulative Principle’, *Presbyterion* 20 (Spring 1994), pp. 41-50, and John Allen Delivuk, ‘Biblical Authority and the Proof of the Regulative Principle of Worship in the Westminster Confession’, *Westminster Theological Journal* 58 (Fall, 1996), pp. 237-256.

⁴⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 161.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 162. Although Hildersham rejected the term ‘puritan’ as odious, he seems more prepared to accept the equally polemical name ‘precisian’ to describe those who adhered to his position, see, for example, *Lectures upon John*, p. 276.

⁴² Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 711, and see also pp. 381, 383, 580.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 385, 390, 446, 711.

legitimate for them to decide, then he, and others who shared his views, were unable to conform. This tension found its focus in the ‘ceremonies’, most notably making the sign of the cross in baptism, wearing the surplice, and kneeling to receive the Lord’s Supper.

The clearest and most detailed explanation of Hildersham’s position can be found in the book that thirty-two ministers of the Lincoln diocese presented to James I at Hinchinbrooke, during the royal hunting season of 1604-5.⁴⁴ The issuing of new canons, in particular Canon 36, in the wake of the Hampton Court Conference, signalled a tighter redefinition of orthodoxy and a renewed emphasis on enforcement. Fresh declarations of conformity and subscription required from clergy raised problems for men of Hildersham’s persuasion. The *Abridgement* represents a corporate statement of belief, designed to provide learned arguments in support of these ministers’ position, addressed to a monarch who was reputed to enjoy the cut and thrust of theological debate. It is an attempt to supply a historical and theological justification for a nonconformist stance. From the start, the ministers make it clear that they have no problems with the first article of subscription which required acknowledgement of the king as ‘the onely supreme governour’, but that it was the

⁴⁴ See *An Abridgement of that booke which the ministers of Lincolne Diocesse delivered to his majestie upon the first of December 1605* (reprinted 1617). C.W. Foster, *The State of the Church in the reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln* (Lincoln, 1926), Vol. I, p. lxxi, says that, in fact, the real date of presentation was 1 December 1604. The treatise represented ‘An Apologie for themselves and their brethren that refuse the Subscription and Conformitie which is required’ (title page). Since Hildersham was generally recognised as one of the leading diocesan nonconformists, and one of the few ministerial suspensions in the diocese subsequent to the book’s presentation, it is not unreasonable to conclude that he played a major part in its drawing up, and that it provides an accurate representation of his opinions. For a discussion about the circumstances surrounding its presentation, see B. W. Quintrell, ‘The Royal Hunt and the Puritans, 1604-1605’, *JEH*, 31:1 (1980), pp. 41-58.

other two articles which raised difficulties for them.⁴⁵ It was the right of the Bible alone to determine the nature of worship in the church, they asserted, and here they looked to the ‘best reformed churches’ and ‘the godly learned of all Churches and ages’ as its interpreters.

The second article declared that the Book of Common Prayer and Ordering of Bishops, Priests and Deacons ‘containeth in it nothing contrary to the word of God’ and it alone was prescribed to be used in public prayer and administration of the sacraments.⁴⁶ The *Abridgement* raised two major exceptions to this article: first, a series of arguments related to how the prayer book treated the canon of Scripture, and, second, that it commanded ‘the use of ceremonies as are contrary to the word’.⁴⁷ The ministers argued that the prayer book schedule for public Bible reading meant that the greatest part of the canonical Scriptures was either not read at all or on occasions when few could be present. The same source held the apocrypha to be canonical, and treated it with similar respect to the authentically canonical text.⁴⁸ The authors also objected to the biblical translation prescribed by the prayer book, stating that in places it added to the original text and at others took away from it. Thus, it ‘binds us to a translation which is absurd and senseless’ and that ‘perverteth the meaning of the Holy Ghost’.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ *Abridgement*, p. 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, ‘A Table of the principall Heads in this Booke’.

⁴⁸ *Abridgement*. Interestingly the ‘Song of Solomon’ is mentioned as one of those parts of Scripture omitted from the schedule of reading. It was one of the puritans’ favourite books, frequently cited when the subject of assurance was being handled. Hildersham himself composed a paraphrase of this book, *The Canticles*, published posthumously in 1672. For a further discussion of this subject, see Chapter 3, above, pp. 116-117, n. 86.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, ‘A table of the principall Heads in this Booke’.

The second exception brings us to the heart of what is usually characterised as ‘Jacobethan’ nonconformity. Although such nonconformity also comprised some fundamental objections to the Book of Common Prayer and other criticisms of the Church of England, it was opposition to the ‘ceremonies’ that became its core complaint.⁵⁰ Four main arguments are advanced against such practices in general, and each is then applied in particular to the three main ceremonies themselves. An appeal to Scripture is always the first touchstone, to be supported by reference to the ‘judgement of the godly learned’.⁵¹ The first argument centred round the old allegation of ‘humane inventions abused to Idolatry’, which had been current since the earliest years of the Reformation.⁵² The ministers were eager to make a space between themselves and the Catholics: by rejecting the ceremonies inherited from them ‘we might shew ourselves thereby unlike to the papists’.⁵³ They demonstrated that the use of such ceremonies infringed the Scriptures, and again the fear of Catholicism gaining a foothold in their parishes emerges:

That seeing the Pope is reveiled to be that great Antichrist, and his Idolatry troubleth the Church at this day more then any other, and our people converse more with papists then with any other Idolaters there is more danger in the retaining of the ceremonyes and relicks of Popery then of any other Idolatry whatsoever.⁵⁴

The widespread feeling was that the ‘retaining of the popish ceremonies will certainly bee a meanes to indanger the doctrine that wee professe, and bring the people back

⁵⁰ The table at the end of the *Abridgement* (pp. 89-102) lists a host of things about the Church of England that Hildersham and his brethren saw fit to criticise, such as the observation of holy days, the private administration of the sacraments, the notion of baptismal regeneration implied through the application of interrogatories to infants, the use of the ring in marriage, and the churching of women.

⁵¹ *Abridgement*, p. 23.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 22. See also, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 711-714.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

again to Popery'.⁵⁵ There are two points here: ceremonies served both to hand a weapon to their polemical opponents, and also confused the people. Secondly, the ministers argued that 'All humane ceremonies of mysticall signification are unlawfull' and they went on to prove 'by many reasons' why these particular ceremonies were 'humane ordinances' and of 'mysticall signification', which gave them the status of *de facto* sacraments.⁵⁶ They maintained that as helps to worship, God had 'given four meanes viz. the word written, the word preached, the Sacraments, and the great booke of the Creatures'.⁵⁷ God himself had abrogated the Old Testament ceremonies by which he had taught the people, so that if their 'signification may not now be used, much less may those which man hath devised'.⁵⁸ For, they explained, 'the service wee are to do unto God now is not mysticall, ceremonial and carnall (as it was then) but plaine and spirituall'.⁵⁹

The third argument propounded that 'All humane Ceremonies which are esteemed, imposed and observed as parts of Gods worship are unlawfull'.⁶⁰ Adhering to the regulative principle of scriptural interpretation, the biblical text prohibited any such additions, for 'God is the onely appointer of his owne worship, and condemn[s] all human inventions'.⁶¹ Besides, they claimed, the use of such ceremonies served to harden people in their superstition. Obviously smarting at the polemical name-calling

⁵⁵ *Abridgement*, p. 32. Catholic writers themselves also used similar arguments. John Martiall and Richard Bristow are cited here, and see also Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford, 2002), p. 154, on the Catholic exile Richard Broughton. In his, *The English Protestants Recantation* (Douai, 1617), pp. 377-378, Broughton claimed that the doctrines of purgatory and praying for the dead could be proved from 'their publicly allowed and reconfirmed *Communion Booke*'. For more on Hildersham's anti-Catholic teaching, see Chapter 3, above, pp. 133-138.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 'A Table of the principall Heads in this Booke', and p. 41.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44. For similar arguments, see also Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 159, 184-199.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

of their conformist opponents, the ministers contested the omission of these ceremonies being categorised as a sin, so that ‘men otherwise agreeing with the Church in all matters of faith and manners are esteemed Schismatikes and sectaries’.⁶²

The fourth argument stated that ‘All ceremonies in imposing and using whereof the rules prescribed in the word for the Churches direction in matters of Ceremony are not kept, are unlawful’.⁶³ Even the king, the ‘supreme governour in all causes’, was not free to appoint what ‘rites and orders’ he thought good, but ‘hee is bound to observe therein those rules which God in his Word hath prescribed to his Church for her direction in those matters’.⁶⁴ The ministers also refuted the suggestion that papists would be alienated if the ceremonies were abolished, and insisted that continued use only served to harden and confirm such people in their error. In addition, they claimed, the use of ceremonies ‘may grieve or offend such as are brethren’, and ran the risk of driving some into Brownism.⁶⁵ The greatest danger, they felt, existed where the ceremonies were reintroduced in congregations where they had long been out of use.⁶⁶

These various arguments were all specifically related to the three main ceremonies to which the ministers objected, notably the wearing of the surplice, making the sign of the cross in baptism, and kneeling to receive communion. The surplice was regarded as the popish vestment *par excellence*, for without it a Catholic priest was unable to perform service, neither could he ‘hallow water, nor belles’.⁶⁷ But not only was it ‘a badge and ornament’ of the Catholic priesthood, it was also required

⁶² *Abridgement*, p. 50.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63. See also Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 133.

⁶⁶ John Burgess was one of those who favoured such arguments. For more on Burgess, see Chapter 4, above, p. 167, and below, p. 229.

⁶⁷ *Abridgement*, p. 36.

for the supreme act of idolatry, the saying of mass; it was ‘a popish massing garment’.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it had an unlawful mystical signification, something recognised even by those Protestants such as Bucer and Martyr who had argued for its retention.⁶⁹ In rejecting it, many reformers who had opposed its use were cited.⁷⁰ Their practical experience at parish level showed these ministers that the wearing of the surplice gave rise to superstition, for many people ‘in all parts of the land’ regarded it as ‘so holy a thing, as they will not receive the sacrament from any but such as weare it’.⁷¹

Making the sign of the cross, too, was ‘notoriously knowne to bee abused to superstition and Idolatry by the Papists’.⁷² The Catholic writers, Bellarmine and Stapleton, are quoted to prove their belief in the mystical powers of this sign, ‘*ex opere operato*’, to drive away devils and combat diseases. Moreover, the papists’ ‘breaden god (the greatest and most abhominable Idoll that ever was knowne in Christendom)’, could not be made without such a sign.⁷³ In Catholic baptism, the procedure had no spiritual virtue, the ministers argued, until the water had been sanctified by the sign of the cross, and the child marked by it to drive away the devil. Even the Book of Common Prayer expressed its mystical significance by annexing ‘to it the Doctrine which it teacheth’.⁷⁴ The ‘common people’ stood in ‘superstitious awe’ of it, and held

⁶⁸ *Abridgment*, p. 37.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 47. For vestments and their mystical signification, see also Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 38-39.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 38. For a survey of the history of this practice in the English church, and opposition to it, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 124-134.

⁷³ *Abridgement*, p. 39.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

that ‘their children were not rightly baptised without it’.⁷⁵ Making the sign at the end of the baptismal ceremony was particularly culpable, for this implied that what went before was incomplete without it.⁷⁶ Perhaps most fundamentally, the authors concluded, none of these ceremonies were used when Christ himself was baptised, ‘which notwithstanding had been most fit’, neither had he given ‘any such thing in charge to his Apostles’.⁷⁷

Kneeling to receive the bread and wine in the communion service was the ceremony which attracted the most vehement and lengthy criticism.⁷⁸ At the most basic level, it was objected to because Christ and his apostles, at the first institution of the Lord’s Supper, did not receive the elements kneeling. Moreover, there was no instruction for such a posture in the reception of any sacrament in the Scriptures, or any evidence of such an action in the primitive church.⁷⁹ Besides, the sacrament was commanded to be ‘received not worshipped’.⁸⁰ The ministers argued that it had long been recognised that the gesture had been abused by the papists because it was an admission of the Corporal Presence, and thus adoring the elements was the mark of the greatest idolatry possible: ‘Wee may well conclude thate of all the ceremonyes that ever were used in popery, none may bee so properly termed Popish and Antichristian as this’.⁸¹ Indeed, the only churches which knelt to receive were those ‘perswaded of

⁷⁵ *Abridgement*, p. 52.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁷⁸ It was an alleged failure to kneel at communion in 1614 that led almost a hundred parishioners at Ashby to be reported at Visitation, and a process which led to Hildersham’s suspension and degradation from the ministry by the High Commission for nine years, see p. 236, below, and Chapter 2, above, pp. 62-67.

⁷⁹ *Abridgement*, pp. 73-74.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 41. This argument was at the centre of the omission of the Black Rubric from the 1559 Prayer Book.

Christ's Corporal Presence'.⁸² Even when adoration of the elements did not occur, the kneeling gave an appearance of 'grosse idolatry even of bread worship', for outwardly there was 'no difference to be discerned between us and them'.⁸³ Concern was expressed that kneeling to receive afforded opportunities for 'Church papists, or popishly and superstitiously minded in this matter of the Sacrament ... to commit the outward act of their Idolatry themselves, and [they were] confirmed also in their superstition by our example'.⁸⁴ The importance of maintaining 'old termes' and ceremonies was recognised even by the Jesuits, it was argued, as a way of keeping alive the ancient faith.⁸⁵ Sitting or standing to receive communion were 'indifferent gestures but lawfull', according to Bullinger.⁸⁶ Besides, Christ had ordained the Supper 'to be a banquet and Sacrament of that sweet familiarity that is between the faithfull and him ... And in what Nation was it ever held comely to kneele at their banquets, or to receive their foode kneeling'.⁸⁷ The appropriate disposition for receiving was thus 'not so much humility as assurance of faith and cheerfull thankefulnesse'.⁸⁸

The *Abridgement* proceeds to deal with three principal objections to its arguments. To the contention that kneeling was not adoration of the elements but of God himself, the authors responded that the gesture was not scripturally commanded, and was not used when prayer was offered at banquets. The reasoning that God's gift of the sacrament, like any bequest by an earthly monarch, should be received with

⁸² *Abridgement*, pp. 73-4.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

appropriate reverence, was countered by an insistence that true reverence was demonstrated when the 'holy action' was performed in the manner God had appointed. If God had intended reverence to be shown towards the outward elements, he would not have chosen such base and common ones, and he would have explicitly directed it in the Word. If the gesture only implied reverence for God, there were other times in worship, such as baptism, the hearing of the Word preached and read, when kneeling would have been more appropriate.⁸⁹ Finally, to those who put forward the case that the gesture should not be abolished, but rather that idolatry and superstition should be tackled by a teaching of the truth, the ministers responded that there was a lack of pastors who held true views of the sacrament, and anyway there was a natural proneness in people to idolatry. Therefore, the authors concluded, 'we must stop holes not make them, take away stumbling blocks; not laye them, and then bid men beware of them'.⁹⁰

The *Abridgement*, then, is a useful source for giving a fuller understanding of why men like Hildersham objected so strongly to the ceremonies in worship. However, it was a learned work of apologetics designed for a specific recipient, although drawn up by ministers very conscious of the effects such ceremonial usage had in a parish context. In his lectures to a congregation in Ashby, Hildersham is much more circumspect on the subject of the ceremonies. Although he preached extensively about the nature of true worship, including the rightful place of appropriate outward gestures during prayer, preaching and hearing the Word read, he was very brief on such matters

⁸⁹ *Abridgement*, p. 85.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

when it came to the sacraments, where two of the contested ceremonies were used.⁹¹

Usually he sticks to general principles in these areas, speaking only of not going against one's conscience when convinced of anything in the Word, which was open to various interpretations.⁹² It is possible, of course, that such controversial material was censored or toned down prior to publication, but he himself supplies a more compelling reason for his reticence. A focus upon disputed matters like the ceremonies merely served to deflect the congregation's attention away from the more important issues of soteriology. When he did talk about the ceremonies or 'matters of judgement', typically it was to express concern that differences of opinion on the subject were causing division amongst godly people. Addressing his ministerial brethren, he urges that

We should avoide all bitternesse of contention about these things. Though we differ in judgement in these things, yet should we endeavour, that the people may discerne no difference, nor disagreement in Doctrine amongst us. True it is, we may and ought to seeke resolution for our consciences out of Gods Word, even in these things, seeme they never so small ... And when we have received good resolution in these things, we ought to hold that fast, so farre forth as God hath revealed his will unto us ... But if we dissent one from another in these things, it must be without bitternesse, in a brotherly manner ... It is not to be held want of zeale, or alteration in judgement, but true wisdom in a Minister, to shunne in his Ministry and Doctrine (so farre as in him lyeth) these points that brethren differ in; and to spend his time in such points wherein we all agree, and which are more profitable for the people to know.⁹³

Thus, the public congregation was not the appropriate forum for these issues, which ultimately were of secondary importance, to be discussed. In private and amongst

⁹¹ See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 124-127. When talking about the receiving the Lord's Supper, he only mentions the use of the eyes and ears.

⁹² See, for example, Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 716, 776.

⁹³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 301.

fellow ministers, there was a place for debate and lobbying, but though Hildersham was personally convinced of the wrongness of the ceremonies, yet

For my part, I am fully perswaded, there are godly and conscionable men on both sides, that will not sticke to professe, every truth that God hath revealed unto them, how much soever they might disadvantage themselves thereby, in their credit and estate amongst men.⁹⁴

This seems to be a plea for nonconformists not to adopt a superior spiritual attitude or dismiss those with whom they disagreed as mere place-servers. He is even more explicit in his later lectures:

There may be difference in judgement even betweene godly and good men; and one may see that to be a sinne which another man (every whit as good as he) cannot be perswaded to be so ... Christians may not condemne or judge one another to be hypocrites, for their difference in judgement in these smaller matters.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, Hildersham recognised the difficult position in which conscientious objectors found themselves when faced with conformist ceremonial, although he was alarmed when this led some to absent themselves from services altogether:

Many have made scruple to bee present in our Church assemblies, where the Minister hath worne a surplice, or used the signe of Crosse in Baptisme, because they have thought their presence hath beene an approbation of these things, and so a partaking in those supposed corruptions. And some there are that doe applaud these men in this, and say, they are farre honest men then such as disliking these Ceremonies, will yet joyne in Gods worship with our Congregations that use them. But both these are greatly deceived. For admitting these Ceremonies doth use to be monuments of Idolatrie, and as great corruptions in Gods worship, as any man can imagine them to be, admit I say this, yet so long as the worship I goe unto, is (for the substance of it) pure, and

⁹⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 303. Francis Higginson attributed his own conversion to nonconformity to discussions with Hildersham.

⁹⁵ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 715.

according to Gods ordinance, and such as I am bound by the commandement of God to use, the corruptions and sins which another brings into it, cannot defile it unto me, nor shalbe imputed unto me at all, so long as I shew my dislike unto them so far as I may, keeping my selfe within the compasse of my calling; and do unfainedly grieve and mourne for them.⁹⁶

Interestingly, when he declares that no-one will be held responsible for another man's sin, he only cites the two examples of wearing the surplice and making the sign of the cross; both these were ministerial actions of which the lay Christian was merely a passive observer. He does not mention the far more thorny issue of receiving the Lord's Supper, which required an active physical response on the part of the communicant, choosing whether or not to kneel.

He sums up his advice by stressing:

in any case nourish in thy heart a sorrow for all such as are corruptions in deede, (specially in the worship of God) and professe also outwardly upon all just occasions thy dislike unto them, or else thou wilt be in danger to be defiled by them⁹⁷

2. 'My practice and ... my sufferings'

A detailed understanding of Hildersham's nonconformist position is thus necessary to appreciate his actions in context. Clarke records that he was 'alwaies from his first entering into the Ministry, a resolved and conscientious Non-conformist ... and so continued to his dying day'.⁹⁸ Although it could be supposed that such an unwavering stance might be incompatible with an extended career in a church that required conformity, we have already seen how Hildersham was able to exercise a

⁹⁶ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 181.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁹⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 151.

conscientious and largely successful ministry as vicar of Ashby from 1593 to 1605, and as a lecturer there for considerably longer.⁹⁹ He was also involved to a certain extent within the official diocesan machinery, as his role in collecting evidence at the 1599 investigation of complaints against Anthony Nutter, demonstrated.¹⁰⁰ Despite his criticism of its corruptions, this was not a man alienated from the church, at this stage, but one included and committed. One of the factors permitting such an involvement was undoubtedly a generally less stringent attitude to the enforcement of clerical conformity on the part of the authorities during certain periods, especially when the perceived threat from Catholicism demanded the services of effective preachers to counter it. However, the principal reason that Hildersham was able to continue preaching so long was the support and protection of powerful patrons, themselves sympathetic to, or tolerant of, nonconformity.¹⁰¹ Without the personal and political influence of the third Earl of Huntingdon and his successors, patrons of the living of Ashby, Hildersham would surely have had a much shorter incumbency. Under the third Earl, Ashby became established as a puritan parish, where nonconformity was the *status quo*, and few would dare to defy the godly hegemony. The case of poor Richard Spencer, who assayed such a challenge, has received attention precisely because it was so exceptional.¹⁰² Significantly, it came at a time when wider circumstances, nationally and within the diocese, perhaps led him to expect a rather more sympathetic hearing for his conformist views. Throughout Leicestershire, too, the power of the earls as

⁹⁹ See Chapter 3, above.

¹⁰⁰ LRO ID 41/ 4/174. See also, Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', pp. 100-102. Anthony Nutter, rector of Fenny Drayton in Leicestershire from 1582 to 1605, was one of the puritan ministers arraigned with Cartwright in the Star Chamber in 1591-2. He was deprived of his benefice in the same campaign against nonconformity that led to Hildersham suffering a similar fate, see Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 363.

¹⁰¹ For more on the role of patronage, see Chapter 4, above, pp. 182-193.

¹⁰² For a more detailed discussion of the Spencer case, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 48-57.

Lords Lieutenant of the county, ensured that challenges to their protégés were unlikely to gain much support; when Judge Edmund Anderson, a noted opponent of puritanism, took offence at something said by Hildersham in a sermon at Leicester Assizes on 20 July 1596, he wanted to indict the preacher before a Grand Jury. However, commented Clarke, ‘in those daies, it would have been hard to have found a Grand-Jury in Leicester-shire, that would have done that’.¹⁰³ During Elizabeth’s reign, powerful friends at court (including the queen herself, who was said to call Hildersham ‘cousin’), in the privy council and in parliament, served to insulate Hildersham from the worst dangers. Perhaps such influential forces may have been responsible for the failure of the attachment sent out from the High Commission for Hildersham’s apprehension in 1598.¹⁰⁴

Up to 1603, it seems, too, that successive bishops of Lincoln were prepared, to some extent, to turn a blind eye to the nonconformity of Hildersham and others. Possible reasons for this were complex and interconnected; the power of the earls, of course, was a major factor, as was the need to combat Catholicism in the diocese, especially important to William Cooper.¹⁰⁵ Personal friendship and long acquaintance surely played a part in the relicensing of Hildersham by Bishop Barlow in 1609.¹⁰⁶ A later bishop, John Williams, was glad of puritan support in the internal diocesan battle

¹⁰³ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 146. The text that Hildersham preached on was 1 Kings 18:17-18. At the same assizes in 1596, David Allen, ‘sometime the preacher at Louth’, was also reviled by Anderson from the bench on account of his puritan tendencies, see Strype, *Annals*, iv, pp. 369-371, cited in Foster, *State of the Church*, p. ciii. For more on Allen, see below, pp. 233-234. For Edmund Anderson, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/469).

¹⁰⁴ See Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 146.

¹⁰⁵ William Cooper was Bishop of Lincoln from 1571 to 1584. Although this was before Hildersham’s arrival in Ashby, Cooper’s approach was particularly relevant to his predecessor, Anthony Gilby.

¹⁰⁶ The two men had been friends from university days in Cambridge, see Chapter 4, above, p. 166.

with the faction around his chancellor, John Lambe.¹⁰⁷ As Fincham has explored in *Prelate as Pastor*, the wide difference of opinions, styles and priorities on the episcopal bench led to very diverse and patchy levels of conformity in different dioceses and under different bishops.¹⁰⁸

These disparities due to personnel were in addition to anomalies inherent within the ecclesiastical system itself. Ashby's location on the borders of Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Derbyshire, and on the diocesan boundaries of Lincoln and Coventry and Lichfield meant that Hildersham was able to exploit the lack of consistency between jurisdictions to his advantage. Thus, even when he was suspended by the Bishop of Lincoln, William Chaderton, in 1605, 'after some time, by the connivance and favour of William Overton, then Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, he preached sometimes in that Diocesse, specially at those two famous Exercises at Burton upon Trent in Staffordshire, and Repton in Derbyshire'.¹⁰⁹ It was said that Overton was prepared to grant a preaching licence in return for a 'present of Venison, and afterward maintained by a yearly gratuity of a brace of Bucks'.¹¹⁰ Hildersham was described as 'the main upholder' of these two exercises for 'many years', which was certainly the case since the early 1590s.¹¹¹ Calke, in Derbyshire, was only a couple of miles from Ashby, and, as a royal peculiar, was exempt from ordinary

¹⁰⁷ For a discussion of this factional struggle, see Chalmers, 'Puritanism in Leicestershire', pp. 189- 210.

¹⁰⁸ Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: The Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990). See also, Roland A. Marchant, *The Puritans and the Church Courts in the Diocese of York, 1560-1642* (London, 1960).

¹⁰⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 147.

¹¹⁰ Gataker, 'Life of Bradshaw', p. 55. A niche was similarly found for William Bradshaw in the diocese, after he had been in trouble with the authorities elsewhere. For more on the diocese, see Michael Cahill, 'The Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, 1603-1642' (PhD thesis, University of Warwick, 2001), especially 'Chapter 1. Bishop Overton and the Problems of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Seventeenth Century', pp. 19-29. Cahill describes Overton as 'a pastorally-exercised Calvinist bishop, his goals being to promote preaching, reform the ministry and discipline of the church and to deal roundly with papists', p. 24.

¹¹¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 147. For more on Hildersham's involvement with these exercises, see below, Chapter 6, pp. 256-280.

diocesan controls. Because of this, Hildersham was able to recommend his younger friend and protégé, the similarly nonconformist Julines Herring, to the vacancy there. Herring went on to exercise a very popular ministry at Calke; Clarke reported that people from miles around would travel there for the whole day with victuals to hear him preach, going home singing psalms and repeating sermons.¹¹² Hildersham's influence and friends also pervaded the nearby archdeaconry of Nottingham, which was 'distinctly separated from York and thereby achieved a measure of independence'.¹¹³

This resourcefulness in exploiting geographical and jurisdictional conditions to enable them to continue preaching, demonstrates how inventive the puritan mind could be. Men like Hildersham were prepared to explore a variety of means, provided they were legitimate and did not offend their consciences. Justification came through the acknowledgment of the preaching call as the highest divine imperative. The adoption and development of the lecture system, not exclusively a puritan institution but increasingly dominated by them, illustrates this willingness to use new means to circumvent restrictions. As Seaver has shown, in London and elsewhere, it enabled the godly to establish additional preaching ministries in areas where there had been inadequate provision, or to supplement existing ministries.¹¹⁴ The problem of hostile patrons could thus be countered, and the lecturers themselves were subject to fewer

¹¹² Clarke, *Lives of Thirty Two English Divines* (1677), p. 191, cited in Collinson, *Religion of Protestants*, p. 260. The estate and living of Calke had been purchased in 1585 by Robert Bainbrigg, who had been attracted by the freedom of worship it allowed him. In 1586 he was imprisoned in the Tower for his 'extreme' Protestant views, and he died in 1613, see Bernard W. Beilby, *The History of Calke Priory and St. Giles Church* (Nottingham, 1991). For more on Herring, who preached at Ashby on the day of Hildersham's funeral, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/13097) and below, Chapter 7, pp. 295-296.

¹¹³ Marchant, *Puritans and the Church Courts*, pp. 132-136, quote at p. 132.

¹¹⁴ Paul Seaver, *The Puritan Lectureships: The Politics of Religious Dissent 1560-1662* (Stanford, 1970).

controls than the regular parish clergy. In this way, Hildersham was able to serve as lecturer in Ashby, for at least some of the times when diocesan campaigns against nonconformity deprived him of his vicarage. It was only at the end of his ministry that tighter regulation on the activities of lecturers, requiring that they preached in surplice and hood, blocked this outlet.¹¹⁵ For their part, the authorities seemed strangely slow in closing this particular loophole.

Of course, most committed nonconformists like Hildersham were pragmatic enough to realise that, if they held fast to their opinions, there would come times when they could not expect to escape some form of punishment. This was especially true after 1604, when the enforcement of conformity was more rigorously and systematically pursued. Not for these hardliners, perhaps, the disingenuous and rather dubious casuistry that would permit others to proffer occasional conformity to pacify the ecclesiastical authorities, or give excuses that the parish did not have a surplice or that it was in the wash.¹¹⁶ Terms such as prevarication and temporising carry negative connotations of cowardice, hypocrisy and deceitfulness, but even unwavering nonconformists like Hildersham, as we shall see, were prepared to buy time by exploiting some of the blurred and ambiguous areas of ecclesiastical procedure. In some cases, the requirements for conformity were perhaps deliberately fuzzy, to allow space for genuinely unresolved ministers to work their way towards conformity.

However, this open-endedness also enabled Hildersham and his fellows to continue for

¹¹⁵ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 154. Hildersham was suspended on 25 March 1630, and resumed preaching on 2 August 1631. For the royal instructions requiring lecturers to wear surplice and hood when reading service, see Kenneth Fincham (ed.), *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, Vol. II (Church of England Record Society 5, Woodbridge, 1998), p. 39. These instructions were circulated in the diocese of Lincoln by Bishop John Williams in March 1630, so it seems that Hildersham's suspension occurred very promptly.

¹¹⁶ Anthony Watson, Hildersham's successor as vicar of Ashby, was one who used the excuse that the surplice was being washed, see above, Chapter 2, p. 71.

just that little bit longer, by participating in the same process and articulating an acceptable form of words. Puritan dialogue over ‘cases of conscience’ had honed this kind of casuistical subtlety, and provided its theological justification.

Words and language, their nuances and possible alternative interpretations, were central to negotiating a formula that would satisfy both sides, nonconformists and officials, especially at critical times such as licensing and subscription. It appears that subscription to Whitgift’s earlier articles in 1584 had allowed different forms of assent to be used; within the diocese of Lincoln various examples were recorded, including ‘ferteles supradictis volens subscribo’ from a less well-educated former mercer.¹¹⁷ Nevertheless, the issuing of these articles precipitated what Collinson has described as a ‘subscription crisis’.¹¹⁸ The concept of a modified subscription developed, but even this was unacceptable to the more thoroughgoing nonconformists. For a man like John Burgess, rector of Waddesden, however, whose objection to the ceremonies was not on the grounds of their unlawfulness but their unpropitiousness, a certain freedom to choose the terms on which he subscribed enabled him to continue until the end of Elizabeth’s reign. The tighter formulations of Canons 36 and 39 deprived him of these possibilities. He protested to the authorities that he had already subscribed four times to Whitgift’s articles and was prepared to do so again in the same way, but not in the form now enjoined by the canon, ‘willingly and ex animo’.¹¹⁹ Within the diocese of Lincoln, however, generally the emphasis was on conformity rather than subscription.

¹¹⁷ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. xxvi.

¹¹⁸ Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, pp. 245-260, 263-281.

¹¹⁹ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. lxxviii. Burgess’s case is discussed in Peter Lake, ‘Moving the Goalposts? Modified Subscription and the Construction of Conformity in the Early Stuart Church’, in Lake and Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy*, pp. 179-210. Burgess was, with Hildersham, one of the thirty-two ministers from Lincoln diocese who produced the *Abridgement* and petitioned the king in 1604. His later defence of conformity, in his, *An Answer Rejoyned* (1631) angered his former allies,

Licensing by a bishop was another area fraught with potential difficulty for a godly or presbyterianly-minded candidate hoping to enter the Church of England ministry. Indeed, Hildersham apparently tried to circumvent the problem initially by commencing preaching without the necessary licence, as a result of which a subsequent embarrassing public apology was demanded.¹²⁰ It may, of course, have been merely an oversight, in his eagerness to commence his ministry, but he did not assent to the proposed apology and in addition later felt the need to explain how he had resolved his conscience in accepting ordination at the hands of a bishop, ‘without sinne’.¹²¹ The actual wording of each licence apparently allowed for some flexibility, for in an undated, but clearly early, letter to Hildersham from his fellow nonconformist Humphrey Fenn, the subject was discussed. How to satisfy both the authorities and one’s own conscience was the balancing act required. Fenn writes of the ‘formata verba in my Licence, of we you confess you had the like; if any other subscrips under my hand, the father of lyes can make no vantage, except quatenus (articuli) Consentia cum verbo Dei, will give it’. Apparently both the ‘chancellor’ and the ‘Archdeacon’ had seen it and found it acceptable, despite the ‘matters differenced’, but anything less would have been ‘an eye sore to me ... such Romish stuffe, fitter for that strumpet than

who considered him a turncoat, although he argued that his views had never changed. This led to a disagreement with Hildersham, who in his final illness challenged allegations made by Burgess, see Thomas Hooker, ‘Preface’ (unpaginated), to William Ames, *A Fresh Suit against Human Ceremonies in Gods Worship* (1633). For more on Hildersham’s relationship with Burgess, see Chapter 4, above, p. 167.

¹²⁰ For the document prepared for Hildersham’s signature by the High Commission for preaching without a licence, dated January 1588, see Albert Peel (ed.), *The Seconde Parte of a Register* (Cambridge, 1915), Vol. II, pp. 259-260. For the text of this document, see p. 16, above.

¹²¹ In a letter to a gentlewoman imprisoned for separatism, quoted in Johnson, *Treatise*, see p. 207, above.

the spouse of Chrt.¹²² Nevertheless, licensing continued to pose spiritual problems for some puritans, especially as the Calvinist consensus amongst the episcopate began to break down and subscription was more closely enforced. In the early seventeenth century, it led men like Hildersham's own son Samuel and his disciple Simeon Ashe to try and sidestep the issue entirely by seeking ordination at the hands of Irish bishops, where subscription was not required.¹²³

After the Canons of 1604, it might be expected that nonconformists would have had little choice, except to conform or be deprived. In the broader sense, it was true that from that date Hildersham faced increased trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities, and suffered a total of almost twenty years suspended. However, even for someone as apparently uncompromising as Hildersham, it seems that for a short period at least he was able to stave off the inevitable consequences of his nonconformist position. Less prominent figures had even more success. An examination of the diocesan enforcement process for 1604-1605 reveals not only the range of nonconformist persuasions, from the partial to the absolute, but also the way in which the system could be exploited. On 3 October 1604, ninety-three ministers from the diocese of Lincoln were cited to appear before Bishop Chaderton in the church of St Benedict, Huntingdon, to answer articles charging them with not wearing the surplice, and in some cases not making the sign of the cross in baptism.¹²⁴ Hildersham was one of the twenty-eight ministers from the Leicester archdeaconry to be thus summoned.

¹²² Bl Add. MS 4275, f. 223. Humphrey Fenn was known as the old nonconformist minister of Coventry; for more on his life, see *ODNB* (ref:odnb /9280) and F. L. Colville, *The Worthies of Warwickshire* (Warwick, 1869) pp. 279-281.

¹²³ The legitimacy of ordination overseas, and a subsequent demand for reordination in England, was at the heart of the earlier quarrel between Whitgift and Walter Travers, see John Strype, *The Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Whitgift* (London, 1718), Appendix, pp. 68, 107.

¹²⁴ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. lxix.

If, on that first day, he had uttered the words that he did six months later – that ‘he doth not nor can conforme himselfe for manie causes’ – presumably the bishop would have had no option but to proceed immediately to deprivation, as indeed he did on the latter occasion of 24 April 1605.¹²⁵ However, Hildersham was less forthright on his initial court appearance; along with seventeen other ministers, he ‘confessed that the article was true and craved time to deliberate about their conformity’.¹²⁶ According to the unwritten rules of engagement for such a procedure, a properly deferential admission of fault, combined with a request for extra time to consider their position, was sufficient to get these ministers off with an episcopal admonishment and a demand for conformity by the end of October. It was carefully-choreographed collusion. By going through the accepted motions, and offering additional reflection on the issue of conformity yet without any promise of future change, nearly a month of breathing space was gained by the defendants.¹²⁷ At their next appearance, on 31 October 1604, the same set plea, that they ‘craved time to deliberate afresh’ was used by the ministers, combining their inability to ‘conforme themselves according to the monition’ with the crucial prefix ‘as yet’.¹²⁸ This critical phrase was full of ambiguity, allowing the ministers to hold out the possibility of future persuasion without compromising their consciences by any definite commitment. The formulation ‘craved

¹²⁵ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. cxxix.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 363.

¹²⁷ This same combination of deference and playing for time was also used successfully by John Cotton in his letters to John Williams, Bishop of Lincoln, in 1621 and 1625, when he stressed his doubt rather than his ‘wilfull Refusal of Conformity’, see Sargent Bush, Jr. (ed.), *The Correspondence of John Cotton* (North Carolina, 2001), pp. 93-103.

¹²⁸ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 364.

time to deliberate' achieved a further month's grace, and then was deployed again by certain men on 14 and 22 November 1604, 30 January and 10 April 1605.¹²⁹

Often attention is focused on the persuasive efforts of the bishops, and their preparedness to allow those of tender consciences time to confer and consider, 'in hope of their conformity'.¹³⁰ This 'softly-softly' approach was reckoned to be a success, since, over a period of time, many who had previously felt unable to conform, were brought to submission. Certainly, this positive gloss was put on the policy by the bishops themselves. Indeed, in the diocese of Lincoln, for example, the original number of ninety-three presented for nonconformity in October 1604 had been reduced to thirty-three 'unconformed' by 18 January 1605.¹³¹ However, the actions of Hildersham and his fellows show that there was another side to the equation; those with absolutely no intention of ever conforming could subvert such a system, designed to win over doubters, to their own advantage. Their victories were piecemeal and relatively brief in many instances, but such men demonstrated that they were not completely without agency. Even Hildersham, the most prominent and committed, was able to gain six months' grace, and other less well-known ministers such as David Allen, John Jackson and Simon Bradstreet, seemingly evaded deprivation entirely through their continued procrastination.¹³²

As well as pleading for more time to consider, there were other ways in which nonconformists could sometimes succeed by evading rather than confronting authority. The most obvious of these was pleas of illness. There may be no reason to suspect that

¹²⁹ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. 364.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 368.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 365.

¹³² For these men's stories, see below, pp. 234-235.

these episodes of sickness were anything but genuine, but, providentially or conveniently, they could supply a valid excuse for avoiding or delaying a showdown. Some prime examples can be found in this same 1604-1605 campaign against nonconformity in Lincoln diocese. David Allen, rector of Ludborough, was arraigned with Hildersham on that initial appearance of 3 October 1604, his churchwardens reporting that he ‘does not wear the surplice, uses the order of the book in the sacrament, does not always use the sign of the cross, and whether he omit or change anything they have not been able to observe’.¹³³ After discussion with the bishop, ‘who thoughte good to graunte him a further time of reading and conference’, Allen excused his next appearance, due on 12 December, by alleging that the plague had prevented him attending. Again, on 30 January 1605, he did not come to court, pleading that his heavily-pregnant wife ‘lieth greivouse afflicted with an hotte ague, the same, also nowe turning into the Jaundwise’.¹³⁴ Promising that he would ‘indevor to satisfie and conform himself therein according to the law’ on 6 June 1606, Allen, despite further presentations in 1607, 1608, 1611 and 1614, managed to hold on to his living and was buried, apparently still unconformable, at Ludborough on 5 September 1615. Similarly, John Jackson, vicar of Bourne, who was also present at the court on 3 October 1604 and subsequently, for failure to wear the surplice, wrote to the bishop on 30 July 1605 begging to be excused from attendance because of his infirmity.¹³⁵ It was avowed that,

¹³³ Cited in Foster, *State of the Church*, p. cii. For Judge Edmund Anderson’s reproof of David Allen’s puritan tendencies in 1596, see above, p. 225, n. 103.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. cii.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. cviii-cix.

both by sicknes of body and lameness of lymes. in so much as the yssewe runinge now of on of his legges is full as broad . as a Quene Elizabeth pece of xxs. in gould: so that he is nat hablle to go or ride.¹³⁶

Nevertheless, it was stressed, even if Jackson could not appear before the bishop, he was still able to do his duty by his parishioners; ‘yet he will take a staffe and limpe with paine to releve ther weake consciences’. Other letters testifying to Jackson’s bodily infirmity respited him throughout 1605, until the bishop finally dismissed him until he should be cited again. Presented once more for nonconformity at visitations in 1607 and 1608, and recorded in 1611 as being ‘of good behaviour but suspended being presented for unconformytie’, Jackson held his benefice until his death on 30 January 1613. Likewise, Simon Bradstreet, vicar of Horbling, excused himself on 31 July 1605 for reasons of ill-health:

And yf I may not seame to bould in presuming to farr upon your LL. favour I must humblye crave somne day in October for my next appearance. My bodie by reason of a speciall infirmitie ys not well able to indure ryding especially in the heate of sommer.¹³⁷

Saying of his conformity ‘give me leave and leisure to go somewhat slowly that I may goe the more surely’, he had still not arrived by 1611, but notwithstanding remained at Horbling until his death in February 1621. Others such as Thomas Heape, vicar of Little Marlow, and Brian Burton, rector of Langton by Partney, used similar pleas of sickness with a measure of success.¹³⁸ For some, however, like William Harting, rector of Healing, John Squier, rector of Saltfleetsby St Peter, John Prestman, rector of

¹³⁶ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. cix.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. civ.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. cxxi, civ. Thomas Heape, after a long history, including a period of excommunication, was finally absolved after being named in the House of Commons as ‘a peaceable man’. Burton had not fully conformed in 1607, but died in possession of his benefice in 1612.

Emberton and Charles Richardson, rector of East Barkwith, an excuse of illness was a final throw of the dice, rather than one move in an extended campaign of evading punishment; appearing after their recovery, they were prepared to certify their conformity.¹³⁹

Hildersham, himself, seems to have remained untroubled by poor health during 1604-1605, and certainly never entered any plea to the court for respite on these grounds. However, illness struck him at another critical time in 1614, when Thomas Hacket, replacement vicar of Ashby, was pursuing his own campaign against local nonconformity. Clarke documents that, in the Spring of that year, Hildersham,

fell into a violent Feaver, which held him long, the malignancy of which, struck up into the Roof of his mouth, and the gristle of his nose, which endangered him much; but by the blessing of God, upon the care and skill of Physicians and Chyrurgeons, he was recovered.¹⁴⁰

It was apparently this fever which kept Hildersham bed-bound, and prevented his appearance at the Easter Communion in Ashby church, where Hacket had announced his intention to refuse to administer the sacrament to any who did not kneel.¹⁴¹ Illness, recorded in such careful detail by Clarke, was Hildersham's alibi and defence against allegations that he, 'stood still among them that kneeled till the Communion was done', for, as he protested, 'it is notoriously known to all the Inhabitants at Ashby, that I was at that time sick in my bed, and for many weeks before, and after, utterly unable to stir out of my Chamber'.¹⁴² A fever may have saved Hildersham from a very awkward situation, where confrontation appeared inevitable, but it was no protection against false allegations, and he was found guilty nonetheless. In the Michaelmas term

¹³⁹ Foster, *State of the Church*, pp. civ, cxii, cxiii, cxxiii.

¹⁴⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', pp. 148-149.

¹⁴¹ This episode is discussed in more detail in Chapter 2, above, pp. 62-67.

¹⁴² Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150.

of 1615, though, when Hildersham had been delivered out of prison upon bond to appear in Court, his pleas of ‘dangerous sicknesse (whereof affidavit was made in Court)’ seems to have been accepted as justifying his non-attendance.¹⁴³

Other means of evading official censure were possible. Emigration, either to Holland or the New World, was an option for a large number of nonconformists as the seventeenth-century progressed. Hildersham rejected this alternative for himself in 1616, when, during a period of suspension and deprivation, he was offered but did not accept the pastorate at Leiden.¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, however, he demurred, it seems, not on any theological or rational grounds, but because of his wife’s ‘unwillingnesse to go over the Seas’.¹⁴⁵ When the debate over emigration intensified in the late 1620s, Hildersham obviously considered himself too old to go, but, as he counselled his younger friend Francis Higginson in 1629, ‘Were I a younger man and under your case and call, I would think I had a plain invitation of Heaven unto the voyage’.¹⁴⁶ In many ways the debate amongst the godly during these years resembled that amongst their predecessors in Mary’s reign – was flight overseas cowardly escapism or a prudent husbanding of gospel resources? Hildersham, it appears, was a defender of the latter argument, validating the emigration option for younger brethren like Higginson. Similar charges of pusillanimity could also have been levied against hiding oneself from the authorities to avoid punishment for one’s beliefs, but again a more favourable gloss could be placed on a preemptive removal from the danger scene. Clarke refers to Hildersham’s ‘wisdom’ in choosing not to appear before the High Commission on the

¹⁴³ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 149.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

¹⁴⁶ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, cited in Sidney Perley, *The History of Salem Massachusetts* (Salem, 1924), Vol. I, p. 108.

day of his ‘calling and censuring’, after hearing of the punitive sentence passed on his fellow-defendants, Dighton and Holt, on 21 November 1616. This same ‘wisdom’ led Hildersham, after the sentence of excommunication, fining and imprisonment had been passed on him *in absentia*, to ‘conceal himself, which accordingly he did for a long time in the City; and God so hid him under the shadow of his Wings, that his adversaries could not meet with him.’¹⁴⁷ Hildersham, it seems, was not prepared to be a martyr unless it was absolutely unavoidable. He also appears to have taken pains to conceal his financial assets, through the use of intermediaries, so that when, in pursuit of the two thousand pound fine imposed on him by the High Commission, ‘several Processes were issued to the Sheriffs of Leicestershire, to enquire of his estate; but they, by several returns, answered, They could find none’.¹⁴⁸ Thus, although Hildersham was forbidden to preach between 1613 and 1625, by careful measures of obfuscation and side-stepping, he was able to sustain a private ministry in the houses of supporters. Even the most ‘constant Non-conformist’, it appears, considered evasion valid and indeed wise, if it could supply him with a further opportunity to exercise a ministry of sorts, however limited.¹⁴⁹ This spiritual pragmatism, along with the backing of influential supporters, enabled Hildersham to continue supplying religious counsel for as long as he did. His own commitment to, and identity with, the Church of England, as we have seen, provided the *raison d’être* for the ongoing struggle to square the conflicting demands of a nonconformist conscience and the official requirements.

¹⁴⁷ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 150.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 150. For a further discussion on the means whereby Hildersham may have attempted to hide his assets, see Chapter 4, above, pp. 189-190.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

However, despite this calculatedly ‘peaceable’ and non-confrontational approach, there were times when direct action was deemed necessary or when a principled stand could not be avoided. Attempts to change the *status quo* through debate and petitioning were important. The Millenary Petition of 1603-1604, and the other petitions of this time, including that of the Lincolnshire ministers to the king at Hinchinbrooke, were notable examples of campaigns where Hildersham was at the forefront. In the midst of the process leading up to Hildersham’s deprivation in April 1605, when, as it has been shown, for much of the time he was playing the system to win a precious respite, a memo in the bishop’s courtbook demonstrates that Hildersham’s demeanour was not always that of passive deference. On 12 December 1604, it was recorded that,

upon a monicion from his matie for some of the ministers to confer with m L [sc. The bishop] and Mr d [octor] Mountacute deane of the kinges chappell Mr Hildersham said they would not come to be borne down with countenance and scoffs (ibid).¹⁵⁰

When Chaderton finally pronounced a sentence depriving him of his benefice on 24 April 1605, Hildersham dissented in no uncertain terms, ‘protesting that it was of no effect, and appealing to the archbishop of C in his court of arches’.¹⁵¹ Of course, this move may have been mere bluff, or another calculated attempt to buy still more time, for on 19 June 1605 it was recorded that he failed to appear for the purpose of prosecuting his appeal.¹⁵² On 16 December 1612, when letters missive were sent out from the High Commission court requiring his appearance, he apparently made no attempt to evade the summons, and was duly sentenced. Again, in the Easter Term of

¹⁵⁰ Foster, *State of the Church*, p. cxxix.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. cxxix.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. cxxix.

1615, a direct refusal of the *ex officio* oath resulted in a three-month spell of imprisonment in the Fleet and Kings Bench prisons. Towards the end of his life, in 1630, a flat refusal to wear the surplice and hood while reading service led to his final suspension.¹⁵³ There were times, then, when the dictates of conscience required unambiguous declaration.

Hildersham's example makes it clear that reformulations of the concepts of orthodoxy and conformity during the early Stuart period, something Peter Lake has described as a 'moving of the goalposts', posed new challenges for those who opposed the ceremonies. The closing of loopholes and a more precise definition of requirements pushed many, like Hildersham, into a radicalism they would not have chosen for themselves. Displaying a real sense of alienation, perhaps for the first time, Hildersham wrote to Lady Barrington during his final suspension, 'Now is the tyme come wherein not myselfe only but all of my judgment are cast out as men utterly unprofitable and unfit to God any further service in his church'.¹⁵⁴ His case is also a reminder of the powerful and growing opposition to the godly cause, centred on the Court and positions of authority. In particular, the personal animosity on the part of James I, and of Bishop Richard Neile, to Hildersham as someone they regarded as a chief ring-leader of the 'schismatics', singled him out for special attention. Although the Bishop of Lincoln and the Archbishop of Canterbury were not unsympathetic to Hildersham, correspondence with the Earl of Huntingdon in 1612-1613 reveals that they were impotent to help him, in the face of such royal displeasure. William Barlow explained that it was 'not in my power to extend the favor to Mr Hildersham wch I

¹⁵³ For a helpful summary of puritan objections to the oath, see Marchant, *Puritans and the Church Courts*, pp. 5-7.

¹⁵⁴ BL Egerton MS 2645, f. 156.

wish him', because of the 'peremptory message from the Arch Bishop, in his Maties name, to suppress him still', despite his exoneration in the Wightman case.¹⁵⁵

Overtures by the Earl of Huntingdon to George Abbot in the following February drew forth a warning that he,

must take heed how you appeere, to move for any of those ministers, who have been silenced for not conforming themselves unto the orders of the church. For I see no hope or expectation that any of them will be tolerated to preache upon any pretence whatsoever, unlesse they do subscribe, as by the Canon they are directed ¹⁵⁶

As for Hildersham himself, the archbishop continued,

If Mr Hildersham bee resolved to maintaine the peace of the Church, and to testify it by his subscription, wee shall be most glad to receive him: but if hee still refuse, hee is assured to sustaine the indignation of his maty, if he offer to preache; for hee is a person, whom his highnesse hath particularly in observation. I do not finde but that his Maty is satisfied touching that Mr Whiteman reported of him.¹⁵⁷

In the light of this royal suspicion, it is not surprising that Hildersham remained unpardoned until after the king's death in 1625.

Such unremitting opposition, and the severe penalties it incurred, provided Clarke with material for portraying Hildersham as a victim or martyr for the godly cause. Hildersham, himself, referred to his 'sufferings'. Although this strand of the narrative should not be minimised, Hildersham's story, as we have seen, is much more complex than this simple interpretation would allow. He was not entirely passive or

¹⁵⁵ M/F Hastings Collection of Manuscripts from the Huntington Library, Part One: Correspondence 1477-1701, Letter from the Bishop of Lincoln to Henry, Earl of Huntingdon, dated 1 April 1612. For more on the Wightman case and Hildersham's involvement in it, see Chapter 6, below, pp. 256-280.

¹⁵⁶ M/F Hastings Collection of Manuscripts from the Huntington Library, Part One: Correspondence 1477-1701, Letter from the Archbishop of Canterbury to Henry, Earl of Huntingdon, dated 2 February 1613.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

without agency. Less prominent or committed nonconformists had more leeway for manoeuvre, of course, but even someone as supposedly ‘intransigent’ as Hildersham was able to deploy a range of strategies to delay or avoid official suppression.¹⁵⁸ His case illustrates the complicated and multivarious nature of the church, its ambiguous jurisdictions and its differing attitudes to the enforcement of conformity, in itself a shifting notion. Pragmatism and shrewdness, absence and silence, are not features normally associated with the principled conscience, but Hildersham was prepared to adopt them all at differing stages of his attempt to continue preaching in the church he considered as his own. Hildersham did not want nonconformity to become the defining characteristic of his ministry, for it was only a lesser thing, a ‘matter of judgement’; that it has become so is a consequence of the parameters drawn by others. Paradoxically, his very endeavours to remain within the boundaries of the English church only served to confirm his polemical opponents in their opinion that such men were trying to undermine the institution from within.

¹⁵⁸ The use of this epithet to describe Hildersham comes from S. B. Babbage, *Puritanism and Richard Bancroft* (London, 1962), p. 185.

CHAPTER 6

THE WORLD OF RADICAL PURITANISM

Now there is but one true Church and Religion: there may be in matters of lesse moment, sundry differences in the true Church (as betweene us and the Lutherans, and Brownists, and among our selves) but these make us not severall Churches: because in the fundamentall points of Religion (the knowledge whereof is absolutely necessary to salvation, and the profession whereof maketh a true Christian) we all agree.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 138.

you (whom I take to be a Sister, and whose welfare in the Lord I hartely desire)

‘A Letter sent by Mr H. a Minister to Mrs N. a Gentlewoman imprisoned for this, that in the worship of God she would not partake with the publick ministry of these assemblyes’,
in, Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 1.

For howsoever in these controversies of religion we do in judgment or practise differ one from another, yet for the knowledge I have of him [Hildersham], and the good gifts God hath given him, I do and shall always love him in the Lord.

Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 2.

To some observers, the very notion of moderate puritanism is in itself an oxymoron.¹

From such a perspective, all puritanism is inherently radical, and to attach the qualifying adjective ‘moderate’ is to drain the term of any meaning. However, we have already seen, when looking at the concepts of orthodoxy and conformity, how porous such attempts at classification can be, and this is never more the case than where the radical/moderate paradigm is concerned. Peter Lake, who himself has applied the epithet ‘moderate puritan’ to John Burgess and Laurence Chaderton, nevertheless

¹ See, for example, Lewis Samuel Feuer, *The Scientific Intellectual: The Psychological and Sociological Origins of Modern Science* (Edison, New Jersey, 1992), p. 75.

admits that moderation is ‘an ideologically charged category and one, moreover, subject to almost incessant polemical construction and reconstruction ... For the nature of that stable middle depended, as ever, on where and how the threateningly peripheral was located’.² That Hildersham has been dubbed both a moderate and a radical illustrates the slipperiness and ambiguity of such rhetoric.³

Nevertheless, in areas such as theology, ecclesiology, or even sheer intensity of religious zeal, there were those generally recognised as being beyond the margins of the mainstream majority, pushing at the parameters of what was considered acceptable or normal, however that was defined. More orthodox or respectable puritans often sought to distance themselves from these extremes, in an effort to establish their own spiritual credentials, and their identification with a unified national mission.

Hildersham, himself, as we have seen, was known as the ‘Hammer of the Schismatics’, because of his condemnation of separatism. However, recent studies have shown that the boundaries between heterodoxy and mainstream godliness were not as clearly defined as the protagonists would have liked us to believe. Peter Lake’s account of the clerical/lay altercation between Stephen Denison and John Etherington in 1620s London traces the ‘interaction between a godly minister and an active, critical and relatively humble member of his flock’, demonstrating an intricate web of

² Peter Lake, ‘Joseph Hall, Robert Skinner and the rhetoric of moderation at the early Stuart court’, in, Lori Anne Ferrell and Peter McCullough (eds.), *The English Sermon Revised: Religion, Literature and History 1600-1750* (Manchester, 2000), p. 181. For Chaderton, see Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge, 1982). For Burgess, see Peter Lake, ‘Moving the Goal Posts? Modified Subscription and the Construction of Conformity in the Early Stuart Church’, in Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000), pp. 179-205, and above, Chapter 4, p. 167, and Chapter 5, pp. 229-230.

³ For examples of Hildersham being classified as a radical, see Stephen Bondos Greene, ‘The End of an Era: Cambridge Puritanism and the Christ’s College Election of 1609’, *Historical Journal*, 25, 1(1982), pp. 197-208; and Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967), p. 456. Hildersham is most frequently regarded as a moderate influence in his relationship with John Darrell, see below, pp. 272-280.

interconnectedness.⁴ The pseudo-messiah, William Hacket, too, has been shown by Alexandra Walsham, to have arisen from within the ranks of the godly and retained a problematic relationship with that community.⁵ Doctrinal ambiguity and charismatic open-endedness formed the basis of David Como's research into the growth of an antinomian underground in early-Stuart England.⁶ Integral to all these studies is an emphasis on a growing lay participation and confidence, which could create tensions when private Christians trespassed on the ministerial preserve of scriptural interpretation and theological formulation. What is clear is that, as Green, Spufford, Watt and Freeman have also taught us in their different ways, the 'puritan' message could have a more popular appeal than has sometimes been argued.⁷ In many ways, these developments represented an extension of the concept of godly sociability, which was not without its problems. Marion Gibson has rightly stressed the rhetoric of 'family' shared by the godly, which meant that recalcitrant members were regarded as erring brethren, and altercations treated as domestic squabbles to be resolved.⁸

This chapter will seek to explore in a little more detail some of Hildersham's associations with what have often been thought of as the more radical elements of puritanism, and support the historiographical argument that these interactions were

⁴ Peter Lake, *The Boxmaker's Revenge: 'Orthodoxy', 'Heterodoxy' and the Politics of the Parish in early Stuart London* (Manchester, 2001).

⁵ Alexandra Walsham, "'Frantick Hacket": Prophecy, Sorcery, Insanity, and the Elizabethan Puritan Movement', *Historical Journal*, 41:1 (1998), pp. 27-66.

⁶ David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, 2004).

⁷ Ian Green, *The Christian's ABC; Catechisms and Catechizing in England c. 1530-1740* (Oxford, 1996); Margaret Spufford (ed.), *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520-1725* (Cambridge, 1995); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991); Thomas Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance: John Darrell and the Politics of Exorcism in Late Elizabethan England', in Lake and Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy*, pp. 34-63; for the classic statement of an alternative thesis, see Keith Wrightson and David Levine, *Poverty and Piety in an English Village; Terling, 1525-1700* (New York and London, 1979).

⁸ Marion Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print* (London, 2006), pp. 106-109.

nuanced and not easily pigeon-holed. By doing so, the continuing dialogue between those of differing shades of godly opinion will be illustrated, and the various strategies by which the brethren attempted to contain and resolve such factiousness will be examined. The chapter will consider two particular historical moments or case studies, in themselves not entirely unrelated in terms of timing, personnel and issues. The first of these centres on a prison in 1590s London and deals with Hildersham's involvement in the contentious debate over separatism, and the second, located in the heart of middle England, offers another version of the story of 'the blasphemous heretic', Edward Wightman.

1. 'The brethren of the separation'⁹

There was every reason that Hildersham should forsake the Church of England and become a separatist. So, at least, thought Francis Johnson, who from September 1592 had been the pastor of the newly-formed Barrowist congregation in London. And this was no vain delusion on Johnson's part, but a realistic expectation based on a long acquaintance with Hildersham's character and convictions. 'And of Mr H', Johnson wrote, 'I have this hope more specially, for the good things I know to be in him'.¹⁰ The two men had been contemporaries at Christ's College, Cambridge, in the late 1570s and early 1580s, when Hildersham had already espoused Cartwrightian views on church polity.¹¹ Johnson, at this stage, was not a separatist, although in 1589 he was

⁹ John Smyth, cited in *DNB*, Vol. xviii, p. 477. The complex area of early separatism, with its vast historiography, is beyond the scope of this thesis. The intention here is to illustrate the connections between those holding various ecclesiological viewpoints, through focusing on the interactions of one particular participant.

¹⁰ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 2.

¹¹ For more on the godly connections established at university, see Chapter 4, above, pp. 152-158.

arrested and imprisoned by university officials for preaching against the *ex officio* oath, a situation for which, doubtless, Hildersham would have had some sympathy.¹² It was only from this point that the two men began to follow different trajectories of nonconformist response: Hildersham, as we have seen, remained firmly within the camp of the established church, while Johnson, after a spell as minister to the English church of the Merchant Adventurers at Middelburg, embraced the separatist position in 1592.¹³

The early leaders of the separatist movement, such as Robert Browne, Robert Harrison, Henry Barrow, John Greenwood, John Penry, Nicholas Crane, Thomas Settle and Arthur Bellot, were all university men, as were their successors, Francis Johnson, Henry Ainsworth, John Robinson, John Smyth, Richard Clifton and Henry Jacob.¹⁴ They did not move, at least initially, in a different world from their nonseparating brethren, but in the same cultural and spiritual milieu of learned theological debate, treatises and conferences. Many of them were friends, and visited each other's houses.¹⁵ All of them, alike, faced the challenge of how to respond to a national church which increasingly clamped down on their sort of interpretation of Scripture. Their views were hammered out in the exchange of letters and papers, developing incrementally and divergently in response to counter-questioning. Where

¹² For more on this episode, see Peter Lake, 'The Dilemma of the Establishment Puritan: the Cambridge Heads and the Case of Francis Johnson and Cuthbert Bainbrigg', *JEH*, 29:1 (1978), pp. 23-35.

¹³ For more on Johnson, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/14877); and Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research (1550-1641)* (Cambridge, 1912), Vol. I, pp. 136-182. Burrage (p. 137) corrects the assertion by other writers that Johnson was the minister of the Merchants of the Staple.

¹⁴ See Leland H. Carlson (ed.), *The Writings of Henry Barrow 1590 – 1591* (London, 1966), p. 213.

¹⁵ John Edwards alleged that he and John Penry stayed at 'one Mr. Yreton's house beside Darby vi miles, and dnyed there', on their journey from Scotland to London in 1592, see Leland H. Carlson (ed.), *The Writings of John Greenwood and Henry Barrow 1591-1593* (London, 1970), p. 299. John Ireton, minister of Kegworth in Leicestershire, was a leading puritan figure and close friend of Hildersham, see Chapter 4, p. 156, and below, p. 273.

they would end up was by no means clear at the beginning of the process, and, of course, was partly determined by the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities. It was those same authorities which, by rejecting their pleas for liberty to follow their consciences in worship and their protestations of loyalty to the queen and state, pushed them into radicalism and separatism from the late 1580s onwards.¹⁶ The polemical demonising of all separatists as seditious, and the execution of leaders such as Barrow and Greenwood on 6 April and Penry on 29 May 1593, turned the holding of such opinions into a dangerous radicalism.¹⁷ However, this outcome would not have been apparent in the early days, and the fluidity of the situation meant that there was much shifting of ground amongst those participating in the debates. Here were brethren who shared a common commitment to the pre-eminence of the Word of God, but who differed in their conclusions as to its application.¹⁸ There was a continued discourse between them, as each tried to persuade the other to see the error of his ways.¹⁹ James Forester, physician and Master of Arts, and Robert Stokes were two such separatists thus persuaded to return to the established church, while others travelled in the other

¹⁶ For some of the petitions protesting their loyalty and peaceable intent, see, for example, Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Greenwood*, pp. 397-497.

¹⁷ Their identification, however unproven, with the scurrilous Martin Marprelate tracts, did nothing to help their cause.

¹⁸ There was much debate, for example, about the interpretation of one key text, Matthew 18:17, 'Tell it unto the Church' (*Dic ecclesiae*). For Barrow's view, see *A Plaine Refutation* (Dort, 1591), reprinted in Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Barrow 1590-1591*, p. 140. Francis Johnson also wrote a book dealing with the same text; Johnson, *A Short Treatise concerning the Words of Christ, 'Tell the Church'* (Amsterdam?, 1611). Stephen Brachlow, *The Communion of Saints: Radical Puritan and Separatist Ecclesiology 1570-1625* (Oxford, 1988), suggests that the differences between what he calls 'radical puritans' and 'separatists' were not ecclesiological but matters of timing, strategy and extent, see p. 6.

¹⁹ Richard Greenham, Stephen Egerton, and Edmund Snape, all well-known puritan preachers, conferred with separatists in an attempt to win them back: see Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Greenwood*, pp. 198, 311, 356, 372. For the conferences and exchange of letters between the imprisoned separatists, Barrow and Greenwood, and Thomas Sperin, Stephen Egerton, and Martin or Robert Cooper, see Henry Barrow, *A Collection of Certain Letters and Conferences lately passed betwixt Certain Preachers and Two Prisoners in the Fleet* (Dordrecht?, 1590).

direction.²⁰ That there was no unbridgeable divide can sometimes be forgotten in the confessional search for roots and distinctives in the Elizabethan period. As Clarke says of Hildersham, ‘such was his ingenuity and Christian Charity, that he respected, esteemed, and was very familiar with those he knew to be religious and learned, though of another judgment’.²¹

This, then, was the context of the early 1590s, in which Francis Johnson took upon himself to answer a letter that Hildersham had written to ‘Mrs N’, a gentlewoman imprisoned for her separatist convictions. The lady had, it appears, appealed to Hildersham for his views on the validity of the Church of England’s ministry and explained her own ‘faith and practise’.²² Hildersham’s response was shared with ‘some of her friendes’ in prison, who ‘advised to get it answered’. It would be natural that Johnson, very much the spiritual leader of the group in prison, would be nominated for the task.²³ It is interesting to speculate why Hildersham should have been the person

²⁰ Forester, a Cambridge graduate, was arrested and examined for separatism on 19 March 1593. On at least one occasion he had preached to the congregation. In his deposition he confessed that he had since seen his ‘great error’, and subsequently returned to the Church of England. Stokes claimed that he had been persuaded to turn from Barrowist opinions, by Edmund Snape and Robert Aves. Stokes had been active in the separatist cause from 1589 to 1591, helping to finance the printing and distribution of separatist books, but, having weakened in his opinions, was subsequently excommunicated by the congregation in the autumn of 1592. For Forester and Stokes, see Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Greenwood*, pp. 309-310, 370, 310-312.

²¹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 151.

²² Johnson, *Treatise*, preamble. For discussion of the contents of Hildersham’s letter, see above, Chapter 5, pp. 204-209. For a similar correspondence in 1590 between Thomas Cartwright and Anne Stubbe, his sister-in-law, who had espoused ‘Brownisme’, see Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (eds.), *Cartwrightiana* (London, 1951), pp. 58-75.

²³ A group of Johnson’s congregation had been arrested on 4 March 1593 as they met in woods near Islington. Others members were arrested on 10 March 1593. A list of fifty-two separatists, who were examined in March and April 1593, is given in Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Greenwood*, pp. 293-294. They were held in various London prisons, notably the Gatehouse, the Fleet, Newgate, the Clink and the Counter in the Poultry. Only one of those listed is a woman, Katherine Unwin (or Onyon, Onnyon, Owin, Unyon, or Unwen, see p. 366), a thirty-five year old widow from ‘Allgate’. At her examination on 6 April 1593, she is recorded as being ‘late of Chri[st]church’, which Carlson suggests might indicate that she enjoyed the sermons of Richard Greenham (Hildersham’s mentor), who accepted a position there in 1591. Carlson also states that Mrs Unwin was first arrested at a conventicle being held at the home of Henry Martin in 1587. She was freed, but during 1588 it was discovered that her twelve-year-old son had never been baptised because Katherine regarded the regular clergy as false ministers. Dr

that Mrs N first chose to approach. The only reason given in the text for his selection is that he was ‘a minister, and very learned’, but this appellation could have been applied equally to a whole host of others.²⁴ Hildersham was certainly well-known in godly circles by this time, and if, indeed, Mrs N had had an earlier connection with Richard Greenham at Christ Church, this would provide another possible link. Additionally, Hildersham’s reputation as a ‘peaceable’ man, renowned for settling ‘cases of conscience’, may have influenced the lady into thinking that she would receive a sympathetic hearing. The tone of Hildersham’s reply, courteous if at times a little patronising, suggests that she would not have been disappointed in that respect. However, since Johnson was obviously the woman’s spiritual adviser, it could be argued that the approach to Hildersham was part of a calculated campaign to win him over to the separatist cause.²⁵ Mrs N may have had genuine doubts about her own

Edward Stanhope, Chancellor to the Bishop of London, caused the boy to be publicly baptised at St Andrew’s in the Wardrobe, accompanied by a special sermon. Fearing punishment, Mrs Unwin ran away, but was rearrested on 10 March 1593 after being among those presenting a petition to the Houses of Lords and Commons. Despite, at her examination, seeming ‘conformable’ and willing to ‘come to church’, it seems that she may have remained in prison, being a widow of limited means and lacking sureties to be bound for her. However, in 1598, she and her son were in the Ancient Church at Amsterdam. For information on Katherine Unwin, who may or may not be Hildersham’s ‘Mrs N’, see *ibid.*, pp. 366-367. For transcriptions of the separatists’ examinations during March and April 1593, including that of Francis Johnson, see *ibid.*, pp. 292- 381. A slightly different version of Katherine Unwin’s story is given in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, Vol. I, p. 128 and Vol. II, pp. 30-31. Here, her child, having been made afraid of eternal damnation because of his unbaptised state, beseeched his mother to allow him to be baptised, but to no effect.

²⁴ Johnson, *Treatise*, preamble.

²⁵ As ‘sundry copies’ of Hildersham’s letter had already ‘spread abroad in writing unto the hands of many’, Johnson, no doubt, also felt the need to counter the effect that a statement from such an influential source might have on any doubters, or indeed his own supporters. John Cotton was later to claim that Hildersham’s letter, published without his consent, ‘hath so strongly and clearly convinced the iniquity of that way [separatism], that I could not but acknowledge in it, both the wisdom of God, and the weakness of the separatist. His wisdom, in bringing to light such a beam of the Light of his truth by the hand of an adversary, against the Authors mind: and the weakness of the other, to advance the hand of his adversary to give himselfe, and his cause such a deadly wound in open view, as neither himselfe nor all his associates can be able to heale’, ‘To the Godly Reader’, in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A4r. For the manuscript circulation of spiritual advice letters in the context of the prison writings of the Marian martyrs, see Thomas Freeman, ‘Dissenters from a dissenting Church; the challenge of the Freewillers, 1550-1558’, in Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (eds.), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 129-156.

position, but Hildersham could equally well have been targeted particularly as a possible convert. He was, after all, one of the so-called ‘forward preachers’, to whom many of the separatists attributed their initial interest in further reformation, and his own recent trouble with the High Commissioners could have given them hope that he might be feeling some disaffection for the establishment.²⁶ Johnson might well have considered Hildersham ripe for the plucking. If the lady’s letter, itself, was not sufficient to convince Hildersham, then the subsequent learned arguments of Johnson were designed to do the trick. After all, Johnson himself had until recently been resolutely opposed to separatism, being responsible for the confiscation and burning of all but two copies of the first edition of Henry Barrow’s *A Plaine Refutation* in Holland in 1591. But a reading of one of the surviving copies engaged his interest, and he returned to London to confer with the separatist leaders. As a result, Johnson embraced the Barrowist position in April 1592. By a similar means, then, of reasoned, written, scriptural argument, he hoped to persuade Hildersham, too, a man he professed he would ‘always love in the Lord’, and who, he believed, ‘erreth of ignorance and not of malice’.²⁷ If it had worked for him, then why not as well for Hildersham, a man with whom he shared so much common ground and sympathy?²⁸

It would be all too easy to dismiss Johnson’s hopes for Hildersham as foolishly optimistic, in the light of the latter’s unwavering commitment to the national church.

²⁶ Although Hildersham was not named specifically in any of the separatists’ examinations in 1593, several of the accused referred to the influence of the ‘forward preaching’ of men like Stephen Egerton, Richard Gardiner, Edmund Snape, Andrew King, Giles Wigginton, Thomas Sparke, Edward Philips, Martin or Robert Cooper, and even, in one instance, the printed sermons of Laurence Chaderton. These men were all ministers of the Church of England, with reformist views, many of whom were close friends of Hildersham. For more details, see Carlson (ed.), *Writings of Greenwood*, pp. 317, 320, 333, 337, 349, 355, 359, 376, 379, 384.

²⁷ Johnson, *Treatise*, pp. 2, 4.

²⁸ Ashby was one of the ‘best’ Church of England parishes according to Johnson, although the whole episcopal system was essentially flawed: Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 63.

But this is a judgment that owes much to hindsight. At the time, lines of demarcation were not clearly drawn, as we have seen, and those involved in the controversies moved in the same world of clandestine meetings, the circulation of manuscript copies of letters and books, and a fear of the ecclesiastical authorities.²⁹ Hildersham, although he deplored their ecclesiological stance, recognised separatists as fellow-believers and brothers and sisters in Christ. He was prepared to engage in patient debate, and was not overtly dismissive of their arguments.

Hildersham also had ‘divers conferences and disputes’ with Henry Jacob, often called a ‘nonseparating congregationalist’ or a ‘semiseparatist’.³⁰ Jacob and Hildersham had worked together organising the Millenary Petition, but it was not until after the perceived failure of reformist demands at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, that Jacob shifted towards a more openly radical ecclesiological position.³¹ Nevertheless, there was a continued dialogue with those who disagreed with him, and he was not cut off from godly intercourse. Indeed, the decision to form a new covenanted congregation in Southwark in 1616, by Jacob and others, was only taken after ‘much conference’ with leading figures in puritan circles such as Walter Travers,

²⁹ John Cotton alleged that Hildersham was so closely in touch with separatist opinion that he claimed to have private information that John Penry, just before his death, ‘did ingenuously acknowledge’ his fault in seducing loyal subjects from hearing the ‘Word of life’ preached in their parish churches; ‘Which though himself had learned to discern the evill thereof, yet he could never prevaile to recover divers of her Subjects, whom he had seduced’, John Cotton, *The Bloody Tenent, Washed* (London, 1647), pp. 117-118, cited in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 150. Cotton does not say whether Hildersham actually visited Penry in prison, only that his story was well-authenticated.

³⁰ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 151. For more on Jacob, see Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, especially pp. 56-64, 101-106, 136-141, 185-193, 220-224, 256-262. For Jacob’s debate with Johnson from 1596-99, see Brachlow, ‘The Elizabethan Roots of Henry Jacob’s Churchmanship: Refocusing the Historiographical Lens’, *JEH*, 36:2 (1985), pp. 228-254. Brachlow stresses the common roots of separatist and other puritan ecclesiology. For a discussion of differing reformist ecclesiological ideologies, see Polly Ha, ‘English Presbyterianism, c. 1590-1640’ (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2006).

³¹ See Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, p. 62. Brachlow suggests this was more a change of context than a change of mind for Jacob.

Richard Mansell, John Dod, and Hildersham himself.³² Hildersham, it seems, opposed the move, but others were more encouraging or at least equivocal. John Smyth, later to become known as the ‘se-baptist’, was another future separatist with whom Hildersham conversed.³³ He, too, was a product of Christ’s College, and may have known Hildersham and Johnson from that time.³⁴ Perhaps Hildersham was also familiar with Smyth when the latter was a lecturer in Lincoln for a short time in the early 1600s.³⁵ Whatever the case, both men, along with Dod, Barbon and others, participated in a conference held in 1606 at the Coventry home of Isabel, Lady Bowes, where the matter for discussion was ‘about withdrawing from true churches, Ministers, and Worship corrupted’.³⁶ By this point, Smyth had already separated from the established church, but despite the differences of opinion, relationships between the participants appear to have remained cordial, with Smyth later recording, ‘I praised God for the quiet and peaceable conference’.³⁷ Hildersham himself insisted in 1610 that, ‘Howsoever we cannot agree in judgement, yet should we love one another, and be glad to imbrace one anothers acquaintance’.³⁸

³² Cited in Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, p. 139.

³³ For Smyth’s career, see Michael Watts, *The Dissenters* (Oxford, 1978), pp. 41-50, Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, pp. 221-250, and *ODNB* (ref: odnb/25833).

³⁴ For more on Christ’s College and its influence, see Chapter 4, above, pp. 155-158.

³⁵ Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 227, records that Smyth was chosen town lecturer at Lincoln on 27 September 1600, the position being granted him for life on 1 August 1602. He was removed on 13 October 1602, but even as late as 1603 he continued to style himself as ‘City Preacher’. Burrage also surmises (p. 230) that Smyth may have played some part in the drawing up of the *Abridgement*, or at least saw the printed version, and this may have helped him finally to become a separatist. However, no evidence is given to support this theory, and it must remain purely conjectural. For a discussion of the *Abridgement*, see Chapter 5, above, pp. 212-220.

³⁶ Smyth, cited in *DNB*, Vol. xviii, p. 476. For more details of the conference, see Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 229. For more on Lady Isabel Bowes, see Christine M. Newman, ‘“An Honourable and Elect Lady”: the Faith of Isabel, Lady Bowes’, in Diana Wood (ed.), *Life and Thought in the Northern Church* (Studies in Church History, Subsidia 12, Woodbridge, 1999), p. 414.

³⁷ John Smyth, *Paralleles, Censures, Observations* (Middleburg, 1609), p. 129.

³⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 302.

It is, however, with William Bradshaw, ‘his intimate Friend’, that Hildersham probably had the closest association of any of those considered ecclesiologically ‘radical’.³⁹ As we have seen, Hildersham befriended the younger man, facilitating his university career, and introducing him to his own patrons, the Rediche family.⁴⁰ This led to a close cooperation in local exercises, especially in Burton on Trent. When Bradshaw published his treatise on the Lord’s Supper in 1609, he obtained Hildersham’s permission to append his own contribution on the subject.⁴¹ But Bradshaw is surely a classic illustration of the instability and unhelpfulness of labels: Gataker, his early biographer, does his best to portray him as a man of ‘meek and discreet carriage’, whose clashes with authority were due to animosity and envy on the part of detractors such as Bancroft and the Bishop of Rochester.⁴² Gataker also emphasises his friendly relationship with that arch-moderate, Laurence Chaderton. And yet it is clear that Bradshaw was prepared to voice his precise opinions very openly, and to enter the world of controversial print, in a way that Hildersham avoided. Paul Chang-Ha Lim is right to refer to Bradshaw as a ‘complex figure’.⁴³ Perry Miller, echoed by Brachlow, classifies Bradshaw as a ‘nonseparating congregationalist’, along with men like Henry Jacob, and it is often his church polity rather than his vehement

³⁹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersham’, p. 151. Peter Lake talks of Bradshaw’s ‘radical opinions’ and compares them to the more moderate responses to Hampton Court, see his chapter on Bradshaw, entitled ‘moderation in extremity’ in his, *Moderate Puritans*, p. 262.

⁴⁰ See Chapter 4, above, pp. 190-193.

⁴¹ William Bradshaw, *A Direction for the Weaker Sort of Christians ... Whereunto is adjoined a verie profitable treatise of the same argument, by way of question and answer, written by another* (1609). For a fuller discussion of these treatises, see above, Chapter 1, pp. 23-25, and Chapter 3, pp. 138-146.

⁴² Thomas Gataker, ‘Life and Death of Master William Bradshaw’, in Samuel Clarke, *Lives of Two and Twenty English Divines* (1660), pp. 32-74.

⁴³ Paul Chang-Ha Lim and C. H. Lim, *In Pursuit of Purity, Unity, and Liberty: Richard Baxter’s Puritan Ecclesiology in its Seventeenth-Century Context* (Boston, Mass., 2004), p. 121.

rejection of separation that is emphasised.⁴⁴ That he was articulating a theoretical, ideal model in his writings should also be remembered. On doctrinal issues, Bradshaw himself considered that he was beating out ‘a middle tract’ between ‘the extream opposition of Divines in this point dissenting’, when he penned his *Treatise of Justification*.⁴⁵ All this serves to highlight that categorisations such as radical and moderate were relative, and at best subjective, depending on the perspective of the assessor.

Contemporary commentators, especially those with a polemical point to make, often based such judgements on the network of associations in which an individual was involved. Thus opponents of puritanism, like Bancroft, were able to gloss Hildersham as a dangerous and seditious radical because of the sustained conversations he had with men like Johnson and Smyth, who in turn had been dubbed schismatics and Brownists. Conversely, Hildersham’s presence could be considered a moderating and respectable influence in his relationship with John Darrell and William Bradshaw. It could work both ways. However, in one particular notorious interface, with Edward Wightman, a man in 1612 unanimously considered to be ‘threateningly peripheral’, Hildersham’s enemies had a polemical field-day.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts 1630-1650* (Boston, Mass., 1933), cited in Brachlow, *Communion of Saints*, pp. 16, 139.

⁴⁵ Gataker, ‘Life of Bradshaw’, p. 68.

⁴⁶ Lake, ‘Joseph Hall’, p. 181.

2. Guilt by Association? Arthur Hildersham and the ‘blasphemous heretic’, Edward Wightman.⁴⁷

Everybody agreed about one thing at least: by 1612 Edward Wightman, a woollen draper from Burton on Trent and the last person to be burned for heresy in England, was indeed a ‘blasphemous heretic’.⁴⁸ Perishing in the flames at Lichfield on 11 April 1612, he was declared to be ‘an obstinate and incorrigible Heretick’, the holder of ‘perilous and dangerous Opinions’.⁴⁹ Thomas Fuller, having devoted considerable space to discussing the case of Bartholomew Legate, the last heretic to be burned at Smithfield (on 18 March 1612), spends very little time on the more extreme Wightman, averring that he was dispatched ‘for farre worse Opinions (if worse might be) than Legate maintained. Mary Magdalene indeed was once possessed with seven Devils, but ten severall Heresies were laid to Wightman’s charge’.⁵⁰ The local Burton churchwardens refer to the ‘vehemencie arrogancie & intemperance’ of his spirit and to his ‘damnable opinions’.⁵¹ According to the puritan historian Samuel Clarke,

⁴⁷ Most of the research for this second section was done for a Warwick MA course essay (‘Guilt by Association? Arthur Hildersham and the ‘blasphemous heretic’, Edward Wightman’) in 2003, prior to the publication of the article on the same subject by Ian Atherton and David Como, ‘The Burning of Edward Wightman: Puritanism, Prelacy and the Politics of Heresy in Early Modern England’, *English Historical Review*, 120: 489 (2005), pp. 1215-1250, which covers much of the same ground and comes to broadly similar conclusions. However, the main focus of my research is upon Hildersham and his relationship with Wightman, rather than on Wightman himself.

⁴⁸ King James I to the Sheriff of Lichfield, in *A True Relation of the Commissions and Warrants for the Condemnation and Burning of Bartholomew Legatt and Thomas Withman the one in West-Smithfield, London, the other at Lichfield in the Year 1611* (London, 1651), p. 12; see also Archbishop Richard Neile in *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1639-1640* (HMSO, London, 1877), p. 84.

⁴⁹ *A True Relation*, p. 9.

⁵⁰ Thomas Fuller, *The Church History of Britain from the birth of Jesus Christ until the year M.DC.XLVIII* (London, 1655), Book X, Section IV, p. 64. For more on Legat(e), see Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, pp. 1237-1239.

⁵¹ LAO D+C cijj (1), ‘the report of Francis Lynton and Thomas Hafter Churchwardens made unto the right reverend father in god, Rich[ard] Bishop of Coventry and Lich[field] concerninge Edward Wightman accordinge to his letters charge and commande imposed upon them’, May 1611.

Wightman was ‘a damnable Heretick’.⁵²

It is not hard to see why there was a consensus on this point. The detailed list of heresies with which Wightman was charged, and to which he openly confessed, formed a veritable panoply of heterodoxy, both ancient and more modern. Not only had he adhered to the doctrines of the ‘Ebionites, Cerinthians, Valentinians, Arrians, Macedonians, of Simon Magus of Manes, Manichees, of Photinus and Anabaptists’, he had also invented some more of his own ‘heretical, Execrable and unheard of opinions, by the instinct of Satan’.⁵³ In all, Wightman was accused on fourteen separate charges, including a whole raft of anti-Trinitarian and Christological heresies, soul-sleeping, the denial of infant baptism, advocacy of the abolition of communion by bread and wine, and casting doubt upon the legitimacy of the Church of England’s ministry.⁵⁴ In addition, and perhaps even more damagingly, he confessed that

I ... have affirmed my selfe to be that prophet promised in the 18 of Deuteronomie and that Elijah in the 4th of Malachie promised to be sent before the great and fearfull day of the lord And that comforter in the 16 of John who should convict the world of sinne of righteousness and of judgment.⁵⁵

These views were elaborated in various such confessions, and also in books which he wrote and presented both to the king and the High Commissioners.⁵⁶ Any official tribunal, be it Catholic or Protestant of whatever hue, would surely have choked on

⁵² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 147; for Clarke’s agenda see Patrick Collinson, “‘A Magazine of Religious Patterns’”, in his *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 513-519.

⁵³ *A True Relation*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ For full details see Bodleian Library Ashm. MS. 1521 (vii). A summary of this trial manuscript appears in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, Vol. I, pp. 217-220.

⁵⁵ LAO D+C cijj (2), Edward Wightman, ‘his prophecy of the great day of the L[ord] before Allhallows day’, 3 September 1611. See also Ashm. MS.1521 (vii), e.g. p. 37. Atherton and Como posit a link here with a view expressed by the separatist Henry Barrow, see ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1237.

⁵⁶ *A True Relation*, p. 6. The books appear to be no longer extant, but further details of his views can be found in Ashm. MS.1521 (vii) and LAO D+C cijj. The latter source seems to have been mentioned first by Kenneth Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor: the Episcopate of James I* (Oxford, 1990), p. 241 n. 152.

such a combination of blasphemy and heterodoxy. What the whole episode suggests about Wightman's mental state is beyond the scope of this thesis, as is any discussion of the history of burning as a punishment in such a case.⁵⁷

The contrast between Wightman's reputation, and that of another Burton on Trent habitué of the time, Arthur Hildersham, could hardly have been greater. Hildersham, as we have seen, was nationally regarded as an important and influential puritan divine, and as vicar of Ashby-de-la-Zouch, he was strategically located at the centre of a network of godly clergy looking to him for advice and direction.⁵⁸ In many ways, Hildersham could be considered the archetypal puritan minister: learned, pious, and exercising an exemplary parish ministry. Although ostensibly far apart in theology, social status and reputation, however, the fact that Hildersham and Wightman became linked together in the narrative of events leading up to the latter's burning, offers an interesting case study of the nature of 'Jacobethan' puritanism and how its opponents were able to construct an effective polemical weapon against it.⁵⁹ As a result of this episode, the lectures at Burton and Repton were suppressed and Hildersham himself was silenced, despite being formally exonerated.⁶⁰ The apparent principle operating here was that there was no smoke without fire, even if that fire was

⁵⁷ There seems to have been an absence of claims in the literature of the time that Wightman was 'frantick' or insane, unlike the case of an earlier pseudo-messiah, William Hacket: see Walsham, 'Frantick Hacket'. Of course it would not have been profitable for the authorities to have taken this line on Wightman; for suggestions that the burning was engineered by Archbishop Abbot on behalf of the king by ensuring a favourable composition of judges on the Bench, see two letters from Abbot in J. Payne Collier (ed.), *The Egerton Papers* (Camden Society, 31:12, 1840), pp. 446-448. For a discussion of the decline in burning as a punishment, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', pp. 1247-1249.

⁵⁸ See above, Chapter 4, pp. 160-169, and Chapter 2, pp. 31-93.

⁵⁹ Interestingly, though, both men were of a similar age; in 1612 Hildersham was forty-eight, Wightman was forty-five.

⁶⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', pp. 147-148. Hildersham was suspended by the High Commission on 22 April 1613.

not Hildersham's own, but Wightman's.⁶¹

The actual burning itself was bizarre and somewhat bathetic. Recalling the occasion some twenty-seven years later, Richard Neile, quondam Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, described how on 20 March 1612, Wightman had been 'brought to the stake, and the fire [having] scorched him a little, he cried out that he would recant. The people thereupon ran into the fire and suffered themselves to be scorched to save him.'⁶² Before being unchained from the stake, he signed a recantation, but two or three weeks later, on cooler reflection, he 'blasphemed more audaciously than before' when he was brought again before the Consistory Court.⁶³ The writ of *de haeretico comburendo* was therefore renewed, and on this second occasion, Easter Saturday 1612, was carried through to a conclusion.⁶⁴ In Neile's words, 'he died blaspheming.'⁶⁵

The chain of events culminating in this dramatic outcome was brought to a head by Wightman himself when, in March 1611, he delivered a self-authored, handwritten book to the king at Royston.⁶⁶ In this manuscript, his intention was to

⁶¹ This principle of 'guilt by association' was apparently one of the 'main devices of the inquisition' employed in the heresy trials of Reginald Pole, Hildersham's great-uncle, see Thomas F. Mayer, *Reginald Pole: Prince and Prophet* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 332. Similar tactics were also seemingly deployed against Anthony Wotton, another puritan minister linked with Wightman, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1240.

⁶² *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1639-40*, p. 84.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 85.

⁶⁴ Traditionally this has always been held to have taken place in the Market Place, Lichfield, but recently this location has been questioned, see Christopher Upton, *A History of Lichfield* (Chichester, 2001), p. 50. For more on *de haeretico comburendo*, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1242.

⁶⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1639-40*, p. 85.

⁶⁶ Petitioning the king during his annual round of hunting was a common activity. Hildersham himself, along with other divines from the diocese of Lincoln, had done so at Hinchingsbrooke on 1 December 1604/5, see B. W. Quintrell, 'The Royal Hunt and the Puritans, 1604-1605', *JEH*, 31:1 (1980), p. 47. The Burton minister and churchwardens had already presented Wightman to the bishop, who had ordered that he be taken into custody, which may have led Wightman to take this desperate step, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1231.

‘discover and confu[t]e the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes’.⁶⁷ A lengthy period of imprisonment followed in the Gatehouse, London, and then in Lichfield, alongside a detailed investigation on the part of the ecclesiastical authorities, led by Neile and his chaplain William Laud. Even before the official trial began, Neile, ‘the man, whom all the pious ... misdoubted would do the most mischief’, had Hildersham silenced for his supposed implication in the affair.⁶⁸

The final proceedings opened in the crowded Consistory Court of Lichfield Cathedral on 19 November 1611.⁶⁹ It is to Samuel Clarke that we must turn for Hildersham’s version of events. He tells us that on the trial’s second day, 26 November 1611, Wightman complained in front of more than five hundred hearers that Neile had been spreading the rumour that he had learned his heretical opinions from Hildersham, when quite the opposite was true; Hildersham had caused even his own friends to reject him for them.⁷⁰ However, on the next day of the trial, whether out of craft or confusion, Wightman appeared to change his story and

before the Bishop, he impudently avouched to Master Hildersams face, that at the conference forenamed, he should say, that the whole drift of the Scripture indeed, did make for the Opinion of the souls sleeping, but that the Church had otherwise judged of the matter. Master Hildersam did protest, that he never spake or thought so; and offered by Oath, or any other means that

⁶⁷ Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 217. For more details see Ashm. MS.1521 (vii). For more on the Nicolaitanes, see Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1232.

⁶⁸ Gataker, ‘Life of Bradshaw’, p. 61; for a more positive view of Neile’s attitude to puritan divines, including his tenure as Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield and specifically his handling of the Wightman case, see Andrew W. Foster, ‘A Biography of Richard Neile, 1562-1640’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1978), pp. 75-78.

⁶⁹ A report of the trial can be found in Ashm. MS.1521 (vii), ‘The proceed [ings a (?)] + Lichfield in. 7. / Court dayes [against?] Edward Wightman / in case of b[lasphemie & (?)] heresie’. A full summary is provided in Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, pp. 216-220. The large crowds on the second and third days caused proceedings to be moved to the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin.

⁷⁰ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 147.

should be required to avow, that he ever held this his Opinion, to be directly contrary to the Scriptures, and a most detestable Heresie.⁷¹

Supported by the testimony of Henry Aberley, the incumbent of Burton, who had been fully involved in the case, Hildersham was completely exculpated.⁷² Even Bishop Neile, who had previously given out ‘that Wightman learned his Opinions (at least that of the souls sleeping) of the Puritans, and at the aforesaid Exercises, and that of Master Hildersam by name’, was forced to admit openly that ‘he was assuredly perswaded that Wightman had greatly wronged him [ie. Hildersham] in this he had said of him’.⁷³ ‘Thus’, concludes Clarke triumphantly, ‘was Master Hildersams innocency cleared in a publique audience, during the time of Wightmans trial at Lichfield’.⁷⁴ It raises the question of who exactly was in the dock here.

The background to these seemingly preposterous allegations by Wightman, and indeed Neile, against Hildersham must be sought in the context of the ‘famous’ exercises held at Burton on Trent.⁷⁵ These had been running for a considerable number of years and were ‘the meanes of great good to the souls of many, both Ministers and private Christians in the parts adjacent’.⁷⁶ Hildersham, says Clarke, ‘was the main upholder of these two Exercises for many years’.⁷⁷ Wightman is recorded as ‘coming

⁷¹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148. Clarke says that this next trial day (the third) was 27 November 1611, whereas Ashm. MS.1521 (vii) lists it as 29 November.

⁷² For more on Aberley, see below, pp. 266-267.

⁷³ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁷⁵ For more details of the exercises at Burton and Repton, see Gataker, ‘Life of Bradshaw’, pp. 66-67.

For a more general consideration, see Patrick Collinson, ‘Lectures by Combination: Structures and Characteristics of Church Life in Seventeenth-Century England’ in his *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 467-498.

⁷⁶ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 147.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 147. Collinson, ‘Lectures by Combination’, p. 469, makes the point that ‘preaching was usually provided by incumbents of churches within the natural catchment area of the preaching centre’. Hildersham was resident in Ashby-de-la-Zouch, some eight miles from Burton.

sometimes to the Exercise there', but, as we shall see, Clarke understates somewhat Wightman's previous involvement with Burton's godly community.⁷⁸

Clarke's account of the interchanges between Hildersham and Wightman is corroborated and supplemented by a report to Neile in May 1611 by the Burton churchwardens, Francis Lynton and Thomas Hafter, during Wightman's imprisonment.⁷⁹ From this source we discover the first apparent public enunciation by Wightman of his soul-sleeping heresy, and also witness a spiralling descent into increasingly self-confident heterodoxy:

About some ffoure years past ymediatly after the death of one Sir Humfrey fferrars knight (a worthie gentleman of our country) Wightman beyng amongst an ydle companie in his owne house where the death of the said Sir Humf[rey] fferrars was spoken of, did by slanderous speeches inveigh against the said Sir Hum[rey] ff[errars] touchinge some injustice or wrongs foradly done him by the said Sir Hum[rey] ff[errars] (as he surmised) whereupon one in the company persuaded him to forgive and forgett these matters sayinge that Sir H[umfrey] fferrars knew before that tyme whether he had done him right or wronge; Noe sayeth Wightman I deny that; ffor (sayeth he) the soule of man dyeth with the bodie & participateth not either of the joyes of heaven or the paynes of hell, untill the generall daie of judgment, but resteth with the bodie untill then, (or wordes to the like effect) And having once uttered this damnable heresie his pride and glory therein was such that he was never [?], longer than he was reasoninge in all companies upon this poynte as well as with divines as with other laitie.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 147.

⁷⁹ LAO D+C ciiij (1).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.* On the incremental nature of Wightman's heresy, he himself claimed at his trial that 'from the tyme of his Infancy untill within theis Two yeares last past [i.e. 1609] he did hould and believe the Trinity of persons in the unity of the diety', see Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 218 and Ashm. MS.1521(vii), p. 17. Thus his thnetopsychist heresy apparently predated his trinitarian heterodoxy by some two years, since the burial of Sir Humfrey Ferrars is recorded as taking place on 9 January 1607, see Staffordshire Record Office [SRO] F37731/1 Parish Register for Tamworth St Editha. The injustice felt by Wightman against Sir Humfrey may relate to a dispute between Wightman and his former servant and apprentice Samuell Royle listed in the Quarter Sessions Roll for 1600, in which Sir Humfrey Ferrars was the officiating JP, see S. A. H. Burne (ed.) *Collections for a History of Staffordshire 1935: Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls*, Vol. IV, 1598-1602 (William Salt

The churchwardens, however, put forward no suggestions for the source of Wightman's heresy. Is it possible that he could have learned his thnetopsychism from Hildersham, as he claimed on the third day of his trial, and as Neile was only too quick to believe (or at least to say that he did)? Given the reformed consensus on mortalism which had existed since the time of Calvin and Bullinger, however, this seems extremely unlikely.⁸¹ Hildersham, despite his ceremonial nonconformity, had an unblemished record of reformed theological orthodoxy.⁸² In the light of this, it seems we have no reason to disbelieve Hildersham's own vehement denial. Even Neile was forced to back down, although the damage to Hildersham's reputation was already done.

Wightman, then, may simply have been lying, in the cause of self-defence, before a bishop only too glad to hear such aspersions against a prominent puritan divine. Alternatively, he may have been deluded or confused, actually believing that he had heard Hildersham expound such a doctrine. The existence of a gap between learned preacher and humble lay hearer does not have to be as great as some historians have claimed for misapprehension to be a viable explanation.⁸³ However, this will not do in Wightman's case. Here we have no illiterate peasant, but a man of 'good

Archaeological Society, 1936), p. 296. Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1227, also suggest that the Royle case may have been responsible for the failure of Wightman's clothing business.

⁸¹ For a history of the doctrine of soul-sleeping, see Norman T. Burns, *Christian Mortalism from Tyndale to Milton* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972). Burns says that Wightman was a thnetopsychist rather than a psychopannychist, p. 123. Thnetopsychites used 'slept' in a figurative sense, regarding 'soul' as merely a name for the insubstantial 'breath of life' which could not exist without the body. They were called soul-sleepers, because they expected the future resurrection of both body and soul – both were 'sleeping' until the Last Day. This position was commonly held by many early anabaptists, and, indeed, Milton. The psychopannychists, on the other hand, believed that 'the immortal substance called soul literally slept until the Last Day', see Burns, p. 18.

⁸² For more on Hildersham's theology, see Chapter 3, above, pp. 94-147.

⁸³ In the sixteenth century a heresy case is recorded in St David's in which 'a local layman' 'seriously misunderstood a sermon preached by his archdeacon', see Richard Rex, *The Lollards* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 129.

schooling & understanding', who was informed about the heresies taught by the 'Nicolaitaines', and who 'took in hand to write bookes of such volumes'.⁸⁴ He demonstrated an obvious pride in his intellectual and scribal abilities, and his deposition displays a firm, stylish hand.⁸⁵ Atherton and Como stress his social standing and respectable parentage.⁸⁶

Therefore, it seems certain that Wightman must have absorbed his thnetopsychism from some source other than Hildersham's preaching. Tracing the history of Christian mortalism from the early days of the Reformation, when it was espoused by Luther and Tyndale, Burns has demonstrated how the doctrine quickly came to be relegated solely to those on the radical margins, the anabaptists. He suggests that Wightman, whom he labels 'an anabaptist', may have been a product of the evangelical mission mounted by English anabaptists from Haarlem, centred on Norwich, a generation earlier.⁸⁷ The evidence he cites is inferential, in that Wightman at his trial maintained the first four tenets of anabaptism as listed by John Payne in his *Royall Exchange* (1597).⁸⁸ Undeniably, Wightman could be included within the penumbra of anabaptism, but a direct link has not been proven. Likewise, there is a close similarity between his Arianism and that of those other contemporary heresiarchs, the Legate brothers in London, but there is no evidence of any actual

⁸⁴ LAO D+C ciiij (1); Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 217; LAO D+C ciiij (1). Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1219, suggest that Wightman attended Burton grammar school, of which his father was probably master.

⁸⁵ LAO D+C ciiij (2).

⁸⁶ Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', pp. 1218-1219.

⁸⁷ Burns, *Christian Mortalism*, p. 123.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123

contact between them.⁸⁹ However, a general feeling existed that there was a widespread diffusion of radical ideas throughout the country; allowing for a certain polemical exaggeration, there may have been some truth in Joseph Hall's rhetorical exclamation, 'What Cobler or Spinster hath not heard of the maine holds of Brownisme'.⁹⁰ Without wishing to revisit the old debate about the connections between the cloth trade and the spread of radical religious views, we may note that Wightman's business was drapery which certainly gave him a geographical mobility and the opportunity to mix with people holding a variety of opinions.⁹¹ And, it is highly likely that his years of apprenticeship with the 'dominant Drapers Company' in Shrewsbury coincided with the tenure of the charismatic civic preacher John Tomkys in the 1580s, a scene so wonderfully evoked by Patrick Collinson.⁹² It is tempting to speculate that this may have given Wightman a taste for zealous, even adversarial, Protestantism, but to conflate this with radical heterodoxy is to fall into the trap set by its polemical opponents, who collapsed any distinction between the two. Atherton and Como also point to the 'religious revolution' that had occurred in Burton by the time

⁸⁹ Burrage calls Wightman a 'Legatine-Arian or English Seeker': Burrage, *Early English Dissenters*, p. 216. Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', pp. 1238-1239, argue that the parallels are so 'striking', that it seems very likely that Wightman had been exposed to the ideas of the Legates. This leads them to posit a 'now unknown missing link' between the two.

⁹⁰ Joseph Hall, *A Common Apologie of the Church of England against the unjust challenges of the over-just sect, commonly called Brownists* (London, 1610), p. 5. Joseph Hall, later a bishop, was himself at school in Ashby, and was a protégé of Hildersham, see above, Chapter 4, pp. 151, n. 9, and 166.

⁹¹ On the links between the cloth trade and radical religion, see for example, J. H. Davis, 'Lollard Survival and the Textile Industry' in G. J. Cumming (ed.), *Studies in Church History III* (1966); according to the *DNB*, Wightman is believed to have been born in Hinckley, Leics., but Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1218, supply evidence that he was actually baptised in the nearby parish of Burbage on 20 December 1566. They also give more details of his family history and parentage. He is also reputed to have had a connection with Mavesyn Ridware, Staffs.: see F. W. Hackwood, *Glimpses of Bygone Staffordshire* (Stafford, 1925), p. 22.

⁹² Patrick Collinson, 'The Shearmen's Tree and the Preacher', in *ibid* and John Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 205-220, quote at p. 219. Collinson says that 'Tomkys lived with the Drapers Company in a kind of symbiosis', p. 220. Wightman was apprenticed to John Barnes, woollen draper, in Shrewsbury, and in 1590 was admitted a master of the Shrewsbury Drapers Company. Drapery was the business of his mother's family, leading clothiers in Burton, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1219 and LAO D+C ciiij (1).

of Wightman's return.⁹³ Most significant, perhaps, was his 'Ale selling & keeping a house of tiplinge and entertainment of all companies for gamminge at tables and cardes', which Wightman did, to solve his financial difficulties, for ten or twelve years in Burton sometime in the period between about 1590 and 1610.⁹⁴ With the 'resort to his house being very great' and Wightman being 'much accustomed to reasonings and disputations touchinge the scriptures' there were numerous opportunities for doctrinal debates.⁹⁵ It was precisely this sort of cultural environment that led a later writer to complain that religion had 'become the common discourse and table-talk in every tavern and ale-house'.⁹⁶

The existence of several possible alternative sources for Wightman's soul-sleeping heresy reinforces credence in Hildersham's firm disavowal of any complicity. Indeed, both Clarke and the churchwardens demonstrate a clear sequence of events in which Hildersham and also Aberley acquit themselves of any responsibility.⁹⁷ It was Aberley, the parish minister, being 'much grievinge' on learning of Wightman's irregular views in 1608, who first publicly reprovved him; 'whereupon Wightman inveighed against this Mr Aberley exceedinglie and absented himself a long tyme from hearinge any of the sermons of the said Mr Aberley in Burton and resorted to other churches where pleased himself'.⁹⁸ It was at this stage that Hildersham (along with

⁹³ Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1220.

⁹⁴ LAO D+C cijj (1); Wightman appears in the list of forty-six licensed victuallers for Burton in 1604, see S. A. H. Burne (ed.), *Collections for a History of Staffordshire 1940: Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls*, Vol. V, 1603-1606 (William Salt Archaeological Society, Kendal, 1940), p. 140. Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1227, suggest that Wightman's financial problems may have been the result of the severe economic difficulties of the 1590s.

⁹⁵ LAO D+C cijj (1).

⁹⁶ John Taylor, *Religious Enemies* (London, 1641), cited in Watts, *The Dissenters*, p. 80.

⁹⁷ These events also reveal the close co-operation between the parish incumbent and the godly lecturer. For a wider discussion of this point, see Collinson, 'Lectures by Combination', pp. 468-469.

⁹⁸ LAO D+C cijj (1).

another clergyman) was called in by Aberley, perhaps because of his reputation for settling disputes and his longer acquaintance with Wightman, to ‘reprove him herein’ with the hope of achieving ‘a resolution between Mr Aberley and him’.⁹⁹

That the ensuing meeting between the warring factions was partially successful on a personal level is probably testimony to Hildersham’s peacemaking skills; to a certain extent ‘they did pacifie him [Wightman] towards Mr Aberley but touchinge his opinion they could nothings prevaile with him’.¹⁰⁰

Shortly after this, on 10 March 1609, Hildersham received a letter from Wightman on the subject of soul-sleeping, and ‘perceiving by that, and the report of others, that he grew more and more obstinate in his errours, and laboured to draw others unto it’, he took the opportunity of the next public exercise at Burton, on 15 March 1609, to refute the mortalist heresy.¹⁰¹ On 21 April 1609, Wightman reacted by dispatching yet another epistle ‘wherein he revileth him for the said speech’.¹⁰² It is unclear whether Hildersham responded in writing, although the churchwardens talk of

⁹⁹ LAO D+C cijj (1); Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1229, supply the name of the other clergyman as Simon Presse, rector of Egginton, Derbyshire, from c. 1590. I have been unable to find a reference to Aberley in Venn, J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (Oxford, 1891), Walter Noble Landor (ed.), *Collections for a History of Staffordshire 1915: Staffordshire Incumbents and Parochial Records (1530-1680)* (William Salt Archaeological Society, London, 1916), or in Albert Peel, ‘A Puritan Survey of the Church in Staffordshire in 1604’, *English Historical Review* 26:102 (1911). However, in *Staffordshire Incumbents*, pp. 42 and 44, John Hassall is listed as curate of Burton in 1604, and Robert Lussher on 9 July 1609, which suggests that Aberley’s incumbency, coming between these two, must have been a relatively brief one. After this episode, Henry Aberley moved to Ashby, married, and continued to be a great supporter of Hildersham, helping to maintain his religious legacy there after Hildersham’s death in 1632, see Chapter 7, below, p. 289.

¹⁰⁰ LAO D+C cijj (1). Clarke reports that Hildersham used Luke 16:22-23 (The Rich Man and Lazarus), Luke 23:43 (The Dying Thief) and Phil.1:23 in his arguments against soul-sleeping, Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148. These were classic proof texts all referred to in Calvin’s standard work on psychopannychia, translated into English as *An Excellent Treatise of the Immortalitye of the Soule* (London, 1581), pp. 16-18, 35-36, 71.

¹⁰¹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148. Interestingly, Hildersham used the text of Hebrews 9:27, fixed in advance for the exercise, for the purposes of refutation. This text, though of obvious relevance, was not one mentioned by Calvin in his *Excellent Treatise*.

¹⁰² Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 148.

an ‘often intercourse of letters with Mr Hildersham’.¹⁰³ What is certain is that it became increasingly obvious to Hildersham that he was getting nowhere with Wightman, and there came a point, probably in mid-1609, when he ‘did give him over leaving him to himselfe and his letters unanswered’.¹⁰⁴ It says much about Wightman’s state of mind that he took this as a triumph; ‘boastinge to his favourers his opinions were such as were invincible & not to be confuted’.¹⁰⁵ This seems to mark the termination of any direct contact between the two men, although there are reports of a disturbance during Lent 1611, when

at a great assemblie at an exercise in our church at Burton ... he [Wightman] thrice or more did presse and with audations and loude wordes importune the ministers in that assemblie to have had hearinge to have spoken in that publique place upon the portion of Scripture then in handling by the Ministers and might hardlie be stayed therein.¹⁰⁶

Within days, Wightman was presented at the bishop’s visitation by the minister and churchwardens of Burton.¹⁰⁷ It was in this spirit of excluded bitterness that Wightman shortly afterwards petitioned the king.¹⁰⁸

A certain defensiveness, even disingenuousness, can be detected in the efforts by both Hildersham and the churchwardens to stress the space that had undoubtedly existed between themselves and Wightman in the two years before the latter’s imprisonment. Despite knowing a great deal about Wightman, his activities and his contacts, the two churchwardens claim that they are ill-fitted to provide Neile with much information, ‘by reason there has been noe societie or familiaritie between him

¹⁰³ LAO D+C ciiij (1).

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* It is not explicitly stated whether Hildersham was one of the ministers taking part.

¹⁰⁷ Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1231.

¹⁰⁸ He had also made contact with the London puritan minister, Anthony Wotton: *ibid.*, p. 1231.

and us But rather we have opposed ourselves against him for many lewd misdemeanours of his which have made us to estrange ourselves one towarde another'.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the gap was never absolute, in a formal sense, since, notwithstanding Wightman's articulated opinions on infant baptism, his children continued to receive the sacrament in the parish church right up to August 1611.¹¹⁰ And in spite of the public rebuttal of his heresy and the withdrawal of fellowship, Wightman was not denounced to the authorities by the local professors.¹¹¹ For it is apparent that up to 1609 Wightman was considered very much one of the godly flock, and as such this was to be treated as a matter of internal pastoral discipline. The evangelicals were in the reclamation business and, at least initially, seem to have had hopes of winning him back to the truth. As the *DNB* puts it, 'the puritans were for treating him tenderly, hoping to reduce his errors by argument'.¹¹² This paradigm of reasoned dialectic and dialogue, between what passed for mainstream puritanism and more fringe elements, has recently been brilliantly explored by Peter Lake; moderate and radical were not watertight compartments but interacted in the same cultural

¹⁰⁹ LAO D+C cij (1). This report was made in response to a demand from Bishop Neile.

¹¹⁰ SRO D4219/1/1, Parish Register of St Modwen, Burton on Trent, 1538-1686, records the baptisms of at least six of Wightman's children in the decade beginning in 1601, the last being Samuel on 18 August 1611. Wightman called infant baptism 'an abhominable custome' (see Ashm. MS. 1521 (vii), p. 7) but it may be that his wife Frances Darbye, whom he had married at St. Modwen's on 2 September 1593, was of a more conventional piety than her husband. Nevertheless, she was also deeply involved with Burton's godly group, see p. 275, n. 140, below.

¹¹¹ This was also true in the case of William Hacket: see Lake, *Boxmaker's Revenge*, p. 255. I am not suggesting that the godly community in Burton was coterminous with the whole communicant population of 1500 (see Peel, 'Puritan Survey of the Church', p. 348), but there is every indication from the Wightman case that the evangelical subset existed harmoniously within it. Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1223, argue that the godly clique included many members of the leading members of the town.

¹¹² *DNB*, entry on 'Wightman, Edward'. For the updated entry on Wightman, see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/29371). For Hildersham's attitude towards the ministerial duty of reproving sin, including the 'wisdom not to reprove', see his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 504.

milieu.¹¹³ The use of letters as one weapon in the arsenal of persuasive discourse was illustrated by Hildersham himself, as we have seen, in an earlier private exchange with a gentlewoman imprisoned for separatism in the 1590s.¹¹⁴ It was only in 1609 that similar tactics employed with Wightman were adjudged to be fruitless and he ceased to be a ‘brother’.

But it was these links between separatists and nonseparatists, conformists and nonconformists, which are a key to the polemics of Neile and his allies. The fluidity of the situation could be deliberately misinterpreted and manipulated to the godly’s disadvantage, with a monarch who did not need much convincing.¹¹⁵ Although James may have been prepared to be more lenient to the rank and file puritan clergy, towards prominent leaders such as Hildersham he was implacable. Since the time of the Millenary Petition, the name of Hildersham was automatically associated in his mind with sedition; to Cecil in November 1604, James wrote,

I doubt not also but ere this time ye have received the Puritans’ catholic petition ... but I deceived their expectation by dismissing the multitude in fair terms. Only that knave that was the framer of the petition and drawer of them together deserves some correction ... but he is so near of kin to Emmanuel as I shall distrust that race the more while I live ...¹¹⁶

The continuing personal animosity of James towards Hildersham was again apparent in the very month of Wightman’s trial, when Archbishop Abbot warned the Bishop of

¹¹³ Lake, *Boxmaker’s Revenge*.

¹¹⁴ See above, pp. 246-252.

¹¹⁵ Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1232, point out that Wightman’s attack on the three main Creeds of the Church would have been particularly abhorrent to James, who, since 1607, had been involved in a battle of the books with Catholic apologists on this subject.

¹¹⁶ G. P. V. Akrigg (ed.), *Letters of King James VI and I* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1984), p. 236. Frederick Shriver, in his ‘Hampton Court Re-visited: James I and the Puritans’, *JEH*, 33:1 (1982), p. 67, claims that the king was here referring to Arthur Hildersham and the Millenary Petition, but Quintrell, ‘Royal Hunt’, p. 45, locates the reference more plausibly to the petition presented by Essex yeomen to the king on 20 November 1604, of which Richard Hildersham, Arthur’s brother, was the main draughtsman. In any case, the sentiment expressed is the same; James was so hostile to Richard Hildersham precisely because of his family connection to Arthur.

Peterborough of the king's anger that the deprived nonconformist had been preaching in the Lincoln diocese.¹¹⁷ A case can be made that James, rather than his bishops, occupied the driving-seat in the campaign that surrounded the Wightman episode.

But how was Neile able to make such a plausible case against Hildersham, and persuade many far less critical than the king? On the face of it, the slurs against Hildersham were risible, and yet his enemies were seemingly so successful at making mud stick that even some thirty years after his death, his biographer felt the need to go to great lengths to clear his subject's name.¹¹⁸ By making no distinction between shades of 'puritan' opinion, and by labelling all opposition to the shifting *status quo* as seditious or schismatic, the adversaries of the godly were able to exploit the undoubted associations that existed between 'moderate' and 'radical'. Spurr's definition of puritanism 'as that which puritans saw in each other' is particularly helpful here: these wider relationships were but an extension of the concept of godly sociability, and family quarrels did not negate the underlying unity.¹¹⁹ Polemically, of course, this was a gift for their conformist opponents, who were able to point to the increasingly extreme career and opinions of someone like John Smyth as the inevitable conclusion of a nonconformist stance. That the separatists also believed that their position was the only logical outcome of nonconformity did not help those 'mainstream' puritans like Hildersham who were trying to maintain a very fine middle ground of ceremonial nonconformity with anti-schismatism; Francis Johnson did Hildersham no favours

¹¹⁷ Shriver, 'Hampton Court Re-visited', p. 69; Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, pp. 225-227.

¹¹⁸ In a 'Life' of thirteen pages, covering Hildersham's sixty-eight years, Clarke devotes more than a page to this single incident. He is also at pains to point out that Hildersham was known as 'The Hammer of Schismatics': Clarke, 'A Life of Hildersham', p. 151. Hildersham's friend, John Cotton, also refers to the episode, in *The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648), p. 39, cited in Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1247.

¹¹⁹ John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603-1689* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 7.

when he expressed his reluctance to write against any whom he counted as Christian brethren, 'least of all against him', for whom he professed such affection.¹²⁰ And although questions of church polity ('matters of lesse moment'), might divide the brethren on earth, yet, admitted Hildersham, 'in the fundamental points of Religion ... we all agree'.¹²¹

It was demonology, however, and not ecclesiology, that supplied the focus for one of Hildersham's most significant and controversial friendships, with the puritan exorcist John Darrell.¹²² As we have seen, Darrell moved to Ashby 'on the feast day of St. Mychaell tharchangel' in 1592, and resided in the town until about the same time in 1599.¹²³ His arch-opponent, Samuel Harsnett, referred to him as 'M. Darrell of Ashbie'.¹²⁴ Although Darrell is not explicit about the reasons why he moved from Mansfield, it is evident that the godly climate in Ashby, fostered by the Earl of Huntingdon and Hildersham's ministry, must have encouraged him to expect both a sympathetic reception and opportunities to exercise his own preaching gifts.¹²⁵ Indeed, it is evident that Hildersham and Darrell became closely associated and mutually supportive. Hildersham baptised two of Darrell's sons, Andrew and Samuel, during these years, and subsequently also buried the infant Samuel.¹²⁶ In what must have been interpreted as a mark of esteem, Hildersham also entrusted his pulpit to Darrell on

¹²⁰ Johnson, *Treatise*, p. 3.

¹²¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 138.

¹²² See Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance'. Freeman is not explicit about Hildersham's role as Darrell's mentor, but does refer to his involvement, see pp. 36-37. For a recent study of Darrell, which puts a generally positive gloss on his activities, see Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print*.

¹²³ John Darrell, *A Detection of that Sinful, Shameful, Lying and Ridiculous Discourse, of Samuel Harshmet* [England? By the secret English press?, 1601], p. 77. For the local network of godly associations see above, Chapter 4, pp. 160-169.

¹²⁴ Samuel Harsnett, *A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrel* (London, 1599), p. 22.

¹²⁵ For more on Ashby during this period, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 42-57.

¹²⁶ LRO DE 1013/1. Andrew Darrell was baptised on 29 July 1593, and Samuel on 13 April 1597. Samuel was buried on 18 June 1597. The choice of the name Samuel by Darrell may well have been a

Sunday 17 November 1594, when he preached a sermon arguing that the ringing of church bells on the Sabbath was a profanation.¹²⁷ We can also catch an intimate glimpse of a godly group, including Darrell and Ireton, dining and sharing fellowship at Hildersham's house.¹²⁸ But support for Darrell was not confined to this select coterie. During his interrogation by the High Commission, evidence of Darrell's good character was supplied by a 'testimonyall' subscribed by the 'cheif' residents of Ashby, 'being above 30. in number', which declared that,

Wee the Inhabitants of Ashby de la Zouch &c. certify that for the space almost of six years together duringe which time he hath dwelt here in Ashby, he hath lived among us in very good reporte, behaving himself every way as became his profession, and the gospel of Christ.¹²⁹

'Moreover', Darrell continued, 'And this they offer ... to testify further, if it shall please authority to call them thereunto'.¹³⁰

The Hildersham-Darrell connection is of a particular relevance to the Wightman case, since Burton on Trent provided the setting for one of Darrell's most famous exorcisms, that of the thirteen-year old Thomas Darling, in Spring 1596. As a result of this and similar cases, Darrell was tried and imprisoned as a fraud, and Samuel Harsnett, a close associate of Bancroft and Neile, mounted a scorching polemical attack on the practice of unauthorised exorcism, which culminated in the legislative success of Canon 72 in 1604, by which it was outlawed.¹³¹ Harsnett rightly made much of the interconnection between exorcism and the puritan activities of

mark of respect for Hildersham, whose own son Samuel had been baptised less than two years earlier in 1595.

¹²⁷ Harsnett, *A Discovery*, p. 95.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

¹²⁹ Darrell, *A Detection*, p. 78. Darrell asserts that this testimonial and 'sundry other writings the B. Of London injuriously tooke away from me, being prisoner in the Gatehouse'. It does not appear to have survived.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹³¹ Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance', pp. 42-63.

prayer and fasting. Thus it was that Hildersham's position as the leading protagonist in the Burton and Ashby exercises gave him a central role in the Darling case; Darrell and his co-worker, George More, insisted that they embarked upon their missions only after being urged to do so by a group of sixteen ministers meeting at an exercise in Ashby.¹³² Hildersham accompanied Darrell on his first visit to the boy, addressing 'some short godly speeches' to him, while the other ministers kept silent.¹³³ Acting as 'the mouth of the rest', Hildersham provided a theological contextualisation for post-apostolic dispossession.¹³⁴ He is also the one for whom Darling seemed to feel a special affinity, exclaiming in one of his trances, 'Come maister Hildersham, let us five goe to heaven'.¹³⁵

The extent of relatively humble lay participation and autonomy in the Darling episode is striking; the family and friends of the youth who constantly surrounded him were those who reported on his utterances and symptoms to the clerics. They contributed their own impressions, visited the alleged witch, and wrote the narrative of events which became the crucial reference point in all subsequent polemical exchanges.¹³⁶ The session of fasting and prayer preceding the actual dispossession was entirely a lay affair.¹³⁷ And it is here, at the very thick of things, that we again encounter Edward Wightman. Jesse Bee, the principal author of the Darling narrative,

¹³² George More, *A True Discourse concerning the Certaine Possession and Dispossession of 7 persons in one Familie in Lancashire* (n.p., 1600), pp. 49-50.

¹³³ Harsnett, *A Discovery*, p. 276. See also Jesse Bee, *The Most Wonderfull and True Storie, of a Certaine Witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill...* ed. John Denison (London, 1597), p. 26, and Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance', p. 36.

¹³⁴ Bee, *Wonderfull and True Storie*, pp. 26-27.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.* Bee, a saddler, was Darling's uncle. Harsnett calls the 'said Booke' 'that corrupt and false and ridiculous treatise', see his *A Discovery*, p. 269; Bee's book was said to have been 'perused' and 'approved' by both Darrell and Hildersham, see *A Discovery*, p. 26.

¹³⁷ This fact was much derided by Harsnett, but explained by Darrell in terms of not wanting to foster a cult of the miracle-worker.

being absent in London for about a month, requested Thomas Saunders to write the latter part of the book; 'He the said Saunders did take short notes in his tables, and when he came home, he did cause one Edward Wightman upon his report to set them down.'¹³⁸ That Wightman was one of the privileged inner circle around Darling is further evidenced in the Bee account (probably the section he ghost-wrote), where he is seen visiting the suspected witch, Else Gooderige; 'The next morning went Jerome Horabin, Edward Weightman, mistris Caldwell with others to heare what confession she would make'.¹³⁹ Likewise, on the morning of 3 May 1596, we learn that 'Robert Toone, Edw.[ard] Weightman, Rich.[ard] Teare and others, went againe to examine the witch, who confessed to them saying ...'.¹⁴⁰

But this involvement of 'private Christians and men of trade' must have been something of a double-edged sword for the puritan leadership.¹⁴¹ Though welcoming the possible extension of the godly coterie through the power of exorcism to draw crowds, such activity also posed a potential threat to clerical hegemony and the shaping of the experience along 'correct' doctrinal lines. Darrell himself made a distinction between '*miraculum*' and '*mirandum*', but the theological niceties may well have been lost on some of those attracted by the phenomenology.¹⁴² Undoubtedly there were those who were more interested in the cultural manifestations of the

¹³⁸ Harsnett, *A Discovery*, p. 267.

¹³⁹ Bee, *Wonderfull and True Storie*, p. 25.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25. Wightman's wife, Frances, was also heavily involved, being identified (from the Lambeth Palace Library copy) as the earnestly praying woman in Darling's room, mentioned in Bee, *Wonderfull and true storie*, see Atherton and Como, 'Burning of Wightman', p. 1222.

¹⁴¹ I have pluralised this phrase from John Denison's address 'To the Reader' in Bee, *Wonderfull and True Storie*, where it particularly referred to Jesse Bee, but it could equally be applied to the other participants, such as Wightman. For the popular appeal of exorcisms, see Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance', pp. 41-42.

¹⁴² See Walsham, 'Frantick Hacket', p. 42, n. 69, and Freeman, 'Demons, Deviance and Defiance', p. 50.

maleficium, than in the glorious power of God.¹⁴³ Religion and ‘magic’ may have formed part of a ‘seamless web of supernatural belief’ for much of the populace, but superstition was viewed as a problem by the godly clerical elite.¹⁴⁴

Therefore, we must be cautious in assuming that Wightman, though certainly an intimate part of the Darling circle (one of ‘the boyes friends’), was also necessarily one of the godly fraternity around Hildersham.¹⁴⁵ Inhabiting the same geographical space of Darling’s parlour did not mean *per se* that the two men were on the same spiritual wavelength. Wightman’s contentious spirit and his keeping of a ‘house of tiplinge and entertainment’ were also unlikely to have endeared him to the more precise brethren.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, later events indicate that, despite these caveats, Wightman was perceived as one of the godly community in Burton (and indeed identified himself as such) from at least 1596 onwards, and this lengthy association goes a long way to explain the trouble that was taken to try and reclaim him in 1609.¹⁴⁷ The professors were reluctant to wash their dirty linen (or should that be woollen cloth?) in public precisely because it had been in their cupboard for well over a decade. They were acutely aware that the potential for embarrassment, or worse, at the hands of their enemies, was enormous, as indeed it proved. This posed a far more subtle and

¹⁴³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Harmondsworth, 1971), p. 650, says that ‘even scratching the witch was diabolical as they [the theologians] saw it’. In the Darling case the practice of scratching was encouraged by the officiating JP, Sir Humfrey Ferrars, see Bee, *Wonderfull and True Storie*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ Walsham, ‘Frantick Hacket’, p. 44. In a later period, Hopkins and Stearne reported that the country folk were said ‘to talk more of the witch-finders than they do of God, Christ or the Gospel’, cited in Thomas, *Decline of Magic*, pp. 593-594.

¹⁴⁵ Harsnett, *A Discovery*, p. 291.

¹⁴⁶ LAO D+C cij (1). For puritan attitudes to alehouses and the bad habits encouraged therein, see Peter Clark, *The English Alehouse: A Social History 1200-1830* (London, 1983), pp. 109, 111, 124, 145, 151, 166, 167. For Hildersham’s condemnation of drunken parents, see his *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 292.

¹⁴⁷ A local tradition that Wightman was a ‘puritan preacher’ still persists, see ‘Small city with a vengeful past’, *Staffordshire Life*, June/July 1990, pp. 29-31, and *Staffordshire Magazine*, July 1979, p. 32.

potent challenge than any crude allegations that Wightman had learned a specific heresy from Hildersham.

It is possible to surmise, as no doubt the puritans' opponents did, that this local case of demonic possession had an influence on the later development of Wightman's religious views and psyche. Certainly, there is a sense of moving in the same cultural milieu of heightened supernatural awareness, visions, and dramatic prophetic utterances in both the Thomas Darling affair of 1596 and Wightman's pronouncements of 1608-1612. Both Darling and Wightman employ a common biblical, especially apocalyptic, imagery.¹⁴⁸ The epistemological jump from articulating these prophecies to believing oneself to be the fulfilment of them is not beyond credibility, particularly where a disturbed consciousness is involved. The Darling case must have been an intoxicating experience for those caught up in it, and to Wightman as one of those entrusted with writing up, and thus framing, the narrative of events, it must have brought a sense of self-importance as it became a national *cause célèbre*. Wightman's later predilection for writing 'bookes of such volumes' may well have stemmed from this point, or conversely his selection as scribe in 1596 may have indicated that authorship was already a preoccupation with him. Perhaps, too, witnessing Darrell's persecution by the ecclesiastical authorities may have provided a model for Wightman's later conduct and inculcated in him an expectation that God's servants must suffer.

What, then, can be learnt from this study? We have all grown up with the (early) Collinsonian model of a Calvinist consensus in the 'Jacobethan' church, and

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, the use of the 'chariots of Israel' metaphor in both cases: Bee, *Wonderfull and True Storie*, p. 31, and LAO D+C cijj (3), 'The examynation of Edward Wightman for appropriating to himself many places of Scripture', October 1611, marginal comment.

doctrinally this is supported by the Wightman episode; all parties were unanimous in their condemnation of his mortalism.¹⁴⁹ But ironically this unanimity did not bring unity, on the contrary it merely served to underscore divisions. As Lake, Fincham, Tyacke and others have shown, the late Elizabethan and early Stuart church was a place where new orthodoxies were being fashioned and identities contested and redefined; this posed real problems for someone like Hildersham, who had to work out his response in the light of fresh configurations of conformity.¹⁵⁰

The Wightman case also demonstrates that there are still many unanswered questions about the place occupied by exorcism in early modern spirituality. It is often implied that the active participation of men like Darrell and Hildersham serves to prove their radicalism, whereas the opposite - that the involvement of such figures showed just how mainstream and acceptable it was at the time - may well be nearer to the truth. Allegations of counterfeiting only serve to confuse the issue. As Marion Gibson emphasises, Darrell was a respected, orthodox clergyman to this point, and he acted in full accord with his clerical, albeit puritan, brethren.¹⁵¹ When we consider exorcism as an extreme or fringe practice, we may merely be accepting the paradigm imposed by the polemical glossing of its opponents, especially as this perspective accords more closely with our post-enlightenment sensibilities. The godly, themselves,

¹⁴⁹ For the consensus model, see, for example, Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, and *idem*, *Godly People*.

¹⁵⁰ Lake, 'Moving the Goal Posts? Modified Subscription and the Construction of Conformity in the Early Stuart Church'; Fincham, 'Clerical Conformity from Whitgift to Laud'; Nicholas Tyacke, 'Lancelot Andrewes and the Myth of Anglicanism', all in Lake and Questier (eds.), *Orthodoxy and Conformity*.

¹⁵¹ Gibson, *Possession, Puritanism and Print*.

remained deeply ambivalent about the theology and practice of exorcism, as Walker and Deacon demonstrated.¹⁵²

As for Wightman himself, Atherton and Como conclude ultimately that his case shows that ‘the godly community contained within it all the components necessary to generate profoundly radical people and ideas’.¹⁵³ It is certainly true that men like Wightman and Hacket emerged from the ranks of the puritan brethren, and that the godly clergy were afraid of a potential loss of control. However, there is a danger of overstating the case, and of becoming too teleological in the light of later post-1640 experiences. At least in the ‘Jacobethan’ period, such cases were not common. It should also be remembered that, although late in the day, Wightman was disowned by the godly brethren, and experienced exclusion by their own disciplinary system before that of the state. Hildersham, however belatedly, had ‘given him over’ two years before his committal. An undue emphasis on the consequences of a theology of ‘the unfettered Spirit’ runs the risk of making insufficient allowance for the checks and balances inherent in a godly ecclesiological system of discipline firmly rooted in the inerrant Word. To espouse the view that Wightman was ‘a natural by-product of English puritanism’, is to bring us back to where we began; to a perception that all puritanism was intrinsically radical and that its adherents were incipient heretics.¹⁵⁴ Wightman was clearly a ‘product’ of puritan culture, but it could be argued that he was more of an unnatural, rather than a ‘natural’ one. Notwithstanding, this episode supplies evidence of both the success and the failure of English Puritanism; a

¹⁵² John Deacon and John Walker were godly clergymen who argued against post-Apostolic dispossession, and against the activities of Darrell, in their books, *Dialogicall Discourses of Spirits and Divels* (London, 1601) and *Summarie Answere* (London, 1601), see Freeman, ‘Demons, Deviance and Defiance’, pp. 51-56.

¹⁵³ Atherton and Como, ‘Burning of Wightman’, p. 1250.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 1250.

genuine success in popularising its brand of piety, but an ultimate failure to curb its wildest excesses.

With these caveats in mind, the potential anarchy feared by godly clergy, and predicted by their critics, became a reality in Edward Wightman, as he refused to observe the accepted conventions of clerical direction in ecclesiastical matters. To Neile, and even more so to James, this episode provided a rare propaganda opportunity to blacken the name of one they considered a leading troublemaker; thus, Hildersham, ‘a person whom his Highnesse hath particularly in observation’, had become a dangerous man to know.¹⁵⁵ For Wightman, scapegoated by Neile and rejected by Burton’s godly community that had nurtured him, it was a no-win situation. All of this poses the question: for whom was their mutual association the more damaging - for the ‘blasphemous heretic’ Edward Wightman or that ‘knave’ Master Arthur Hildersham?

¹⁵⁵ Archbishop Abbot, cited in Fincham, *Prelate as Pastor*, p. 226.

CHAPTER 7

ANOTHER WORLD: THE LEGACY OF HILDERSHAM¹

He left a precious memory behind him; had Letters of Commendation written in the hearts of many, of which some live here, some in Glory. His Books will prove more durable Monuments of his Name, than that his Sonne Erected for him in Ashby Church. And yet his Name, with the lively Picture of his Person, lives in his worthy Son, Master Samuel Hildersam, whose Learning Cambridge knew ... and whose present Ministerial Labours, and Pious Conversation ... do perpetuate the Honour of his Reverend Father, whose very Memory he doth much Reverence, and whose Rich Vertues, both personal and Ministerial, he doth happily imitate.

Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 156.

Samuel Clarke, writing almost thirty years after Hildersham's death and in a changed ecclesiastical and political climate, attempted to assess, as well as to create, the lasting legacy of Hildersham's ministry.² For Clarke, the memorials were of three different kinds: physical (the monument in Ashby church), personal (the people influenced directly by Hildersham, and in particular his son Samuel) and literary (his books). Interestingly, these categories echo the assessment of the legacy of Hildersham's mentor Richard Greenham, by his modern biographers: 'The edifice of his seventeenth-century reputation was erected on two sturdy pillars: his raft of disciples and posthumously published works'.³ This chapter will examine how Hildersham

¹ In this chapter, my thinking has been greatly stimulated by the chapter on 'Puritan Legacies' by John Coffey, in *idem* and Paul C. H. Lim (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge, 2008), pp. 327-345. I am very grateful to Professor Coffey for allowing me to read his chapter pre-publication. He provides a masterful summary of this vast area, concluding that the puritans 'most obvious legacy – ardent evangelical religion' (p. 340) should not be overlooked. He also supplies a very useful bibliography on the legacy of puritanism.

² For the agenda of Samuel Clarke, see Patrick Collinson, "'A Magazine of Religious Patterns'", in *idem*, *Godly People: Essays on English Protestantism and Puritanism* (London, 1983), pp. 513-519.

³ Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *'Practical Divinity': The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), p. 31.

continued to be an influential figure after his death by considering these various avenues, and use them as a starting point to look at how in a wider sense a memory of him was perpetuated and used. It will consider how the sort of ministry that Hildersham represented continued to have an effect on the broader religious scene, both through continuities and transition. In conclusion it will suggest how Hildersham's contribution to post-Reformation church life might help us to see that world in a more complex and fuller light.

1. The Legacy in Ashby

One focus of remembrance which Clarke mentions, but then dismisses as of lesser importance, is the public memorial to Hildersham erected in Ashby church.⁴ What once must have been an impressive reminder to the parish of their former minister and lecturer has deteriorated over the years and is now difficult to read. Moved from its original prominent position within the chancel to an insignificant location high up in the south-east corner of the nave during building work in 1878-80, its current state of neglect is perhaps symbolic of a collective forgetfulness.⁵ Within the town as a whole, Hildersham's house was a very visible and concrete reminder of his presence, but it was pulled down during the civil war, in 1643.⁶ However, until at least 1668, thirty-six years after his death, the access from this property to the Near Commons continued to

⁴ Erected by his son Samuel. He received £5 from the churchwardens for this purpose in 1632, and although it is not clear whether this sum covered the whole cost of the memorial, it was obviously an impressive and expensive item, see HA Misc Box 12 no 1 Ashby churchwardens' accounts 1626-36.

⁵ W. Scott, *The Story of Ashby-de-la-Zouch* (Ashby-de-la-Zouch, 1907), pp. 334-337, and LRO ID/41/2/19, Glebe Terrier for 1674.

⁶ Levi Fox, *A Country Grammar School: A History of Ashby-de-la-Zouch Grammar School through four centuries 1567 to 1967* (Oxford, 1967), p. 158. For a discussion on the significance of Hildersham's house, see Chapter 2, above, pp. 46-47, 75-77.

be referred to as ‘Mr Hildersams gate’.⁷ Even into the early twentieth century, a general folk memory in Ashby seemed to recall that the house that had occupied that spot was home to a person of some consequence.⁸

Nevertheless, it is in the religious and social life of Ashby after 1632 that the extent of Hildersham’s enduring influence on the town should be sought.⁹ This is not an easy task, for a variety of complex cultural and political factors combined to impact on the social situation. Not least of these was the significance of the different Earls of Huntingdon, who as Lords of the manor and patrons of the living, had a controlling influence on local affairs. While the puritan third Earl had been responsible for bringing in and supporting ministers such as Gilby and Hildersham, his successors were less similarly committed.¹⁰ Even the fifth Earl, who was a solid and generous personal patron of Hildersham himself, was not a supporter of puritanism in general. After Hildersham’s death, later earls were of a more conformist bent as was clear in their presentations to the vicarage. However, Lilly, reflecting on the civil war period, maintained that, ‘most people in the town were directed by his [Hildersham’s] judgment, and so continued, and yet do continue presbyterianly affected’ and even reported to the Parliamentary forces at Derby when the troops of Lord Loughborough entered Ashby.¹¹

It has been suggested that ‘Hildersham’s death marked the end of seventy years in which Ashby had been served by a succession of Puritan ministers’, but this was

⁷ Fox, *Grammar School*, pp. 171, 173.

⁸ See above, Chapter 2, p. 76, Scott, *Ashby*, p. 241.

⁹ The thesis of C. J. M. Moxon, ‘Ashby-de-la-Zouch – A Social and Economic Survey of a Market Town – 1570-1720’ (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1971), contains a very helpful consideration of the legacy of puritan religion in Ashby in the period following Hildersham’s death, see pp. 313-328.

¹⁰ Ferdinando, the seventh Earl was presented for his Jacobite opinions.

¹¹ William Lilly, *Mr William Lilly’s History of His Life and Times: from the year 1602, to 1681* (London, 1715, 2nd edn.), p. 6. See also Moxon, ‘Ashby’, p. 314.

clearly not the case, even if some of those who came after him were less easily identifiable as such.¹² Besides, it was not strictly true that all of the vicars during the Hildersham era had been of a puritan stamp; Hacket and Pestell, for example, would hardly have merited that categorisation. Anthony Watson, too, who had been vicar since 1622, and was the incumbent at the time of Hildersham's demise, was rather an ambiguous figure. He was certainly more tolerant of nonconformity than his two predecessors, as has been seen, even being presented himself on one occasion. With Hildersham, he had struck up a cordial working relationship after his return to Ashby as lecturer in 1625, a relationship in which Watson was obviously prepared to play second fiddle.¹³ As Haigh has shown, in the bitter enmity that developed between Watson and Pestell in the late 1620s and 1630s, nonconformists such as William Cox gave their support to Watson.¹⁴ However, Watson's own personal convictions were equivocal; in 1636 he protested his conformity, and excused himself for not wearing the surplice on occasions 'when he could not come att the surples and when the same hath binn washing'.¹⁵ Was this moderation, as some have suggested, or the mark of a weak pragmatist, prepared to say anything to save his own skin?¹⁶

The 'troubles' of Thomas Pestell, chronicled by Haigh, could equally well have been written as the troubles of Anthony Watson. While Hildersham lived, it seems that the loyalty and support he afforded Watson helped to validate his ministry, and to shield him to some extent from the criticism that was to emerge later. Although the

¹² Kenneth Hillier, *The Book of Ashby-De-La-Zouch* (Buckingham, 1984), p. 23.

¹³ For the relationship between Hildersham and Watson, see Chapter 2, pp. 70-71, 85, above. Watson was one of the witnesses to Hildersham's will, and also helped to draw up his inventory, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632), and LRO PR/I/34 f. 29.

¹⁴ Christopher Haigh, 'The Troubles of Thomas Pestell: Parish Squabbles and Ecclesiastical Politics in Caroline England', *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (Oct. 2002), pp. 420-21.

¹⁵ Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', pp. 420-21, and Hillier, *Ashby*, p. 23.

¹⁶ Hillier, *Ashby*, p. 23.

feud with Pestell, and the rumours of sexual impropriety regarding Watson had already begun by 1632, his problems deepened considerably after Hildersham's death.¹⁷ Part of this, of course, was to do with the battle for jurisdiction going on at diocesan level between Bishop Williams and his official, Sir John Lambe, in which Watson and others became caught up, but it also seems that Watson lost completely the respect of many of his parishioners; in 1636 he quarrelled with the churchwardens over maintenance of the churchyard and presented them twice for failure to keep out 'the swine' and for allowing a 'water passage' to run through it 'to the great annoyance & damage of the vicar there and of other inhabitants'.¹⁸ As a result of this dispute, one of those same churchwardens, Joseph Hatterley, a sometime nonconformist and close ally of Hildersham, railed upon Watson 'in the open street', the vicar alleged, 'with no respect to his office in the church' and 'in contempt of his place and person'.¹⁹

It was shortly after this, in April 1637, that three men were presented at the visitation for not standing for the gospel and creeds, bowing at the name of Jesus, and for covering their heads during the sermon.²⁰ On the face of it, the failure to stand or bow appear to be the standard puritan offences of objecting to the ceremonies, but the retention of hats at the time of preaching raises a note of caution; it was something of which Hildersham strongly disapproved, and preached clearly against.²¹ The three offenders, Ralph Narborow, Thomas Foster, and Edward Fisher, had no previous record of nonconformity. It could be that Watson was trying to prove his own

¹⁷ Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 417.

¹⁸ For the dispute between Williams and Lambe, see Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', pp. 411-417; LRO ID 41/13/64, pp. 112r, 122v.

¹⁹ LRO ID 41/13/64 p. 126v. For Hatterley's relationship with Hildersham, see Chapter 2, p. 86, above.

²⁰ LRO ID 41/13/64 p. 127v. It is not clear whether the vicar or the churchwardens were doing the presenting.

²¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, pp. 126, 134.

conformity, so soon after it had been challenged by the commission, or alternatively that these men were generally irreligious or disrespectful types. Their contempt for forms could even have been directed against Watson himself, rather than the rubric. That Watson felt the need to defend himself against a growing atmosphere of criticism within the parish was demonstrated in February 1637, when, at the archdeaconry court presided over by Lambe, he made a preemptive and voluntary confession that, ‘sometimes hee hath said divine service in the Church of Ashby aforesaid with Scarlett Capp on his head’.²² This was not a mark of contempt for the law, explained Watson, but was done on the advice of his physician ‘for some infirmitie that troubled him in his head’. In spite of this, he was ordered to ‘forbeare readinge prayers in the church with the said Capp on his head unlesse he cover it with a white or black one’.²³ Nevertheless, by 1641, the relationship between Watson and the Ashby churchwardens seems to have completely broken down. Nicholas Sykes and Thomas Hassard presented Watson on nine charges, which included the unlawful appropriation for his own use of church property such as roof timber, seats, an old chest and a table. He was also accused of removing the altar rails and taking them to his own house. When the churchwardens demanded the rails back, he gave them ‘threatening speeches’. In addition, it was alleged, he converted a chamber on the north aisle of the church for his own use, and dismissed ‘our’ parish clerk, Thomas Rise, and installed his own man, Abraham Smith, in his place. A previous agreement by which he had waived his fees for the burial of the poor, had obviously broken down, as he was also presented for refusing to bury the poor unless he was freed from contributions to poor relief or ‘paid

²² LRO ID 41/13/64 p. 126r.

²³ *Ibid.*

the accustomed duties of buriall'.²⁴ In the dependent chapelry of Blackfordby, too, where there was a long-running quarrel with the mother-church at Ashby over their rights and responsibilities, Watson had managed to alienate the community entirely. This process seems to have begun in October 1636 with a dispute over churching and then spread from there to a more general accusation of a failure on Watson's part to perform his cure.²⁵ By 1637, the Blackfordby churchwardens were presenting Watson on eight counts of neglecting his duties, failing to hold any fast services on the appointed days, not catechising during the whole year, frequenting the company of an excommunicated man and taking the communion to his house, for carelessly throwing his hat and gloves onto the communion table on Good Friday, and for wearing the infamous red cap to read divine service. Watson had answers to all these charges,

²⁴ LRO ID 41/13/65 p. 58v. It is unclear whether or not the churchwardens objected to the taking down of the altar rails as a matter of religious conviction, but it seems that they were more concerned that Watson had done this without consulting them and had then taken them away, rudely refusing to hand them over when requested. Nicholas Sykes, one of the churchwardens concerned, may well have had a grudge against Watson, since he had been presented on a charge of adultery in April 1640, see ID 41/13/65 p. 32r. The parish clerk, Thomas Rise, who had been dismissed by Watson, had served the parish for many years; there is a record of him receiving payment from the school feoffees as early as 1616, when Hildersham himself was responsible for the accounts, see Fox, *Grammar School*, p. 141. After his dismissal by Watson, he continued to be paid by the feoffees as sexton 'for ringing day bell, keeping the cloke and chime', see, *ibid.*, pp. 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157. In 1643, the feoffees paid wages to Abraham Smith, Rise's replacement as clerk. Intriguingly, Watson and Smith were buried together on 23 April 1644, and a note made accordingly in the register; Smith is referred to as 'his' clerk, rather than 'our' or 'the' clerk, see LRO DE1013/1. In the school accounts for December 1644, it is recorded that 19s had been 'paid to Abraham Smithes wife & Thomas Rise'. Rise had obviously reassumed his old duties, and continued to be paid as clerk until 1657, see Fox, *Grammar School*, pp. 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167. In 1658, Samuel Smith, a glazier, was appointed to the post of parish clerk, see *Historic Manuscripts Commission, Hastings I, Series 78* (HMSO, 1928), p. 381. This same volume contains a record for 1 May 1628 of 'an agreement whereby the inhabitants of Ashby released Anthony Watson from liability to be assessed for poor rate, in consideration of his making no charges for the baptisms, churchings, marriages and burials of such of the poor as were in receipt of weekly contributions from the churchwardens. Signed by him and nine inhabitants', p. 384. Clearly by 1641 this arrangement had broken down, Watson was being levied for poor relief, and in consequence appears to have gone on strike.

²⁵ LRO ID 41/13/64 pp. 113r, 132r, 132v, 133r. For more on the background to the dispute, see Chapter 2, above, p. 41, n. 31. Watson had apparently supplied a non-preaching curate, Henry Clarke, to read services at Blackfordby, but since stopping this arrangement in 1634, it was alleged that Watson had failed to make adequate provision for Blackfordby. Henry Cantrill of Blackfordby claimed that for thirty-four years successive vicars of Ashby had supplied someone to read services twice every Sunday, see Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 333.

many sounding perfectly reasonable, but the fact that they were brought at all is indicative of the mistrust and resentment that was felt against Watson by this time. A different set of churchwardens at Blackfordby were to present Watson again in 1639.²⁶

Where did all Watson's difficulties leave Hildersham's legacy in Ashby? Watson's leniency towards nonconformists undoubtedly allowed them to continue relatively undisturbed, despite investigations and pressure from above, but it is doubtful if Watson himself possessed any real commitment in a personal sense to the godly cause.²⁷ The coalition between the nonconformists and Watson appears to be largely pragmatic – one of mutual self-interest – but even this was breaking down in the troubled times of the late 1630s. His high-handed behaviour might well have alienated some of the godly (and indeed others) by the time of his death in 1644, but it may also have served to harden them in their own beliefs and practices. If the unreformed associated Watson with the godly fraternity, it is hard to imagine that his conduct did not damage the latter's cause. Certainly Watson, unlike Hildersham, seems to have died officially unlamented; despite over twenty years as vicar, at his burial the parish register records no eulogy for him, merely a stark statement of fact: 'Mr Anthony Watson vicar of Ashby and Abraham Smith his clerk buried'.²⁸

²⁶ LRO ID 41/13/65 pp. 9v, 14r, 26r. Watson was charged with 'not reading morning prayers in the chappell of Blackfordby upon Sundayes & holy dayes since the last visitation'. In retaliation, Watson countered by presenting some Blackfordby residents for a failure to receive communion at least once annually at Ashby church, the chapelwardens for failing to submit the list of children baptised in the chapel for entry in the parish register, and for not participating in the perambulation of the parish, see Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 333-334.

²⁷ During the enquiry of 1636, Watson avowed his conformity, see *SP. Dom. Chas I*, cccxxxi, 95. His nuncupative will of 1644, LRO Will Register 1644-1645, p. 2, is devoid of any spiritual content.

²⁸ LRO DE1013/1, Parish Register for St Helen's, Ashby. If this entry was made by Thomas Rise, the man replaced as clerk by Abraham Smith on Watson's orders and later reinstated, the terseness is understandable. It is notable, too, that Watson never served as a school feoffee.

Several of Hildersham's closest friends and supporters continued to be active and influential in Ashby during the 1630s and 1640s, and undoubtedly helped to ensure that the legacy of godly spirituality was continued in the town. Foremost amongst these was the locksmith, William Cox, who, with his wife, had a long record of nonconformity, but who also served as churchwarden in 1613 and again in 1631. In 1633, he was described as 'a notorious nonconformitant', and in 1636 was presented for conventicling.²⁹ Another was Henry Aberley, who had been curate at Burton during the Wightman incident, but had then moved to Ashby, certainly by 1614, probably encouraged by Hildersham. He was presented for nonconformity, along with Hildersham, on several occasions, and also served as a school feoffee, being the collector of the school rents in 1640-1641.³⁰ He was still active in Ashby in 1647, serving as overseer to a will, and as a charity trustee.³¹ Others who had been closely associated with Hildersham, such as Joseph Hatterley, Joseph Tomlinson, and Nathaniel Ash, were still around in the later 1630s and into the 1640s, and occupied positions of authority as churchwardens, overseers and school feoffees.³² This must have provided a measure of continuity, and is likely to be the background to Lilly's comments about the population continuing to be 'presbyterianly affected'.

Of course, by the early 1640s, civil war had broken out and Ashby had become the base for a royalist garrison. It was besieged by parliamentary forces from November 1644 until its surrender at the end of February 1646. The presence of Irish

²⁹ See Haigh, 'Troubles of Thomas Pestell', p. 421.

³⁰ His latest presentation with Hildersham was in October 1629, see LRO ID/41/13/59 f. 308r. For the feoffees, see Fox, *Grammar School*, p. 151.

³¹ Overseer to the will of Robert Newton (who had twice been presented himself for nonconformity in 1615 and 1616), PRO, Prob/11/201, 19 October 1647. For the accounts of the Curzon charity to provide gowns for the poor, see LRO ES/AB/9/2 f. 167v (Aberley was responsible for the accounts in 1640).

³² See LRO MF/5 and LRO ES/AB/9/1 fos. 20v, 21v, 22v, 23v, 24r, 24v, 25r.

Catholic soldiers in the royalist ranks must have been a source of friction, and, indeed, clashes arose between them and

those who profess themselves to be Protestants in Ashby Garrison. The Irish rebels have told them to their faces, that they fight for the old true Catholic religion which is better than ours, and puts them in better condition than they that are hereticks³³

Ashby also had become a haven for royalist ministers from Leicestershire and the surrounding areas, drawn to Ashby or pushed out of their own parishes by the war, and looking for safety and perhaps some sort of employment. Some stayed for just a few weeks, others for a couple of years. These included Richard Clarke, John Hodges, Richard Laytenhouse, Cuthbert Nicholson, William Parkes (chaplain to the earl), Thomas Pestell, John Ross, Henry Robinson, Francis Standish, Nicholas Bent and Edward Bigland.³⁴ For Nichols, Clarke and Bent, at least, were ‘learned and pious divines’, but a parliamentary source of 1644 was less complimentary:

they have three malignant priests there, such as will drink and roar, and domineer and swear, as well as ever a Cabb of them all; and end and begin one health after another; and swear and domineer, so as it would make one’s heart ache to hear the country people to relate what they heard of them.³⁵

Although these ministers would have striven vigorously to counter Hildersham’s influence upon the town, how much success they had was doubtful. The obvious disgust with which their rumoured conduct was reported to the writer of the *Perfect*

³³ *Perfect Diurnall*, Sat. 16 Nov. 1644 [?], cited in Scott, *Story of Ashby*, p. 205.

³⁴ A. G. Matthews, *Walker Revised* (Oxford, 1948), pp. 105, 237, 239-42, 244-5, 276, 292. Interestingly, a copy of Johnson’s *Treatise*, now in Cambridge University Library, which responds to a letter by Hildersham, was owned at one time by a ‘Francis Standish’, but whether this was the same man as the royalist minister is not clear.

³⁵ John Nichols, *The History and Antiquities of Leicestershire* (London, 1804), Vol. III, Part II, pp. 611, 632. Richard Clarke, according to Nichols, had been rector of Aston-upon-Trent, Derbyshire since 1637, and was deprived by order dated 11 July 1644. He was later restored to his church, ‘and died lamented in 1686’. Nicholas Bent was the sequestered rector of Braybrooke, Northants, and died in Ashby castle in August 1644; Scott, *Ashby*, p. 205.

Diurnall suggests that the impression they made was not favourable, and would surely only have served to confirm the informers in their own position. By the time the parliament had regained control of Ashby in 1646, William Coke had been appointed as vicar. Little is known about him or his relatively short-lived incumbency, except that his ejection in about 1650 for refusing the Engagement demonstrated that he was a presbyterian, not prepared to acknowledge the new republican Commonwealth.³⁶ His successor Ithiel Smart, inducted to Ashby in 1652, seems to have been a moderate puritan: educated at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, he had previously been vicar of Wombourn, Staffordshire.³⁷ Entries in the parish register of Wombourn indicate Smart's concern for the maintenance of the church fabric and charitable giving, but also a reluctant conformity when the altar rails were installed in 1634 'by the appointment of authority'. Rather more enthusiastic is the September 1641 record of a day of public thanksgiving,

appointed by ordinance of parliament for the peace concluded betweene England and Scotland, on which day myselfe, with the parishioners and inhabitants of Wombourn, tooke the protestation set out by order of parliament, and covenanted together first to maintaine the true reformed Protestant religion³⁸

³⁶ A. G. Matthews, *Calamy Revised* (Oxford, 1934), p. 132.

³⁷ For Smart, see Venn, Vol. IV, p. 92; Nichols, *History of Leicestershire*, Vol. III, Part II, p. 619; Stebbing Shaw, *The History and Antiquities of Staffordshire* (London, 1801), pp. 216-217. Smart's godly sympathies are revealed in a pamphlet published in October 1644, entitled *A More Exact and Perfect Relation of the Treachery, Apprehension, Conviction, Condemnation, Confession, and Execution of Francis Pitt*; Pitt had previously been a godly professor, known to Smart, but he had tried to betray the garrison of Rushall-Hall, Staffordshire, to the royalists. After his arrest he repented of his actions, and the thrust of Smart's message is a warning against 'a barren and fruitlesse profession; take heed of hypocrisie' (p.16). Wombourn was a parish with a patron, Sir John Wollaston, who was a strong puritan supporter, and mayor of London under the Commonwealth. After Smart was appointed to Ashby in 1652, he was succeeded at Wombourn by Thomas Willesby, a friend and correspondent of Richard Baxter, who preached at a thanksgiving service in the church on 19 October 1652. Willesby was ejected in 1662.

³⁸ Shaw, *Staffordshire*, p. 217.

Smart remained as vicar of Ashby until his death in 1661, when the entry in the parish register is couched in exactly the same glowing terms of that referring to Hildersham.³⁹ Perhaps it was only conventional pious rhetoric, but it could also be that his parishioners saw a similarity between the ministry of the two men. Certainly, the petition on his death, signed by thirteen leading inhabitants, asking the Countess to appoint a man ordained by the classis, 'Mr Buxston', shows that godly sympathies were still running strongly in the town.⁴⁰

Interestingly, it is in the area of education (closely associated with religion, of course) that Moxon finds the most compelling evidence of a continuing puritan legacy in Ashby after Hildersham's death. In the dictionary presented to the school by Hildersham on his demise, the scholars would have had a very tangible reminder of their former minister and lecturer.⁴¹ But it was in the relative independence of the feoffees, that we find the most significant site of maintained godly influence; at this stage the feoffees retained their right to appoint the master, and thus were able to express their true convictions. Nonconformists were still able to serve as feoffees, as indeed they had done in Hildersham's day, and men such as Henry Aberley and Nathaniel Ash continued the tradition.⁴² It is not inconceivable that a major dispute in 1657, ostensibly about the mismanagement of the school properties, which led to a commission of enquiry and the suspension of the serving feoffees, may have also had

³⁹ LRO DE1013/1, 'Mr Ithiel Smart, Minister of Ashby a worthy and faithful servant of god a famous divine and a painful preacher the comfort of gods people in his time departed this life the 22 of November and was interred in the Chancel of our Parish Church in Ashby the six-and twentieth of November 1661'. His eldest son, also named Ithiel, became vicar of Ashby in 1676, another mark of the esteem in which he must have been held.

⁴⁰ HL HA 1028 (1661).

⁴¹ Fox, *Grammar School*, p. 151. William Cox was paid 1s by the feoffees for making a superscription on the dictionary.

⁴² This right of appointment was later to pass to the earls, see *ibid.*, p. 272.

an underlying agenda about religious control.⁴³ In 1669, the feoffees appointed Samuel Shaw as master of the Grammar School; he had been ordained by a classical presbytery and ejected from his living by the Act of Uniformity. The books he authored were also an indication of his nonconformist persuasion.⁴⁴ It is significant that Shaw later became a leading dissenter in Ashby, and in 1689 licensed the school house as a dissenters' meeting place. The foundation of a school for the poor by Ashby yeoman, William Langley, under the provision of his will in 1695, revealed its evangelical motivation through Joseph Alleine's *Alarum to the Unconverted* being prescribed as reading material for the scholars.⁴⁵

Charity is another area in which any continued influence of Hildersham might be expected to be felt.⁴⁶ Certainly, a large number of charities were founded in the town during his lifetime and in the years following his death, including those of Margery Wright and Simeon Ashe, but without any direct mention of Hildersham's name in connection with these trusts, it is impossible to know if he played any part in inspiring the donors. In that it was reported of Ashe that he 'did more owe himself

⁴³ Fox, *Grammar School*, pp. 48-50, 167-168. The management of the charity was temporarily vested in a new body of thirteen acting trustees, headed by Ithiel Smart, but no accounts were made for the years 1658 and 1659. The original feoffees resumed their duties at the end of 1660, with a memorandum explaining the blank pages left by their replacements.

⁴⁴ Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 313. Shaw's writings included *Samuel in Sackcloth* (London, 1660, 2nd edn.); *A Receipt for the State-Palsie* (London, 1660, 2nd edn.); *Immanuel, or, A Discovery of True Religion* (London, 1667); *The Welcome to the Plague* (London, 1674); and *The True Christians Test* (London, 1682). For more on Shaw, including the fact that in 1658 he obtained a presentation from Cromwell to the rectory of Long Whatton, Leicestershire, by the aid of Gervais Pigot of Thrumpton (a 'kinsman' of Hildersham's son-in-law Gervase Lomax, NAO PR/NW), see Scott, *Ashby*, p. 381.

⁴⁵ Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 273-274, 316. For the popularity and influence of Alleine's work, particularly amongst the nonconformist community, see my MA thesis, "'Vehement Persuasions": Two Seventeenth-Century Evangelical Treatises' (MA thesis, University of Warwick, 2003).

⁴⁶ For the involvement of Hildersham during his lifetime in charitable work in Ashby, see above, Chapter 2, pp. 84-91. On his death, Hildersham gave a 'lease for 60 years to come of 7s per annum for the use of the poor of the town', see Nichols, *History of Leicestershire*, Vol. III, Part II, pp. 616, 625. Nichols also gives details of charitable benefactions given by Margery Wright, Joseph Hall, Henry Curzon, Sarah Seagrave, Simeon Ash, Francis Ash, James Orme, William Burton, John Dickinson, Henry Sikes, Richard Hinckley and William Langley in the later seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century, see p. 616.

unto Master Hildersam, then to any other man', it would not be unreasonable to suggest that there may have been some sort of link, however indirect.⁴⁷

There is a danger of becoming teleological in attempting to trace any direct 'descent of dissent', or in making specific attributions of influence, particularly as the generation who had known Hildersham personally passed away. It would be crude and misleading to make 'nonconformity' the sole or principal marker of Hildersham's legacy; even at its height in the presentations of 1614, only perhaps a sixth of the population were formally involved. This does not necessarily mean that the majority of the parish remained spiritually untouched by Hildersham's message. It would be the greatest irony if the legacy of such a fervent opponent of separatism was to be sought merely in the existence of nonconformist churches after the Restoration. However, despite these caveats and in the absence of other concrete markers, the persistence of spiritual dissent in the town cannot be discounted. Moxon, attempting to quantify the continued puritan legacy, conceded that, 'the tradition of nonconformity persisted after the restoration'.⁴⁸ Indeed, it would be surprising if sixty or more years of fervent gospel preaching had not left some sort of a mark upon the community. Moxon cites as evidence the petition of 1661, in which thirteen leading inhabitants unsuccessfully petitioned the Countess of Huntingdon for the appointment of a classically-ordained minister, 'Mr Buxston', as vicar of Ashby. With no obvious outlet for their views within the established church, it seems natural that at this time puritan spirituality should be channeled into dissent. Two houses were licensed as nonconformist meeting places in 1672, but it seems as if this was really only a recognition of the *status quo*,

⁴⁷ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 155.

⁴⁸ Moxon, 'Ashby', p. 313.

for the men concerned, William Hood and Thomas and Samuel Doughty, had already been presented for holding illegal conventicles.⁴⁹ How large a percentage of the total population was involved to any degree is difficult to ascertain; this tradition of dissenting piety amongst at least a sector of the community, or even the patronage of Selina, Countess of Huntingdon, did not ensure the Methodist evangelist George Whitefield a warm welcome on his first visit to the town in 1750. A riot ensued, and Whitefield was moved to remark, 'Ungrateful Ashby ... What avails throwing pearls before swine who only turn again and rend you?'⁵⁰ Later, though, a more favourable response was reported, and a chapel associated with 'Lady Huntingdon's Connexion' was opened in the town. Perhaps this sharp division of opinion on religious matters, between the 'hotter' sort and the less keen, was in itself a legacy that could be traced back to at least the time of Hildersham, when he strove to be a 'peacemaker' amongst his neighbours.

2. 'Letters of Commendation written in the hearts of many'⁵¹

The sustained personal influence of Arthur Hildersham over a large network of friends and disciples, including such luminaries as John Dod, John Preston, John Cotton, William Gouge, Francis Higginson, Julines Herring and Simeon Ashe, should be fully

⁴⁹ HL HA Correspondence, 1028; LRO ID 41/4/33 f. 109; HL HA Correspondence, 7704, cited in Moxon, 'Ashby', pp. 314-315. Samuel Doughty had been a pupil at Ashby school under Robert Orme, and went up to Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1637. After ordination, he became rector of Bringhurst, Leics., in 1644, and then Sibston, from which he was ejected in 1662, after which he returned to Ashby. He is an example of the puritan influence which continued in Ashby immediately after Hildersham's death and beyond, see Fox, *Grammar School*, p. 46.

⁵⁰ Cited in Scott, *Ashby*, p. 304.

⁵¹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 155.

recognised.⁵² Those who outlived him perpetuated his memory as a godly preacher, a wise counsellor, and one who was faithful in suffering. Their influence, grounded in the example and teaching of Hildersham, was both widespread and extensive, in the Old and New Worlds. He was frequently cited as an authority on contentious points of doctrine and polity, and this endorsement by his peers in itself created a readership for his published works.

The earliest of these testimonials came in the preface penned by John Cotton to the *Lectures upon John*, which also included a commendation by John Preston, who had read the work in manuscript form many years before. Cotton, so influential in the Massachusetts situation, almost certainly discussed with Hildersham the validity of such a move, and Francis Higginson relied directly on Hildersham's counsel. After receiving the invitation from the governor and company to join them in 1629, at a time when he was expecting imminent arrest for his nonconformity in London, it was to Hildersham, especially, that Higginson turned for advice. Hildersham reportedly told Higginson, 'Were I a younger man and under your case and call, I would think I had a plain invitation of Heaven unto the voyage'.⁵³ Many others, too, from the Leicestershire and Lincolnshire areas were doubtless similarly encouraged to make the journey across the Atlantic due to this sort of reasoning. Higginson, who owed his nonconformity to discussions with Hildersham, also retained, like his mentor, a desire for episcopal forms of worship upon his departure in 1629. The merchants, too, who constituted the Massachusetts Bay Company:

⁵² See Chapter 4, above, for an exploration of these networks.

⁵³ See above, Chapter 5, p. 237, n. 146.

had great regard for the judgment of Arthur Hildersham of Ashby de la Zouch in the settlement of the religious life of the colony. He advised the planters to agree fully upon their form of church government before their removal to New England; but no agreement had been made beyond the tacit understanding that the reform of the church be according to the plain teaching of the Bible.⁵⁴

If Hildersham's counsels had been heeded, the course of New England religious history might well have been somewhat different; however, it is clear that his opinions were highly valued by many of the leading players and formed part of the foundational debates in the colony. Richard Mather, who emigrated to New England in 1635, was another who acknowledged his debt to Hildersham, and cited his views to corroborate his own position on such matters as admittance to communion, funeral sermons, and attending nearby lectures.⁵⁵

By the late 1620s it was becoming apparent that many of the godly and nonconformist community were facing increasingly difficult choices. Hildersham himself, in a letter of 1629, commented that, 'Now is the tyme come wherein not my selfe only but all of my judgment are cast out as men utterly unprofitable and unfit to God any further service in his church'.⁵⁶ The dilemma involved choosing between staying within an established church that was increasingly rejecting men of their principles, separatism in one of its different guises, or emigration. The career of Hildersham, especially the way he had handled suspension, became a model for others

⁵⁴ Perley, *History of Salem*, p. 151. Mather calls Hildersham, 'The great Mr Hildersham', see *Magnalia Christi Americana*, p. 27. For more on Higginson, see C. E. Welch, 'Early Nonconformity in Leicestershire', *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 37 (1961), pp. 30-35; *ODNB* (ref: odnb/13237); and Chapter 4, above, p. 168.

⁵⁵ See Richard Mather, *A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod met at Boston* (1664), p. 30: 'Yet the same Hildersam would not admit such as these (who were born and grew up in the visible church) to the Lords Table, without a strict Examination not onely of their knowledge and Lives, but of their Spiritual Estate.'; Increase Mather, *The Life and Death of Mr Richard Mather* (1670), pp. 9, 33. Increase Mather refers to Hildersham as a 'Renowned Puritan', p. 9.

⁵⁶ BL Eg. MS 2645, f. 156. Letter of Hildersham to Lady Joan Barrington, 9 March 1629.

seeking guidance for their own futures. The respect he had gained also fitted him to assume the role of sage, both in person and through his writings. His permission was critical for younger men seeking reassurance that emigration was not an escapist or cowardly route. However, this option was clearly not right for everyone; after 1615 when he seriously considered taking up the offer of a pastorate in Holland, Hildersham does not appear to have countenanced it for himself nor was it embraced by his son Samuel, despite initial difficulties in getting a ministerial appointment.⁵⁷

If Hildersham's influence upon the early settlers in New England was considerable, his contribution to the course of the later Dutch reformation should not be overlooked. Willem Teellinck, who had spent time in England in 1604, and counted men like Dod and Hildersham as his mentors, was responsible for 'injecting Puritan colour into the Dutch Second Reformation', in the form of an emphasis on practical piety.⁵⁸ With his reputation in Holland established by Teellinck and others, Hildersham's writings, too, seem to have been favourably received; John Cotton mentioned a letter he had in 1629 from a Dutch minister in London,

(one Timotheus Van Ul-eren) who telleth him, he had sent sundry of the Books on *John 4*.to Ministers beyond the Seas, who do read them with such great satisfaction, that the said Dutch Minister did, in the name of many others, intreat Master Cotton, to beseech Master Hildersam to put forth his Sermons on *Psal.51*. and other his lucubrations.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ See Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 150; for Samuel's problems in obtaining a pastorate, see the 'Epistle Dedicatory' (dated 8 December 1632) to his patron, William Cokayne, the merchant who had eventually presented him to his living at West Felton, in Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier*, sigs. A2r-A4v. If he had not been given this appointment, perhaps Samuel would also have been forced to consider emigration.

⁵⁸ See the introduction by Joel R. Beeke, in, Willem Teellinck, *The Path of True Godliness*, translated by Annemie Godbehere (Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2003), p. 28.

⁵⁹ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 152. For more details of the Dutch translations of Hildersham's works, see Chapter 4, p. 195, n. 166, above.

In England itself, those who remained also sought for help in navigating the uncharted ecclesiological and political seas ahead of them. In times of rapid change and radicalisation during the civil war, the interregnum, the Restoration and beyond, when fundamental questions about the nature of a true church, its worship and polity, were being earnestly debated, many looked to the ‘old puritans’ like Hildersham, for answers. Hildersham was one of the authorities cited by the Westminster Assembly as it struggled to produce doctrinal standards; when discussing the importance and manner of public reading of the scriptures, Calamy was minuted as declaring, ‘I have one reason to show very convenient to be by a publique officer; Mr Hildersham [on] 4 Joh., ‘the reading of it in the church is of more efficacy then in private’’.⁶⁰

In this period of religious debate and redefinition, Richard Baxter as well as Samuel Clarke, had a vested interest in using the recent past to further his own polemical agenda.⁶¹ Baxter’s looking back to what he called the time of the ‘old nonconformists’ was not merely nostalgic, for he wanted to cite the example of such men as Dod and Hildersham to support his own position, especially as regarding

⁶⁰ Minutes of the Westminster Assembly, Session 87, 2 November 1643, cited in C. B. Van Dixhoorn, ‘Reforming the Reformation: theological debate at the Westminster Assembly, 1643-1652’ (PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004), Vol. 3, p. 249. I am grateful to Dr Van Dixhoorn for bringing this reference to my attention.

⁶¹ Baxter was obviously familiar with Samuel Hildersham, whom he refers to as ‘good old Mr Sam. Hildersham’, through Shropshire connections. Samuel, in conjunction with Baxter, Francis Tallents, Richard Heath and John Bryan, played a part in the unsuccessful venture to bring Henry Newcome to Shrewsbury in 1656. In 1671, Baxter defended Samuel, along with other nonconformist ministers, against a charge by John Hinckley that they lacked formal learning, and in 1674 against one by Thomas Good that all nonconformists had had a hand in the late king’s death, see N. H. Keeble and Geoffrey F. Nuttall (eds.), *Calendar of the Correspondence of Richard Baxter* (Oxford, 1991), Vol. I, pp. 229, 232, and Vol. II, pp. 115-116, 163. Other later writers, too, enlisted the support of Hildersham and the ‘old Non-Conformists’ for their own arguments against separation, see for example, Francis Brokesby, *An History of the Government of the Primitive Church* (London, 1712), p. xl; and anon, *An Answer to the Dissenters Pleas for Separation* (Cambridge, 1701), pp. 71, 223, 226, 227.

separatism.⁶² In his advocacy of a continued national church, as opposed to independency, the model of an earlier generation, which rejected separatism and remained loyal to the established order despite their scruples, was a powerful one. Baxter, in his preface to John Bryan's *Dwelling with God* (1670), defended the author's emphasis 'against separation from the publick Assemblies' by instancing the precedent of 'the old Non-conformists <Arthur> Hildersham, <John> Paget, <Thomas> Brightman, <John> Ball, with many more; who said much more against separatism'.⁶³ His argument was predicated upon the underlying belief that 'our Ordinary Congregations [to] be Churches of Christ and therefore independents 'Gather Christian Churches out of Christian Churches''.⁶⁴ By casting himself as a direct descendant of the heroic tradition of the past, and by seeking to portray the current ecclesiastical battleground as essentially parallel to that of the earlier seventeenth century, Baxter was attempting to gain support and credibility for his own position. He was, however, aware of arguments that things were different now, and in May 1670 he sought to defend his stance:

Some will say the world is now changed: either Conformity is not the same thing as then; or separation then had not the same reasons for it. And its true, the world is changed indeed: but the change is this: we are now silenced, persecuted, imprisoned, hunted about, impoverished; & we have no place but in private to preach, & none but such to heare us, whose passions easily prevaile to carry their judgments into extreames: & these hearers know not how to stand their ground against such trials, without reeling out of the way of Charity, unity & peace ... And the

⁶² Baxter has several different lists of favoured 'old nonconformists', which include a variety of names, but Hildersham seems to feature in each one, see, Keeble and Nuttall, *Calendar*, Vol. I, p. 44, Vol. II, pp. 74, 88, 117-118. Another author who looked back to an earlier golden age of preaching was the late seventeenth-century presbyterian minister John Quick in his 'Icones Sacrae Anglicanae. Or the Lives & Deaths of Several Eminent English Divines' (unpublished MS, DRW MS38.34/5, Vol. 2, p. 488), who includes Hildersham in his list of past worthies.

⁶³ Keeble and Nuttall, *Calendar*, Vol. II, p. 74.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. I, p. 44.

interest <of> our owne *maintenance, reputation*, and we thinke our Labourers lyeth all on these peoples favour; and withall they are the better sort of people. And therefore we cannot bring ourselves to crosse them, & loose them, & all this when it seemeth the cause of the persecutors that we would favour ... This is the Change.⁶⁵

By going on the offensive and defining change solely in terms of the intemperate and divisive reactions of his hearers, Baxter is thus able to divert attention from any other possible areas of change and in fact bolster his own case that his hearers should respond in the same way as previous godly generations.

It was not only the avowed opposition of the earlier nonconformists to separatism that Baxter admired, but what he perceived as their accompanying catholic spirit. Such a spirit made them prepared to acknowledge as brethren others who did not share their rejection of the ceremonies. Referring bitterly to those who had ‘far more charity’ for Quakers ‘(who will not any of them owne the Scripture or the essentials of the Christian faith)’, he continued:

And I that am of the principles of <John> Dod, <Thomas> Cartwright, <Arthur> Hildersham, am more censured for sometimes holding communion with such a Conformist as <Richard> Sibs, <John> Preston, <Robert> Bolton (for such, for piety, though of lower parts we have) than I should be if I had joined with the Quakers.⁶⁶

Although this was perhaps a fair criticism of the factionalism of his own time, and although Baxter had some justification for pointing to the devotion to practical divinity and the shunning of controversy by men like Hildersham, it was something more than a little paradoxical coming from one of the greatest controversialists of his era. In his evocation of an irenic puritan golden age, with its panoply of idealised godly figures (a

⁶⁵ Keeble and Nuttall, *Calendar*, Vol. II, p. 88.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 117-118.

version of history which largely survives today in certain neo-puritan circles), Baxter was even prepared to countenance a form of Protestant hero-worship which resembled the Catholic veneration of its saints:

I have oft had such indiscreet affectionate hearers, that have crept behind me with great desire but to touch my Cloake: If some such weake person should get a bone, or a picture, of Mr Cartwright, Hildersham, Dod, Bolton, Preston, Jewell, Grindall etc. and should overvalue them [there] are few religious people would call this Antichristianity and equall it with the worship of Devills and Pagan Idols ⁶⁷

Whether Hildersham or the others would have accepted such personal devotion is quite another matter, as would be their attitude to Baxter's Amyraldian theology.

Arthur Hildersham died long before the civil war, of course. Given his life-long puritan commitment, it is likely that he would have sided with parliament. And like most puritan ministers, he would probably have recoiled from the trial and execution of the king, while continuing to serve (despite misgivings) in the loose puritan church of the interregnum. That was the course followed by most of the puritan ministers who admired him and his work, such as Simeon Ashe. And it was also the course followed by Hildersham's son, Samuel, who not only bore an apparent striking physical resemblance to his father (according to Clarke, the 'lively Picture of his Person, lives in his worthy Son'), but also seems to have consciously modelled his conduct and attitudes upon his. ⁶⁸ Samuel was very aware that as Arthur's heir and editor, his father's mantle had fallen upon him, and he endeavoured to perpetuate his memory by his own life and by publishing his work after his death. His status as a sort of living

⁶⁷ Richard Baxter, DWL, 'Baxter Treatises', ii, f. 116v, cited in William M. Lamont, *Richard Baxter and the Millennium* (London, 1979), p. 58.

⁶⁸ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 156. I have not been able to discover any portraits of Samuel, to compare to those of his father.

monument was recognised by Clarke who contrasted him with the physical but lifeless memorial erected in Ashby church.⁶⁹ In the preface to *Fasting and Praier*, Samuel wrote,

that as a dutifull sonne, in honour of my deare fathers Name and memory, I strive for some place for this Monument [this book], which may be some meanes to perpetuate the same in Gods church ... It no way becometh me to commend this, or any other worke of his (let me rather strive to imitate him my selfe, then to commend him, or any thing of his to others) his very name will commend them.⁷⁰

Like his father, Samuel was a nonconformist, and had been ordained by an Irish bishop to avoid the issue of subscription. Generally, he seems to have exercised a conscientious, unremarkable ministry in West Felton for thirty-four years until his ejection in 1662, when he retired to Erdington, living quietly until his death in 1674.⁷¹ Like his father, he requested not to have a funeral sermon. His fellow-ministers in Shropshire esteemed his faithfulness, and noted that he was ‘a father to the sons of the prophets in and about Shropshire. He was learned, loving, and charitable, an excellent preacher, an eminent expositor and very much a gentleman’.⁷² Always he was described and remembered as Arthur’s son.⁷³ He published no books of his own, only

⁶⁹ Clarke, ‘Life of Hildersam’, p. 156

⁷⁰ Samuel Hildersham, ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’, in Hildersham, *Fasting and Praier* (unpaginated).

⁷¹ After the 1665 Five Mile Act, there was an influx of ex-preachers to Birmingham, since the town was exempt from the Act, being a Borough. For Samuel’s burial, see Birmingham Central Library, *The Second Volume of the Register of the Parish Church of Aston-juxta Birmingham 1640, to Nov; 14th 1697*, p. 60, 6 April 1674. He ordered the inscription ‘Samuel Hildersam BD, Rector of West Felton, in the county of Shropshire, 34 years till August 24th 1662’ to be put on his gravestone. His wife Mary was also buried in Aston, on 13 August 1679, see Vol. 3, p. 9.

⁷² J. B. Williams (ed.), *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Edinburgh, 1974 edn.), pp. 270-271.

⁷³ See, for example, Thomas Blake, ‘The Epistle Dedicatory’ to Samuel Hildersham and Mary, his ‘pious Consort’, in *Vindiciae Foederis; or, a Treatise on the Covenant of God entered into with Man-kinde in the severall Kindes and Degrees of it* (1653). After thanking Samuel for his hospitality and the use of his ‘accomplished library’, Blake goes on recall Hildersham senior in the words used by Joseph Hall of ‘learned Whittaker’: ‘Who ever saw him without reverence, or heard him without wonder?’. Blake concludes, ‘To be a follower of such a precedent, and to be found worthy of such a testimony, is a

bringing out those of his father. During the interregnum, he was named as one of the twenty ministers appointed to assist the commissioners for Shropshire, enquiring into the fitness of ministers and schoolmasters. He reaffirmed his presbyterian sympathies by signing the *Testimony of the Ministers of Salop to the Solemn League and Covenant* in 1648, and was also appointed to the Westminster Assembly of Divines in 1642 (however, he never attended any meetings but was not replaced, as was the usual practice. This remains an unsolved mystery).⁷⁴ He inherited his father's papers, and contributed to the drawing up of Clarke's biography. It is tempting to imagine that, had he lived, Hildersham senior would have followed a similar trajectory; stubbornly consistent to his principles and nonconformist stance but careful and low-key in his exercise of them, avoiding confrontation as much as was possible.

Frustratingly, any attempt to trace the Hildersham spiritual torch being passed down directly through the family line might seem to come to an abrupt halt with the death of Samuel. There does not appear to have been any issue of his marriage to Mary

greater glory than all the noble blood that ran through the veins of the greatest of either of your ancestors'.

⁷⁴Hildersham's name appears on two catalogues of names printed in 1642, each listing those divines who would be summoned to the Assembly. His name remains on the list in the final ordinance of June 1643, so that he would have received an official summons to attend. However, he appears nowhere in the minutes as a speaker, and he is mentioned in no committee reports, lists of names, attendance lists, or payroll charts. I am grateful to Dr Chad Van Dixhoorn for this information. Slightly earlier than this, another puzzling reference occurs in the private diary of the Earl of Rutland, a royalist commander, to a minister, 'Mr Hildersham' serving as chaplain to the Scottish covenanter forces. The earl records an appointment to meet with four of the covenanters on 6 June 1639, 'But ther cam onely the Mr Johnson & Mr Hildersham, Clerke, who carried himself very temperately and discreteely to his greate commendation'. The next entry, made at the town of Duns, reports, 'At our comminge away the Generall gave all the Lords a Health for partinge, att the stayre heade of the roome where the banquet was, and called for their Menister, Mr Hildersham to drincke it, and when he had druncke it asked him what he could say for ther Lordships welcome, and he answered it was not possible for him to expresse ympossibilities', see *HMC Duke of Rutland's Manuscripts*, Vol. I (HMSO, London, 1888), pp. 514-515. Without more information it is impossible to say whether the 'Mr Hildersham' referred to here was indeed Samuel. However, the list of possible contenders is limited; it could, of course, be his mysterious brother Nathanael, or perhaps the Nehemiah Hildersham (surely a relative of some sort, maybe a descendant of Richard Hildersham), who is recorded as receiving his BA from Emmanuel College, Cambridge, in 1626-7, see Venn, Vol. II, p. 368.

Goodhere.⁷⁵ However, Samuel's sister, Sarah, seems to have extended the family inheritance of godliness through her marriage to Gervase Lomax. As we have seen, Hildersham's bequests to his son-in-law indicated a measure of spiritual approval, and Lomax's own will of 1647 confirmed his continuance in a godly path. 'Resting on Christ alone for Salvation', he specifically requested burial 'according to the directory'.⁷⁶ The will also contains a remarkable paragraph of spiritual advice and benediction for his six children:

And the Lord of heaven blesse even all of you my beloved Children Henry Arthur Gervase Samuel John and Anne multiply all his graces in you and you to many generations, and in the name and by the authority of a dying Father I charge you all my beloved children ... to know the God of your Fathers and to serve him with a perfect heart and willing mind, to advance what lyeth in you the kingdome of the Lord Christ that redeemed you, and to approve yourselves true members of his mysticall body by your faithfull holy humble and temperate life and

⁷⁵ There are no records of any baptisms of Hildershams in the registers of West Felton, see SAO. Of the other surviving children of Arthur, Timothy died within a year of his father, unmarried, and Nathanael remains a mystery, but see Chapter 1, above, p. 22 n. 75, for one possible theory about the date of his death. Arthur's daughter, Anna, who had married Nycollas Mor in 1610, seems to have predeceased her father, possibly dying in August 1625 (see LRO DE1013/1, parish registers for Ashby). Her two children, Elizabeth and Thomas are mentioned in Hildersham's will, but as they appear to have been crossed out, are likely to have predeceased him. Sarah Hildersham, Arthur's youngest and only surviving daughter, had married Gervase Lomax in 1627, and they had six children: Henry (baptised Ashby, 5 February 1628), Arthur (baptised Ashby, 10 January 1629), Ann (baptised Ashby, 5 February 1632), Gervase (baptised Thrumpton, 27 December 1633), Samuel (baptised Thrumpton, 3 April 1636), and John (born after 1636, but gaps in the Thrumpton registers mean that the date cannot be established). Hildersham's widow, Ann, went to live in Thrumpton with her daughter Sarah after Arthur's death, and was buried there on 29 November 1641, see NAO BT Thrumpton, 1600-1711.

⁷⁶ See Chapter 1, above, p. 22. For Gervase Lomax's will, describing him as a 'gentleman' of Cropwell Butler, Nottinghamshire, and dated 15 December 1647, see NAO PR/NW. By asking to be buried according to the Directory of worship, which had come into force in 1645, he was making it clear that he did not want to be buried according to the Prayer Book service. Details of Lomax's career during the Civil War can be found in Lucy Hutchinson, *Memoirs of the Life of Colonel John Hutchinson*, ed. James Sutherland (Oxford, 1973), pp. 73, 74, 86, 148: Lomax was a strong supporter of Parliament from the beginning of the War. He raised a foot company of militia in Nottingham and led it as Captain; in 1643 he marched with it to join Colonel Oliver Cromwell and fight at Gainsborough, Cromwell's (and Parliament's) first significant victory. He was also named by Parliament to serve on the County Committee, running the war effort in Nottinghamshire, and became Deputy Governor of the Nottingham garrison. Lucy also gives a character sketch of him – 'a very honest man who could not be reckon'd among the gentry, though he were call'd by the name of Mr. Lomax; he was in strength and performance of his age, a stout and an understanding man, plaine and blunt, but withal godly, faithfull to his country, and honest to all men' (p. 73).

conversation, to be dutifull to your mother whilest she liveth, not to bestow yourselves in your first marriages without her consent, and that your choice render you pious rather than covetous, And all you my beloved children ... I councell and advise not to become bound for any man, nor by borrowing to make too much hast to be rich, but to remember what Saloman sayth, he that hateth suretyship is sure, as alsoe that an Inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning but the end thereof not to be blessed, Lastly I beseech you to be loving and kinde one to another, studying quietnes.⁷⁷

It is also clear that Gervase and Sarah Lomax maintained a close and affectionate

⁷⁷ NAO PR/NW. The will also indicates that by this time, Lomax (aged just over forty at the time of his death) was a very wealthy man with extensive property, which perhaps explains his anxiety that his children should not become covetous or overly-concerned with earthly riches. His eldest son, Henry, was only about twenty at the time of his father's death, and the youngest, John, was probably less than ten, so the need for direction was obvious. Arthur, the second son, was left £400 in addition to various leases, and also 'my Gold ringe which I now usually weare'. It is possible that this was the gold ring that Arthur Hildersham had bequeathed to his son-in-law in his own will. Gervase, the third son, inherited the estate at Cropwell Butler with a stock of animals and weapons. Samuel, aged nearly twelve, was obviously destined for the University, with provision made for his continued education, as well as a legacy of £300. It seem as if this expectation was realised; a Samuel Lomax of Nottinghamshire is recorded as being admitted pensioner at Trinity College, Cambridge on 30 March 1653, see Venn, Vol. III, p. 101. However, there is no record of a subsequent graduation or career. Samuel also received an unspecified bequest of books, as did his brothers Henry and Gervase. John, the youngest, was given a legacy of £100, in addition to the rents from particular holdings. Anne, the only daughter, received £300. The will also contained bequests to the poor: 'twenty poore Christians' in the counties of Nottingham or Derby were left 'ten shillings a piece', the 'poorest of the poore of Thrumpton' were designated £5 in stock. Three of his friends, Richard Hawkins, Richard Widdowson and Richard Lomax were given 'a pocket bible of Ten shillings a piece'. What happened to Gervase and Sarah Lomax's children subsequently is uncertain. Only the destiny of Anne Lomax is known for sure, see pp. 307-308. Henry, Gervase's heir, was probably dead by 1659, as his brother Arthur could be found in that year making transactions with property in Cossington, Leics., originally bequeathed to Henry, see LRO 2D31/113, 115, 116, 126, Feb., May, Dec. 1659. Arthur is here described as a 'wholesale mercer of London'. This supports the previously unsubstantiated suggestion that Arthur Lomax, could be the individual of the same name who was apprenticed to Clement Ireton in 1645. This Arthur Lomax (d. 1694), later of London and Harbrough, Lincolnshire, was a mercer, and married Frances Maddison, daughter and eventual heir of Edward Maddison of Grimblethorpe, see Prerogative Court of Canterbury: Allegations PROB 18/5/16. They had two children, Henry Lomax of Habrough (d. 1700) and Elizabeth Lomax (d. 1747), who married in 1695 Henry Walsh, by whom she was the ancestress of the Walsh family of Grimblethorpe, see Melville Henry Massue Ruvigny Raineval, *The Plantagenet Roll of the Blood Royal* (London, 1908), p. 570. Thomas Allen, *The History of the County of Lincoln* (London and Lincoln, 1834), p. 230, states that at the west end of Harbrough church a stone records that the steeple was repaired in 1684 by the patron Charles Pelham, esq., Arthur Lomax, esq., 'Lord of the manor', and all other freeholders of the village. Arthur's brother, Gervase, appears to have died by 1656, judging by an entry in C. Harold Ridge (ed.), *Index to Administrations in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury, 1655-1660*, Vol. II (British Record Society 74, 1952), p. 101, which records an administration for a 'Gervase Lomax of Barton, Notts' in 1656, 'folio 273'.

relationship with Samuel and Mary Hildersham: Samuel, ‘my beloved Brother’, is named as one of the overseers of Gervase’s will. Under the terms of the will, Samuel also received a gold mourning ring worth forty shillings, with ‘deaths head’ cut in it, whereas his wife Mary was given twenty shillings in gold, as ‘a true testimony of the love and affection’ borne to her. Apparently, too, Gervase and Sarah’s daughter, Anne, went to live with her aunt and uncle at West Felton, sometime after her father’s death. Anne Lomax was married at West Felton in 1653 to Francis Tallents, another man very much in the Hildersham mould.⁷⁸ He was a close friend and ministerial associate of Samuel’s in the Shropshire puritan scene, and it looks as if Samuel was responsible for arranging this marriage between a favoured niece and a man he highly esteemed.⁷⁹ Francis and Anne’s first child, born in April 1655, was christened ‘Hildersham Tallents’, emphasizing his godly descent from his great-grandfather, but sadly he died in infancy.⁸⁰ Anne herself died shortly afterwards, and Tallents was to remarry three times.⁸¹ Francis and Anne’s other son, Francis, died at an early age, predeceasing his

⁷⁸ SAO West Felton Registers, Marriages from 1628, ‘1653, June 1. Mr Francis Tallents, publique preacher of the town of Salop + Mrs Anne Lomax, Neice to Mr Hildersam Rector of West Felton’.

⁷⁹ For more information on the long and varied life of Francis Tallents (1619-1708), see *ODNB* (ref: odnb/26953), and also, Matthew Henry, *A Sermon Preach’d at the Funeral of the Reverend Mr. Francis Tallents ... With a Short Account of His Life and Death* (1709). Tallents himself had preached a sermon at the funeral of Matthew Henry’s father, Philip. According to Henry, Richard Baxter in his memoirs described Tallents as ‘a good Scholar, a godly blameless Divine, and that he was most eminent for extraordinary Prudence and Moderation and Peacableness towards all’ (pp. 48-490); this description bears a striking resemblance to the character of Arthur Hildersham, as given by Samuel Clarke. It may be that this is mere rhetoric, conforming to a godly ideal model constructed by puritan biographers, but it is also likely that Samuel Hildersham would have approved someone to marry his niece who apparently displayed similar characteristics to his own father. For his part, Tallents reciprocated Samuel’s regard, calling him ‘Great Hildersam’ in a poem composed ‘On occasion of the death of Mr. Rowland Nevet, formerly Minister of Oswestre, in Shropshire, December 1675, and of other nonconformist ministers in that county, before that time’, see ‘Life of Mr Philip Henry’, p. 459.

⁸⁰ *Shropshire Parish Registers, Lichfield Diocese, Vol. XII, The Register of St. Mary’s, Shrewsbury, 1584-1812* (transcription), p. 116, ‘Births and Baptizings in the Yeare 1655. Apr. 22. Hildersam, s. of Mr. Francis Tallants, minister’; p. 115, ‘Burialls 1655. May 5. Helbersam, s. of Mr. Francis Tallants, minister’.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 121, ‘Burials, 1658. Mar. 14. Mrs Anne Tallants’. The same register records that Francis married Mrs Martha Clive on 27 November 1661 (p. 127). She was buried on 21 July 1663 (p. 129), and

father.⁸² It seems, though, that there is a very real possibility that Tallents senior, through his wife and his relationship with Samuel, may have been the repository of at least some of Arthur Hildersham's papers.⁸³ Although I have not been able to find any record of Samuel's will, to prove or disprove this theory, Francis Tallents is known to have supplied Philip Henry with a manuscript written by Arthur. Henry, mentioning this to the collector Mr Thoresby, adds, 'he has by him many more. If you were not provided with some of that great hand I could procure one for you'.⁸⁴

3. Hildersham's Printed Works

Samuel Clarke adjudged that Hildersham's writings would 'prove more durable Monuments of his Name'; this section will examine this verdict by looking at who owned and read Hildersham's books and what use they made of them, both in the early modern period and beyond.⁸⁵ Currently, however, there are no editions of any of Hildersham's works in print, and indeed there have been no reprints since the

Tallents' third wife, Mary, on 27 June 1685 (p. 180). His fourth and final wife, Elizabeth, was buried on 11 March 1701/2 (p. 232). Tallents himself was buried on 15 April 1708 (p. 256). The baptism of Francis and Anne's second son, Francis, is recorded on 14 September 1656 (p. 117).

⁸² Francis must have been a disappointment to his father; although he entered the ministry, he seemed more intent on courting social favour, serving as chaplain to Sir D. Gauden, the Sheriff of London, and being acquainted with Samuel Pepys.

⁸³ Samuel himself, as heir and executor of his father, had inherited his 'Fathers Papers', see Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 155, and also Samuel's own comments in the preface to *Fasting and Praier*, which he brought out in 1633.

⁸⁴ Orig. MS. Feb 1, 1702/3, cited in Matthew Henry, *The Lives of Philip and Matthew Henry* (Edinburgh, 1974 edn.), p. 220. Francis Tallent's own will, made on 15 July 1706 is frustratingly brief and unspecific: apart from a couple of small personal bequests, and with no surviving issue, he leaves the residue of his estate to be disposed of for 'charitable uses' by his executor Mr John Dutton, a 'distiller of the ... town of Salop', according to his own orders made in writing, 'under my hand'. In 'default of such a writing', Dutton is directed to dispose of the estate 'as he in his judgment and conscience shall think most fit', see Lichfield Record Office, Will of Francis Tallents (1708).

⁸⁵ For an introduction to the subject of early modern readers, see Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (eds.), *Books and Readers in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2002), especially, on the subject of marginalia, William Sherman, 'What did Renaissance Readers Write in their Books?', pp. 119-137.

seventeenth century, which would seem to give the lie to Clarke's prophecy, in the long-term at least.⁸⁶ Despite the 'quiet but steady revival of traditional Calvinism' in the second half of the twentieth century traced by Coffey, and the reprinting of hundreds of puritan titles by the Banner of Truth and similar publishing houses, Hildersham as a writer has been steadfastly overlooked.⁸⁷ This was the case even in the nineteenth century, when there was a flourishing interest in puritan literature, especially that of Bunyan, and British publishers brought out editions of the complete works of such godly writers as Sibbes, Baxter, Owen, Manton, Brooks, Howe, Flavel, and Bridge.⁸⁸ This absence of reprints of Hildersham has led to a demand in the antiquarian book market, but has meant that he has largely been forgotten as an author.

The simplest explanation for such a lacuna can be found in Hildersham's style, rather than his subject matter or personal reputation, both of which continue to command respect and interest. As one well-known nineteenth-century commentator, who highly valued Hildersham's works and included them in his category of 'books most heartily recommended', admitted, 'He is copious and discursive, we had almost said long-winded'. Of Hildersham's *Lectures upon John*, the same author concluded, 'A mass of godly teaching; but rather heavy reading'.⁸⁹ The sheer length of Hildersham's two major works, at 500 (*Lectures upon John*) and 813 (*Lectures upon Psalme LI*) folio pages, is daunting in itself to all but the most dedicated scholar, and

⁸⁶ The only exception seems to be a modern reprint in pamphlet form by the American publishers Soli Deo Gloria, of five lectures from Hildersham's *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, dealing with the upbringing of children, and entitled *Dealing with Sin in Our Children*. It is significant that a discrete section concentrating on a specific practical issue has been chosen.

⁸⁷ Coffey, 'Legacies', p. 464.

⁸⁸ See Coffey, 'Legacies', pp. 461-462.

⁸⁹ C. H. Spurgeon, 'Catalogue of Biblical Commentaries & Expositions', in his, *Commenting and Commentaries* (London, 1890), pp. 33; 99; 161.

meant that in the seventeenth century the volumes would have been priced beyond the reach of the poorer sort of readers. In his espousal of the puritan ‘plain style’ of preaching and writing, too, Hildersham seems to have followed the model very closely, with little in the way of verbal fireworks.⁹⁰ As the means ordained by God to call his elect to salvation, preaching was to be deliberately ‘weake and simple’, so that any success could be attributed to free grace alone.⁹¹ It should be ‘plain and without all ostentation of humane gifts, as the Apostle protesteth his was’, and the best expository was deemed to be that ‘not which tickleth the eare best, nor of that which hath most learning, but that which is most fit to edifie, and to work upon the conscience’.⁹² Although Hildersham stressed ‘the necessity of a learned ministry’, he always insisted that such learning should be subjugated to practical usefulness and ease of understanding.⁹³ In a quite deliberate way, he makes no display of his own erudition: in the *Lectures upon John* there are no citations from other scholarly authorities, and in the *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, merely a couple.⁹⁴ The Bible is consciously his sole

⁹⁰ For an analysis of the plain style and the way in which it was contested and claimed by rival theological and ecclesiastical authors, see N. H. Keeble, *The Literary Culture of Nonconformity* (Leicester, 1987), pp. 240-262. For a discussion of the contributions of William Perkins, Richard Bernard and William Ames to the development of this style, see John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitudes towards Reason, Learning and Education, 1560-1640* (Cambridge, 1986), pp.121-140. For an example of the different ways this plain style was utilised by two later godly writers, Richard Baxter and Joseph Alleine, see Lesley Rowe, ‘“Vehement Persuasions”: Two Seventeenth-Century Evangelical Treatises’ (MA thesis, University of Warwick, 2003), pp.18-28.

⁹¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 251.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 251, see also p. 30, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 22.

⁹³ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 3. For puritan attitudes towards learning and education, see Morgan, *Godly Learning*.

⁹⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 260 (reference to Arias Montanus) and p. 616 (reference to Tantalus). Significantly, apart from the Bible itself, the only other book to be referred to is Foxe’s ‘Book of Martyrs’, where the general example of fortitude shown by simple men and women in adversity is cited, and particular mention made of the cases of Bradford, Glover and Careless, see, *inter alia*, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 142, 152, 267, 325, 461, 468, 475, 686, 773, 792. Hildersham possessed his own copy of the *Acts and Monuments*, which he bequeathed to his son-in-law, Gervase Lomax, in his will, see LRO Leics. Wills, Ashby no. 77 (1632).

authority, copiously quoted and cross-referenced. In his preface to the *Lectures upon John*, John Cotton drew attention to this feature of Hildersham's approach:

When Schollers furnish themselves with store of other writers, besides the Scriptures, and being little conversant in the Scriptures doe draw the Scriptures to the Authors, whom they most affect, and not their Authors to the Scriptures, their Divinity prooveth but Humanity, and their Ministry speaketh to the braine, but not to the conscience of the Hearer. But He that diggeth all the Treasures of his knowledge, and the grounds of Religion out of the Scriptures, and maketh use of other authors, not for ostentation of himself, nor for the ground of his faith, nor for the principall ornament of his Ministry, but for the better searching out of the deepe wisdom of the Scriptures, such an one believeth what he teacheth, not by a humane Credulity from his Author, but by a divine faith from the Word: and *because he believeth, he therefore speaketh*: and speaking from faith in his owne heart, he speaketh much more powerfully unto the begetting and strengthening of faith in the Hearer.⁹⁵

A few Greek, and occasional Latin, phrases and words are used by Hildersham, but they are normally translated or the sense of them given.⁹⁶ He employs metaphors, similes, or illustrations relatively sparsely, and those that he does give are usually biblical in origin, or drawn from daily and family life.⁹⁷ Few are original or striking. Emotionally-heightened language and rhetorical devices like antithesis, repetition, and pithy epigrams, which are so apparent (and which inject a sense of drama and colour) in some other godly writers such as Richard Sibbes, Thomas Watson, Samuel

⁹⁵ John Cotton, 'To the godly Reader', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A3v. As a young man in 1584, Hildersham sought the advice of Thomas Cartwright about the study of divinity and the value of different authors, see Albert Peel and Leland H. Carlson (eds.), *Cartwrightiana* (London, 1951), pp. 108-115.

⁹⁶ See, for example, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 107, 125, 139, 234, 263, 313, 317, 458, 464, 465, 491, 500, 528, 535, 572, 607, 625, 666, 688, 694, 773, 774, 786, 789, 791, 794, 802, 810.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, for example, God as father or parent and we as children (pp. 156, 222, 254, 295, 358, 400, 415, 541, 660, 665-6), God as physician/surgeon (pp. 53, 252, 303, 536, 558), sin as disease/poison/filth (pp. 89, 90, 112, 313, 536), images from domestic life such as fire, servants, travel, horses, ploughing, harvest, etc (pp. 185, 254, 293, 363, 430, 444, 469, 498, 537, 555, 687, 805).

Rutherford or Joseph Alleine, are not characteristic of Hildersham's style.⁹⁸ Instead, the end result is a dense, solid and largely undifferentiated prose that is not difficult to understand, but, as Spurgeon put it, 'rather heavy reading'. Lacking the visual and oratorical enhancement supplied by Hildersham's physical presence in the pulpit, in print the sermons, although worthy, could be considered a little dull and prolix in comparison with the works of some other divines.⁹⁹

This dearth of striking phrases or memorable quotes in Hildersham's writings could have posed a problem for readers seeking to find material for their commonplace books, as John Preston, putting a very positive gloss on it, noted: 'when I went about to take out some things for mine own use briefly, I could not almost tell what to leave out'.¹⁰⁰ John Cotton, too, made a virtue of Hildersham's closely-argued style:

In reading most of the best Bookes extant, the studious Reader is wont to select and transcribe the pith of such Notes, as stand like Lights, or Goades, or Nailles, in the body of the discourse, and in the Spirit of the Writer: But in this Booke (to tell you what I find) I find such variety of choice manner running throughout every Veine of each discourse herein handled, and carried along with such strength of sound and deepe Iudgement, and with such Life and Power of an heavenly Spirit, and withal expressed in such pithy and pregnant words of wisdome, that I knew not what to select, and what to omit, unlesse I should have transcribed the whole Booke.¹⁰¹

The tone of Hildersham's work is measured and carefully nuanced, often giving both sides of an argument, and dealing fully and fairly with any possible objections.

⁹⁸ See, for example, Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reede, and Smoaking Flax* (London, 1630); Thomas Watson, *A Body of Practical Divinity* (London, 1692); Samuel Rutherford, *Joshua Redivivus, or Mr. Rutherford's Letters* (Rotterdam?, 1664); Joseph Alleine, *An Alarme to Unconverted Sinners* (1672).

⁹⁹ Robert Harris, successor to John Dod at Hanwell and sometime head of Trinity College, Cambridge, when advising young men about theological reading matter, recommended Hildersham as an example of 'solid Preachers', see Samuel Clarke, 'The Life and Death of Dr. Harris', in *idem, A Collection of the Lives of Ten Eminent Divines* (London, 1662), p. 315.

¹⁰⁰ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersam', p. 152.

¹⁰¹ Cotton, 'To the Godly Reader', sig. A3r.

Cautious qualifications and exceptions to his main case, which appear in a proliferation of subsections, not only add to the length of the text, but create an almost judicial sense of balance.¹⁰² It also means that it is very easy to find a quote from Hildersham to support a variety of different causes, by taking something out of its closely-argued context.¹⁰³ Structurally, he follows the accepted format of reformed hermeneutics: he ‘divides’ the biblical text by outlining initially the ‘doctrines’ it contains, proceeds to give the ‘reasons’ (or explanations) for those doctrines, and then deals with the ‘uses’ (or applications). A number of sermons are allocated to each verse or grouping of verses.¹⁰⁴ The effect of the lectures is cumulative as well as progressive: Hildersham obviously expected his hearers to be taking in the whole series. He frequently carries on in the next lecture just where he had left off in the previous one, often abruptly in the middle of setting out ‘uses’ or ‘doctrines’.¹⁰⁵ In all the printed sermons of Hildersham, there is a real sense of the historical time and place

¹⁰² The *Lectures upon John* is 500 folio pages, and the *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, 815 folio pages.

¹⁰³ For examples, see above, Chapter 1, p. 6, n. 14, and Chapter 3, pp. 98-99, and 113-118.

¹⁰⁴ The *Lectures upon John* are thus grouped: John 4:10 (Lectures 1-5), 4:11-12 (Lectures 6-8), 4:13-14 (Lectures 9-11), 4:15 (Lecture 12), 4:16-18 (Lectures 13-21), 4:19-20 (Lectures 22-31), 4:21-23 (Lectures 32-38), 4:23-24 (Lectures 39-42), 4:25-26 (Lectures 43-45), 4:27 (Lectures 46-48), 4:28-30 (Lectures 49-54), 4:31-34 (Lectures 55-59), 4:35-38 (Lectures 60-66), 4:39-40 (Lectures 67-69), 4: 41-42 (Lectures 70-76), 4:43-45 (Lectures 77-82), 4:46-47 (Lectures 83-87), 4:48-50 (Lectures 88-106), 4:51-53 (Lectures 107-108). Likewise, the *Lectures upon Psalme LI* are sub-divided as follows; title of the Psalm (Lectures 1-9), Ps.51:1-2 (Lectures 10-30), Ps.51:3 (Lectures 31-42), Ps.51:4 (Lectures 43-54), Ps.51:5 (Lectures 55-73), Ps.51:6a (Lectures 74-94), Ps.51:6b (Lectures 95-114), Ps.51:7 (Lectures 115-152). This series was unfinished due to Hildersham’s final illness. There is some evidence from the text that Hildersham may have been intending to cover the whole nineteen verses of the psalm, for in Lecture 115 (p. 575) he gives a summary of the whole, explaining that it falls into two distinct sections: part one, in which David ‘prayeth for himselfe from the beginning of the Psalme to the end of the 17. verse’, and part two, where he prays ‘for the Church of god ... in the two last verses of the Psalme’. Hildersham sub-divides part one under two headings: initially the first nine verses which ‘concerneth his justification’, and secondly, verses 10-17 which ‘concerneth his sanctification’. At the very least, within this overall structure which he outlines, it would seem logical to suggest that Hildersham envisaged expounding in full up to the end of verse 9, if not to verse 17, or indeed, even to verse 19 itself. As it is, it is clear from the text that he did not even manage to complete his exegesis of verse 7, which he had begun in Lecture 115. Despite announcing at the beginning of Lecture 152 (p. 810) that he would now ‘proceed to make some application’ of the doctrine which would be three-fold, by the end of the sermon, and therefore the volume, he had only completed the first application.

¹⁰⁵ It is possible, however, that he included a recap when he was actually delivering each sermon, and this may have been edited out of the printed version.

in which they are anchored: application is both deeply individualised and also locally, nationally and internationally freighted.¹⁰⁶ Accompanying this comes a tangible feeling of his audience, habitually addressed as ‘beloved’, with whom he strives to engage.¹⁰⁷ This very factor which may have helped to make him compelling and effective as a preacher ironically may have reduced his relevance in print as the years went by.

Nevertheless, in the shorter term, in the seventeenth, and into the eighteenth, century, Hildersham continued to be widely read, and in the case of the treatise on the Lord’s Supper, sell well.¹⁰⁸ In Holland, too, as we have seen, his works were influential in shaping the character of the second reformation.¹⁰⁹ Still, it seems that the memory of Hildersham’s name and reputation, perpetuated by his friends and admirers, was what led people to read his books, rather than the content itself. Godly celebrity endorsements by such leading figures as Cotton, Preston and Willet reinforced that reputation, but it would appear that as people forgot the man, they also forgot his writings. This emphasis on Hildersham’s character and standing is illustrated by an edition of the *Lectures upon John*, owned in the eighteenth century by a George Mackenzie. It contains no annotations on the text itself to show whether or

¹⁰⁶ If Hildersham’s sermons on Psalm 51 are compared with the work of two other seventeenth-century authors on the same passage, this feature of Hildersham’s style becomes more noticeable. Samuel Page’s, *The Broken Heart or David’s Penance* (1637) and Samuel Smith’s, *David’s Repentance: or, A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the 51. Psalme* (fifth edn., 1620) are less obviously engaged with the contemporary situation, or, indeed, with individuals.

¹⁰⁷ For the use of ‘beloved’, see, for example, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 46, 69, 148, 273, 281, 339, 340, 341, 378, 435, 447, 451, 489, 501, 532, 544, 565, 569, 610 x3, 611, 617 x2, 618, 641, 646, 652, 678, 683, 693 x2, 694 x2, 696, 714 x2, 722, 726 x2, 730, 742 x2, 744, 766, 748, 753, 755, 789, 791, 792, 804, 808. This biblical form of address, often used to emphasise or apply a particular point, was common amongst puritan preachers and can still be found in the sermons of nineteenth-century nonconformist ministers like C. H. Spurgeon, see his, *Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit containing Sermons preached and revised by C. H. Spurgeon during the year 1864* (Pasadena, Texas, 1973 edn.), Vol. X, pp. 9, 21, 46, 52, 95 etc.

¹⁰⁸ For details of the various editions of Hildersham’s works, see Chapter 1, pp. 23-30.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 4, above, p. 195, n. 166, for details of some of the Dutch titles.

how the reader was affected spiritually, but it includes a summary of Hildersham's life on the endpaper: 'This book is a Very Commendable one It being preach'd by that Faithfull Minister of Jesus Christ, Arthur Hildersam Minister at Ashby Delazouch in Leicester Shire. And the Book Contains 108 Lectures. And this the Book he began in January 31st 1608'.¹¹⁰

Without doubt, though, in the period following his death in 1632, Hildersham was regarded as an highly-esteemed biblical expositor, and his works found an audience amongst serious-minded students, both ministerial and lay. They also became a staple in many godly libraries.¹¹¹ At a time when sages were being sought as a guide

¹¹⁰ Although this 1656 edition of the *Lectures upon John* very clearly belonged to George Mackenzie, the entry at the back was made and signed by Robert Mitchell on 11 September 1747. For a further discussion of this copy and its annotations, see below, pp. 320-321. It is now in my possession.

¹¹¹ Some examples of libraries may help to illustrate the geographical spread and the diverse theological acceptance of Hildersham's works; typical, perhaps, was the library of Thomas Lye, a presbyterian ejected from a London living in 1662. The catalogue for the auction of his huge library after his death, *Catalogus variorum Librorum ... Tho. Lye* (1684) included two copies of Hildersham's *Lectures upon John* (1629 and 1642), *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, and *Fasting and Praier*, see pp. 5, 36. Thomas Plume (1630-1704), was, it seems, of a more conformist persuasion, being installed as Archdeacon of Rochester in 1679, but he, too, found a place for Hildersham's writings in the library he founded in his home town of Maldon in Essex, 'for the use of the minister and the clergy of the neighbouring parishes who generally make this town their residence, on account of the air in the vicinity of their churches'. He endowed the library at his death, and it is still in existence today. The catalogue includes Hildersham's, *The Canticles* (1674), *Fasting and Praier* (1636), *Lectures upon John* (1647), and *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635), see S. G. Deed (ed.), *Catalogue of the Plume Library* (Maldon, 1959), pp. xiii-xiv, 86. *The Catalogue of Books from Parochial Libraries in Shropshire* (London, 1971), pp. vii-ix, indicates that of the eleven surviving libraries included in the catalogue, two held copies of Hildersham's work. The oldest was bequeathed in 1677 by Edward Lewis, vicar of St Michael's, Chirbury, 'for the use of the schoolmaster or any other of his Parishioners who shall desire to read them'. Among the remaining 250 volumes, many of which still carry their original chains, are *Lectures upon John* (1629) and *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635). The library of the parish church of St Alkmund, Whitchurch, was a collection of 2,250 volumes belonging to a former rector, Clement Sankey, bought by Jane, Dowager Countess of Bridgewater, and in 1717 presented to the church, and later augmented by a further bequest. This library included copies of *Lectures upon John* (1632) and *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635). Across the Atlantic, too, libraries contained copies of Hildersham's works: the list of books bequeathed to Harvard College by John Harvard included Hildersham's *Fasting and Praier*, *Lectures upon John*, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, see Thomas Goddard Wright, *Literary Culture in Early New England, 1620-1730* (New Haven, Conn., and Oxford, 1920), p. 268. The will of New England pastor Peter Bulkeley, dated 14 April 1658, included a bequest of 'Mr Hildersham upon the one & fiftieth psalme' to his son Joseph, see Wright, *Literary Culture*, p. 50. In Virginia, the 1697 catalogue of the 'great library' of clergyman Thomas Teackle included Hildersham's *Lectures upon John*, see Jon Butler, 'Thomas Teackle's 333 Books: A Great Library on Virginia's Eastern Shore, 1697', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., Vol. 49, No. 3 (July, 1992), p. 475.

through a bewildering political and religious situation, Hildersham, with his established reputation for faithfulness and integrity, was valued as an authority. Examining what his early modern readers made of him will help to give some idea of how they viewed his legacy. This can be done in two ways: first, by tracing the citations to Hildersham's writings in the published works of other authors, and second, through looking at the ownership and annotations in surviving copies of Hildersham's works themselves.

When it comes to the readers of Hildersham's printed works, any bias that may have existed in his hearers towards a more educated, affluent and especially clerical clientele is likely to have been accentuated. With the possible exception of the treatise on the Lord's Supper and perhaps *Fasting and Praier*, the pricing of the volumes alone would surely have placed them beyond the reach of the poorer sort of reader, whereas the content would have restricted their purchasers to the godly community. Amongst the laity, Cressy's wealthy merchant of Exeter, John Hayne, who bought a copy of the lectures on John for his future wife in 1634, is likely to have been a typical example.¹¹² However, there is some evidence to suggest that it was amongst the godly clergy that Hildersham's printed lectures found their most ready reception, with the volumes quickly establishing themselves as authoritative works of reference.¹¹³ As John Preston opined on the *Lectures upon John*, 'I hope it will be a good help to Ministers when

¹¹² David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 240. John Hayne bought the *Lectures upon the fourth of John* for 7s in 1634, as a gift for his prospective wife, Susan Henley of Winsham, Somerset.

¹¹³ For the themes of sententious wisdom, the commonplace tradition, and the creation of a 'sage' as an 'authoritative voice of doxa and practice', see Kenneth L. Parker and Eric J. Carlson, *'Practical Divinity': The Works and Life of Revd Richard Greenham* (Aldershot, 1998), pp. 37-47.

they read it, and bring the method of Doctrine and Uses into more credit'.¹¹⁴ As well as this endorsement and the one by Cotton, the citation of Hildersham's works in the writing of other seventeenth- and eighteenth-century clerics such as Thomas Hall, John Flavel, John Spencer, Richard Mather, James Atkinson, Henry Ashhurst, William Burkitt, Richard Claridge, Edward Williams, Lewis Stucley, Henry Newcome, William Barton, Zachary Smith, Thomas Edwards, and Hezekiah Woodward, indicates that they, too, were among his readers.¹¹⁵ Thomas Hall, a nonconformist minister from Birmingham, was probably Hildersham's most enthusiastic admirer in print, to judge

¹¹⁴ Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', pp. 152-153. Some caution must be exercised here not to exaggerate the proportion of clerical as opposed to lay readers. Ministerial libraries and copies of the works are more likely to have been preserved and found their way into the archives than those belonging to private Christians. The clergy themselves were more likely to publish works of divinity in which sermons such as Hildersham's would be quoted, and are therefore more identifiable readers.

¹¹⁵ Many, but by no means all, of these authors were of a nonconformist or presbyterian persuasion. For John Preston, see Clarke, 'Life of Hildersham', p. 152; for Cotton, see 'To the Godly Reader', in Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, sig. A3-4; for Thomas Hall, pastor of King's Norton, see *The Pulpit Guarded with XVII Arguments* (1651), pp. 34, 41, 166, 167; *The Beauty of Holiness; or a Description of the Excellency, Amiability, Comfort and Content which is to be found in Wayes of Purity and Holinesse* (1655), p.16; *A Practical and Polemical Commentary... upon Timothy* (1658), pp. 107, 128, 131, 143, 242, 260, 269, 274, 292, 326, 346, 356, 413, 414; *An Exposition By Way of Supplement, on the Fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth Chapters of the Prophecy of Amos* (1661), pp. 25, 182, 189, 490; for John Flavel, see, *Navigation Spiritualiz'd or, A New Compass for Seamen* (4th edn., 1698), p. 42; for John Spencer, the librarian of the presbyterian Sion College in London, see, *Kaina Kai Palaia, Things new and old, or a store-house of similes, sentences, allegories... collected from the writings and sayings of the learned in all ages to this present* (1658), p. 517; for Richard Mather, see, *A Defence of the Answer and Arguments of the Synod met at Boston* (1664), p. 30; for James Atkinson, see, *The Necessity of Preaching the Gospel in Gospel Language: Being a Sermon Preach'd at an Ordination at Darlington* (Newcastle, 1729), p. 24; for Henry Ashhurst, see, 'Memoirs of the life of Mr Henry Ashhurst' in, anon, *Christian Biography: or A Collection of the Lives of Several Excellent Persons Eminent for Faith and Piety* (1768), p. 114; for William Burkitt, see, *The Poor Man's Help and Young Man's Guide* (Boston, 1725), p. 55; for Richard Claridge, see, *Tractatus Hierographicus: Or A Treatise of the Holy Scriptures* (1724), p. 80; for Edward Williams, see, *The Christian Preacher, or, Discourses on Preaching* (Halifax, 1800), p. 54; for Lewis Stucley, a congregational minister in Exeter, see, *Manifest Truth* (1658), p. 10; for Henry Newcome, presbyterian minister of Cheshire and Lancashire ejected in 1660, see, *The Sinner's Hope* (1660), p. 94; for William Barton, hymnologist and vicar of St Martin's, Leicester, 1656-1678, see, *Man's Monitor, or The Free-school of Virtue* (1655); for Zachary Smith, pastor of Glynde in Sussex and ejected at the Restoration, see, *Life in Death* (1656), p. 9; for Thomas Edwards, see, *Reasons against the Independent Government of Particular Congregations* (1641), cited in Ann Hughes, *Gangraena and the Struggle for the English Revolution* (Oxford, 2004), p. 38 and *Gangraena* (1646), part I, p. 145; for Hezekiah Woodward, see, *A Treatise of Prayer* (1656), pp. 13-14.

by the number of times he cites his works.¹¹⁶ Referring to Hildersham as ‘a sage of latter times’ and ‘the Oracle and honour of his time’, Hall cited the *Lectures upon John* and the *Lectures upon Psalme LI* on numerous occasions throughout his publications, to support and give weight to his own arguments. These were usually on matters of practical divinity, such as resisting temptation, perseverance, the understanding and use of Scripture, hearing sermons, and ‘how farre a Reprobate may go’.¹¹⁷ However, he also enlisted Hildersham’s backing for more controversial topics, like the usurping of the office of priesthood by the magistracy, against separation, and ‘why people should not fret at such [close] preaching’.¹¹⁸ Hall’s usage of Hildersham illustrates the two-fold pattern seen in other authors, too: Hildersham is either called upon as a revered authority on issues of practical spirituality, or more contentiously as an opponent of separatism. The time of Hildersham’s greatest influence as a writer on other writers seems to have been between about 1640 and 1665; significantly this was

¹¹⁶ For more on Hall, see Ann Hughes, “‘Popular’ Presbyterianism in the 1640s and 1650s: The Cases of Thomas Edwards and Thomas Hall”, in Nicholas Tyacke (ed.), *England’s Long Reformation, 1500-1800* (London, 1998), pp. 235-260. Hall’s large collection is now in the Birmingham Central Library, and an MS catalogue, with a seventeenth-century valuation, in DRW.

¹¹⁷ See Hall, *Timothy*, p. 128 and also pp. 107, 247, 260, 269, 274, 292, 316, 356.

¹¹⁸ See Hall, *Pulpit Guarded*, pp. 37, 43; *Timothy*, pp. 143, 413, 414. Hall himself owned three of Hildersham’s works, listed in the catalogue of books from his library, which he bequeathed for the use of ministers in King’s Norton; *Fasting and Praier* (1636), which cost 1s, *Lectures upon John* (1647), which cost 7s, and *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635), which cost 11s, see ‘A Brief Narrative of the Life and Death of Thomas Hall Late Pastor of King’s Norton with a transcript of his will, and a catalogue of books given to the library at Birmingham, and to the parish of King’s Norton’ [c. 1662-64] in DRW, a transcript of which is in Birmingham Central Library. Only the first two of these titles by Hildersham are still held in the Thomas Hall Library at Birmingham Central Library; *Fasting and Praier* contains much underlining throughout, especially in the earlier lectures, and marginal comments by Hall on pages 140 and 141, relating to weeping during humiliation of the soul. He has also written a summary of fasting on a frontleaf, beginning with the words ‘Fasting is a commande...’. Clearly, it was very closely read and used. *Lectures upon John* is much less heavily marked, but some of Hall’s underlinings reveal his particular interests; in the Table, for example, he has underlined Christ ‘the greatest gift’, and under ‘Ministers’ he has underlined those headings that refer to ‘the Ceremonies’, ministers with ‘inferior’ gifts not to be despised, and that faults ‘may be publicly and sharply reprov’d’. On p. 109, he has underlined a passage referring to churches; ‘They are never a whit more holy than our houses are’. Hall was obviously interested in Hildersham’s views on particular redemption, for on p. 295, he has underlined ‘by the World they meane all the Elect of God that were to be gathered out of the whole world’ and ‘Christ is not the saviour of all mankinde’.

a period when he was most clearly remembered and his consistent stance of nonseparating nonconformity was judged to have much to say to the present situation.¹¹⁹ As Thomas Hall put it in 1658, referring to the *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, Lectures 144-150, ‘all those six last Lectures are very useful for our times’.¹²⁰

When Lewis Stucley, a congregational minister embroiled in a bitter row over the expulsion of a church member in Exeter, included a longish quote from Hildersham’s *Lectures upon Psalme LI* in his *Manifest Truth* (1658), he added, ‘See more Hildersham p. 161’. This would suggest that Stucley was assuming that plenty of readers would have Hildersham’s book to hand, or at least have access to it.¹²¹ Indeed, extant copies of Hildersham’s works reveal ownership by other ministers and graduates, some less well-known than others; one copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, for example, belonged to Richard Waugh, a graduate of St John’s College, Cambridge, who served as the vicar of Calverley, Yorkshire, from 1627-1662, while Edward Sanderson, who matriculated sizar at Clare College, Cambridge, in 1609, and John Rawlet owned successively the same copy of *Fasting and Praier*.¹²² Sadly, beyond technical corrections, occasional underlinings and marginal crosses, annotations in

¹¹⁹ William London’s *Catalogue of the Most Vendible Books* (London, 1658), shows that three of Hildersham’s titles were still considered very vendible in the 1650s: the *Lectures upon John* and *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (both described as folio editions) and *Fasting and Praier* (12mo).

¹²⁰ Hall, *Timothy*, p. 242.

¹²¹ Stucley, *Manifest Truth*, p. 10.

¹²² For details of Waugh, Sanderson and Rawlet, see Venn, Vol. IV, p. 353, Vol. V, p. 15, and Vol. III, pp. 424, 494. From Venn, there are three possible contenders for the identity of John Rawlet; the most likely because of spelling and geographical connections being the John Rawlet, who matriculated sizar from Pembroke in 1659, having been baptised at Tamworth in 1642. He served as rector of Kirkby Stephen, Westmorland, between 1673 and 1682, was appointed lecturer at St Nicholas, Newcastle on Tyne in 1679, and was vicar of St Ann’s, Newcastle from 1682-6. He was the author of *Christian Monitor*, and *A Treatise of Sacramental Covenanting with Christ* (1667) and died in 1686, aged 44. He was also a regular correspondent of Richard Baxter’s, see Keeble and Nuttall, *Calendar*, Vol. II, pp. 52, 89, 96, 116, 119, 151. Waugh’s copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI* is now in my own possession, the Sanderson/Rawlet copy of *Fasting and Praier* is held in the New College Library, University of Edinburgh.

surviving copies reveal little of the early modern readers' real responses to what they have read.¹²³ However, even the careful correction of biblical references indicates a close and informed engagement with the text. 'God is good', scrawled on the frontispiece and on the backleaf of a copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI* which had passed through the ownership of John Vernon and Francis Newberie, is a sentiment with which Hildersham would surely have agreed, but is as likely to have been the testing of a new pen as a heartfelt reaction to the contents of the book.¹²⁴ George Mackenzie's 1656 edition of the *Lectures upon John* contains a curious personal outpouring at the back penned by Robert Mitchell; the potted biography of Hildersham has already been noted, but the rest seems to have nothing whatsoever to do with the volume itself. Perhaps it was merely a convenient piece of paper on which to record his feelings that lonely afternoon in September 1747:

George Mackenzie His Book

But with me (This Present day) - Robt Mitchel This Being a Terrible Windy day & Rainy Im Not able to Tell my Mind fully. This is just five of the Clock September 4th 1747 My brother George is just Now Sleeping & there's none in the house But Me. This day is Also the 10th day of the

¹²³ To date, in addition to the reproductions on Early English Books Online, I have examined thirty nine early modern copies of various works by Hildersham. These comprise the holdings at SAO, which had originally been in the parochial libraries at Whitchurch and Chirbury (*Lectures upon John* (1629) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635) x2); Cambridge University Library (Johnson, *Treatise* (1595) x3, *Lords Supper* (1634) x1, *Lords Supper* (1636) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1629) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1632) x2, *Lectures upon John* (1647) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1656) x1, *Fasting and Praier* (1633) x4, *Fasting and Praier* (1636) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1642) x1); DRW (Johnson, *Treatise* (1595) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1629) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1632) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1642) x2); LRO (*Lectures upon John* (1632) x1, *Fasting and Praier* (1633) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635) x1); Edinburgh University Library [EUL] (Johnson, *Treatise* – no. 4 in a volume entitled 'Pamphlets' x1, *Lectures upon John* (1632) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635) x1, *Fasting and Praier* (1633) x1); Birmingham Central Library (*Fasting and Prayer* (1636) x1 and *Lectures upon John* (1647) x1 in the Thomas Hall Library, and also *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635) x1); in my own possession (*Lectures upon John* (1629) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1632) x1, *Lectures upon John* (1656) x1, *Fasting and Praier* (1633) x1, *Lectures upon Psalme LI* (1635) x1).

¹²⁴ SAO. Apparent handwriting practice can also be found in a copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI* in DRW where 'many men many minds' and individual words from this phrase can be found repeatedly written on two flaps inside the front of the book.

Moon [then follows the section on Hildersham] I find the next year is Leape Therefor February
Consists of 29 Dayes

September 4th, 1747 the Age of the Moon 10

Cromerty Robt Mitchell ¹²⁵

Some of the copies now in libraries and archives seem remarkably well-preserved, even with uncut pages, suggesting that the volumes have been barely opened; they were probably bought by such institutions as reference tools for students but have been little-used.¹²⁶ One unidentifiable early modern reader, however, did leave a record of his use of a volume of *Lectures upon Psalme LI* at the end of the book; he has numbered the alphabetical index himself, carrying on where the printed version finishes, and adding his own 'Heades' such as 'Assurance 257', 'Confidence 257', 'Trust in God 257', 'Sin 755', 'Sermon Preaching 765', 'Meanes of

¹²⁵ Rebound 1656 edition of Hildersham's *Lectures upon John*, now in my possession. The back papers also include what can only be described as doodles – concentric circles, flourishes, a sketch of a woman, a face, sums, and George Mackenzie's name several times. On the first page he has written 'George Mackenzie his sermon book' and beneath that, rather mysteriously, 'I bought this book from on that had it you Know very well'. He records possession of the book on 'The 26th Day of August 1747'. These pages also include 'David' and 'The Book is Say Nothing', but in addition they bear a transcription in another, possibly much earlier hand, of 'Christ his 7 last words', which are then listed beneath. The identity of George Mackenzie (and indeed that of Robert Mitchell) remains a puzzle; the reference to 'Cromerty' is a clue, but it seems impossible that the volume could have belonged to George Mackenzie, 3rd Earl of Cromarty, who fought for the Jacobite cause at the battle of Falkirk on 15 April 1745, and who pleaded guilty to high treason on 28 April 1746, as a result of which he was attainted and his land and titles forfeit. Besides his political sensibilities, which would make ownership of such a volume doubtful, he would have been in prison in London on this date in September 1747, before obtaining a conditional pardon in October 1747, see G. E. Cokayne, *The Complete Peerage* (6 Vol. reprint, Gloucester, 2000), Vol. III, p. 546 (cited online at <http://www.thepeerage.com/p2970.htm>). However, the clan connections made this a very popular name in Cromarty at that time, so that it is not easy to ascertain the identity of the owner. One possibility is Sir George Mackenzie of Grandvel, cousin of the third Earl, the laird of the Cromarty estate until 1741 when he sold it, and principal heritor of Cromarty church. After the sale he remained in Cromarty, having sold off many of his possessions. He died in 1748, and was buried in Dingwall, see David Alston, *Cromarty Old Parish Church – A History of the Building* (Cromarty, 2005, consulted online at http://www.srct.org.uk/Cromarty_Church.pdf). Another possibility can be found in the list of householders in Cromarty for 1744, held in Cromarty Courthouse Museum, which includes a George McKenzie of Muirfield, a merchant/sheriff substitute. Two Mitchells are also included in this list: Mr John Mitchell, a customs officer, and Alexander Mitchell, a mason and kirk elder, but no Roberts, see David Alston (ed.), *Hugh Miller index; personal names* (Cromarty, 2008, consulted online at <http://www.cali.co.uk/users/freeway/courthouse/index/htm>).
¹²⁶ See, for example, the very clean copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI* in EUL, which bears an old stamp 'Ex Libris Bibliotheca Edinburgena'. It was probably purchased for divinity students from new.

Sanctification Godliness 767'.¹²⁷ Whether this index was for his own personal use, or for sermon preparation, is not clear. A reader of another copy of the *Lectures upon John* seemed to have marked his place with a bill for building materials such as 'poles', 'pantiles' and 'nales' amounting to a sum of £1-7s-6d.¹²⁸ This juxtaposition of theology and manual labour gives a new meaning to the term 'practical divinity'. But perhaps this mixing of the commonplace and the sublime, the mundane and the supernatural, was Hildersham's true legacy amongst his ordinary readers; that he had a place in their daily lives as well as in the theological archives, was surely an achievement of sorts, however unexceptional.

¹²⁷ Copy in DRW. Evidence of a more direct spiritual engagement with the text can also be found in two copies of Hildersham's works now in Cambridge University Library; in the back flyleaf of a 1634 copy of the *Lords Supper*, Thomas Famanne (?) has inscribed '... if hee truly feares the Lord hee neede not feare what man can doe unto him', and in a 1636 edition of the same work, owned variously by Mark Duncansone (given him by his father in 1719), John Mosgrave (1772) and Allan Freer Fordel, a Latin and English piece about the conditions relating to 'Anathema' is written at the end.

¹²⁸ DRW, copy filed at 1046.M.2. I found the bill, now in two fragments inserted at p. 450. It is not clear if the book's owner was the recipient or the provider of the building materials, although payment was 'resefe of Mr Lord ... in full'. The practice of using personal financial records as bookmarks seems to have been a common one; inside my own copy of *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, which was owned in the nineteenth century by the congregational minister John Angell James, there is a fragment from a page of accounts, which includes the purchase of 'coles' and a 'Book' for '6/-'.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

If a man be in the right way, he cannot be too forward, zealous, or precise,

Hildersham, *Lectures upon John*, p. 276.

If wee shall in any wise goe back from the truth of God, bee it in greater matters or in smaller, if wee shall in any wise goe backe, and decline to gratifie the Papists, and to conforme unto them, wee may know for a certainty that God will forsake us, and Poperie will prevaile against us.

Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 796.

The surest way to keepe our hearts from forsaking and falling from the truth in maine and fundamental matters, is to make conscience of holding fast the truth even in the least matters, of cleaving constantly to the least truth that God hath revealed unto us, and convinced our consciences in ...

Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 795.

If, as we have seen, attention to detail was characteristic of the ‘precisians’ or puritans, then Hildersham was a precisian of precisians. Every aspect of his life demonstrated this exactitude, and it is central to understanding his ministry and impact. This does not mean that the big issues were unimportant to him. As we saw in Chapters 2 and 3, in his parish ministry Hildersham never forgot that he was part of a divinely-appointed national mission of teaching and preaching, which he traced back to the early days of the Reformation in England. He was constantly assessing the success of his own ministry in terms of the highest standards, God’s biblical requirement of perfection, and the godly dissatisfaction he frequently exhibited with the moral and spiritual condition of his parishioners occurred as a

consequence. All of his preaching was informed by the great doctrinal tenets of the reformed faith, and this provided the essential foundation upon which the detailed superstructure of belief and practice was erected. He often urged his hearers not to be distracted by debates about the finer points of theological controversy, those ‘nice and intricate speculations’, but to concentrate on the fundamentals, in particular whether they had been converted through a lively faith in Christ’s death.¹ Unlike some, including other vicars of Ashby (notably Thomas Hackett, Thomas Pestell and Anthony Watson), Hildersham did not allow himself to become bogged down in the petty squabbles and intrigues of parish life, but attempted, wherever possible, to maintain cordial relationships that would assist the progress of the gospel and be for the general good of the town. Haigh’s portrayal of Pestell, albeit insightful, only gives us a partial and brief snapshot of the religious situation in Ashby, whereas using the broader lens supplied by Hildersham affords a fuller and more nuanced picture of the town drawn over a longer period.²

The breadth of Hildersham’s vision was further illustrated in Chapter 4. The social networks with which he was involved were not restricted by national boundaries, and reveal that the reformed faith was truly an international one. The paradigm of ‘the best reformed churches’ and the fellowship they shared was critical to ensure a sense of oneness in the face of Catholic opposition. More than that, the invisible ‘world of Gods elect’ spanned not only time and space, but also eternity. Major ecclesiological issues about the nature of the true church and its worship were of deep concern to Hildersham, as we saw in Chapter 5. In particular, he was exercised about what he saw as the many corruptions of the Church of

¹ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 607. See also p. 785.

² Christopher Haigh, ‘The Troubles of Thomas Pestell: Parish Squabbles and Ecclesiastical Politics in Caroline England’, *Journal of British Studies*, 41 (Oct. 2002), pp. 403-428.

England. His involvement with nation-wide initiatives like the Millenary Petition and the Hampton Court Conference demonstrated his solicitude for the reform of the established church, and reaffirm the thesis of an organised puritan ‘movement’.³ Later in his life, support for schemes such as the Feoffees for the Improvements showed that these sorts of concerns had not diminished, merely taken a different course.⁴ In his dealings with separatists and so-called radicals, as Chapter 6 affirmed, Hildersham demonstrated a real catholicity of spirit. He was anxious to maintain a brotherhood of all true believers, and did not want nonconformity to become a divisive issue amongst brethren. Despite his condemnation of their errors, he could still recognise separatists as fellow-believers. In the light of this, Collinson’s insistence on nonseparation and semi-conformity as crucially distinct from separatism, although valid, may not always be helpful.⁵

This commitment to the bigger picture helps to explain Hildersham’s wide-ranging legacy, and his appeal for a disparate spectrum of later Christians. It also supplies an overview of post-Reformation England itself, from a puritan perspective, as the shifting spiritual landscape can be traced through his concerns and activities. In the historiography of a post-revisionist world, Hildersham’s career embodies the story of one of England’s parallel reformations.

Nevertheless, it is to the smaller details of Hildersham’s ministry and priorities that we should look to find his most significant contribution. Although it is possible not to see the wood for the trees, it is equally misleading to ignore the trees for the wood. The discipline of local history, and the interrogation of its

³ Advanced by Patrick Collinson in his *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Oxford, 1967).

⁴ For Hildersham’s advocacy of ‘the redeeming of Improvements’, see above, p. 173.

⁵ Patrick Collinson, ‘The Cohabitation of the Faithful with the Unfaithful’, in Ole Peter Grell, Jonathan I. Israel and Nicholas Tyacke (eds.), *From Persecution to Toleration: The Glorious Revolution and Religion in England* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 51-76.

archives, has taught us to value apparently banal and ordinary details. In his parish ministry, it was Hildersham's attention to minutiae that ensured that he became, over the course of time, an integral and indispensable part of local life. Whether it was his careful keeping of the registers, or his assiduity in catechising the young and ignorant, few matters were too trifling for his involvement. When he was engaged in 'secular' affairs, such as collecting the school rents or allocating 30s for the repair of the schoolhouse, little escaped his examination. The bequest of a dictionary to the school meant that, for a generation of boys, his memory was associated with their daily struggles for semantic and orthographic accuracy. By diligently cultivating working relationships with the other incumbents, and always knowing his place with his patrons, he slowly and painstakingly accrued social capital. Especially in the area of charity was this participation in the everyday machinery of the parish demonstrated, for example as he held 1s a week in trust for Joan Ball during May and June 1631 and approved the donation of 2s 6d to a 'poore man' in March 1630. In this context, the gift of 6d from the overseers to Hildersham's son Timothy does not appear quite so absurd.⁶ Hildersham, it seems, had learned not to despise 'the day of small things'.⁷

In Hildersham's preaching, too, the same meticulous concern for detail can be witnessed. His sermons were all written out beforehand, and display an almost forensic exactitude as he argues his case. Cautions and caveats qualify so many of his major propositions, and when he felt he had been misunderstood, he was prepared to return to a subject in even greater detail to clarify his position. The revisions he made for the second edition of the *Lectures upon John* reveal a similar preoccupation with precise shades of meaning. To him, these fine distinctions

⁶ See above, Chapter 2, pp. 89-91.

⁷ Zechariah 4:10.

mattered, and to downplay them or take them out of context results in a misunderstanding of what he was about. Any perceived modifications of classic Calvinism, however subtle, were of real importance to him. He was renowned for his 'extraordinary knowledge and judgement in the holy scriptures', and this provided the basis of advice given for the most specific of situations. Acute and directed application of doctrine was facilitated because he had made it his business to know everyone in Ashby. When men normally to be found in the ale-house joined his congregation on one occasion in 1627, for example, they were singled out for a personal rebuke.⁸

Among the godly, bonds of brotherhood were developed through the sharing of matters of common interest, as Chapter 4 demonstrated. These were not always related to the great issues of faith or experience: as Hildersham's correspondence reveals, the godly often concerned themselves with intimate matters such as establishing a fellow's financial and spiritual suitability for marriage, enquiring after each other's health, or expressing thanks for prayers and small gifts. When they resided in the households of their patrons, as Hildersham frequently did, it was involvement with the daily round of ordinary life, of domestic prayers, sermon repetition and secretarial tasks, which knit them tightly within the family circle. This same administrative capability and due regard for detail must surely have been a factor, too, when Hildersham was chosen to be one of the organisers of the Millenary Petition, which required careful record-keeping and collation of returns.

Chapter 5 argued that Hildersham's relationship with the established church, although ambivalent, displayed an almost casuistical regard for the

⁸ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 231 (23 January 1627). See above, Ch. 3, pp. 99-100.

intracacies of the system, as he defended his ordination at the hand of a bishop and discussed a precise form of wording for his licence that would offend neither his conscience nor his diocesan. His studied care to do everything by the book, unless his conscience dictated otherwise, was apparent in his conduct of the plague fast of 1625. By using the official liturgy, and ensuring his sermons did not exceed the prescribed number or length, he avoided drawing upon himself unnecessary punishment, something his less circumspect brethren failed to achieve. But within the approved framework, he was able to invest the ordinance with a decidedly godly meaning. A similar agency, even complicity, was apparent in his skilful negotiation of a system that allowed an individual time to comply with requirements of conformity: by employing the standard, approved responses to the bishop's admonitions in 1604-5, Hildersham reveals that even the most committed of nonconformists had some room for manoeuvre, and were able to gain some small, temporary victories, provided that they played their cards right. Conformity may well have been a process not an event, as Lake and Questier *et al* have shown, but in Hildersham's case, maintaining nonconformity was equally a tactical *modus operandi*.⁹

Nonconformity was not the preferred option for men like Hildersham, but became inescapable when shifting official requirements for subscription clashed with their understanding of the Bible. Forms of worship, they believed, were prescribed definitively by Scripture, and therefore only things specifically commanded were permissible. Because the 'ceremonies' were perceived as being inventions of man and not divinely instituted, they could not be admitted. To others, who regarded the wearing of the surplice or kneeling to communicate as

⁹ Peter Lake and Michael Questier (eds.), *Conformity and Orthodoxy in the English Church c. 1560-1660* (Woodbridge, 2000).

minor issues, this mindset may have appeared over-precise or disproportionate. But for those like Hildersham, the devil was truly in the detail. To compromise on even the tiniest point was to do that which God had not commanded. To bow before a crucifix was only the first step on a slippery slope to ‘greater delusions’ that would result in the reestablishment of popery.¹⁰ However, as we have seen, this was not to say that Hildersham considered this issue to be a priority: it was a ‘smaller matter’ or a ‘matter of judgement’, and as such should not cause argument and division amongst the godly. Although his own conscience was absolutely convinced on the subject, he cautioned his hearers against becoming obsessed with the ‘ceremonies and discipline of the church’ and neglecting the fundamentals of the faith.¹¹ That he felt the need to issue such a warning was in itself a sign that such preoccupations were indeed occurring. But Hildersham did not perceive himself to be defined by his opposition to the ceremonies, and his case warns us to be careful of accepting nonconformity as a defining category of analysis. He belonged to the last generation of nonconformists to exercise the whole of their ministry (albeit with interruptions) within the Church of England, and such men felt themselves to be fully engaged with its mission, defending it against what they saw as threats to its reformed identity. Any sort of division between ‘Anglican’ and ‘puritan’ would have been entirely inimical to them.¹²

The separatists, however, regarded the distinctions between themselves and nonseparating nonconformists like Hildersham as being wafer-thin. As we saw in Chapter 6, they struggled to persuade Hildersham to follow the logic of his concern about worship and discipline to what they perceived as its natural conclusion and

¹⁰ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, p. 796.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 794.

¹² As posited by historians such as John F. H. New, *Anglican and Puritan: the Basis of Their Opposition, 1558-1640* (Stanford, 1964) and R. L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981).

join them. But for Hildersham, for whom the Church of England was still a true church despite its corruptions, such a step was unthinkable. The details mattered. And so they did in his dealings with radicals; there were critical differences between the heretical doctrine of soul-sleeping and the orthodox position on the location and condition of the soul after death, and these needed to be explained. Darrell, too, was at pains to stress the distinction between '*miraculum*' and '*mirandum*', in godly exorcist activities. Polemically, of course, their opponents collapsed these nuances and declared all puritans to be dangerously seditious and radical. Even some of the godly's humbler lay supporters could be forgiven for being confused on occasions. Nevertheless, although Hildersham's experience illustrates that the boundaries between 'radicals' and 'moderates' were certainly more mutable than was once thought, we should resist the *a priori* conclusion that therefore no boundaries at all existed, or that puritanism itself was latently but ineluctably radical, as Como and Atherton, for example, have suggested.¹³

Any attempt to understand Hildersham in any sort of meaningful way, and any appreciation of his significance for a study of the long English Reformation, must maintain a balance between the big issues and the finer points of detail. In so far as the puritan cause succeeded, it did so because it provided not only an overarching world-view, but also a detailed framework which gave shape and certainty to daily living. As well as supplying answers to the great questions of existence, it offered specific guidance for the smallest of domestic situations. Its specificity and minute focus rivalled that delivered by a pre-Reformation calendar

¹³ David Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford, 2004); Ian Atherton and David Como, 'The Burning of Edward Wightman: Puritanism, Prelacy and the Politics of Heresy in Early Modern England', *English Historical Review*, 120: 489 (2005), pp. 1215-1250.

of saints' days and sacramentals. Where it became established, puritanism seeped into the very fabric of the mundane and ordinary, and to its adherents a different way of life became unthinkable. As the Laudians were to discover in the 1630s, the details of worship certainly mattered to godly people. For those who did not respond to their message, of course, the godly's concern for every detail of the manner in which they lived, was regarded as intrusive and interfering. Hildersham was very aware that his attitude was regarded by many as 'more precise than wise', leaving people with no 'liberty to themselves for company and recreations that they might lawfully do'.¹⁴ His Calvinist discourses of a 'little flock', however, prepared him for such a polarised response and a limited success-rate.¹⁵

Hildersham's worlds, notwithstanding, were the worlds inhabited by a significant and committed group of his contemporaries. Despite his extraordinary prominence, he was in many ways typical of a certain sort of puritan divinity and ministry. Its style was 'diligent and painful' rather than spectacular or dramatic, and it evidenced a continuity with the early Elizabethan period, in its theology and praxis. The experience of Ashby demonstrates that where there was a felicitous combination of a supportive patron and diligent preaching and pastoral efforts, which was sustained over a lengthy period of time, then the Reformation could have a significant impact, both culturally and spiritually.¹⁶ In such places godliness, indeed even nonconformity, could become the *status quo* but this brought with it the potential problems of hypocrisy and presumption. Non-compliance remained an

¹⁴ Hildersham, *Lectures upon Psalme LI*, pp. 581, 715.

¹⁵ See above, Chapter 4, p. 148.

¹⁶ This thesis thus supports and complements earlier studies of the Reformation in places such as Dorchester and Bury St Edmunds, see David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven: Life in an English Town in the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1992); Patrick Collinson and John Craig (eds.), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998); and John Craig, *Reformation, Politics and Polemics: The Growth of Protestantism in East Anglian Market Towns 1500-1610* (Aldershot, 2001).

ever-present issue, even if it was a marginal one. For the puritans, though, reformation would always be incomplete and fragile where any ungodliness remained in their community, and where each new generation supplied another cohort of the unsaved needing to be converted. External political and ecclesiastical pressures, as well as intricate internal debates among the brethren, ensured that life would always be complex for those with tender consciences, but Hildersham provides one model of how the problematic and contested worlds of early modern religion might be negotiated. Ultimately, how effective he was in so doing remained a question for another world.

APPENDIX

Epitaph on Mr Hildersam 1632

Whose fervent praire, cold hearers bosoms warm'd
Whose sharpe sweet strains our deafest passion charmd
From whose bright presence darke prophane[r]s fled
Wise, holy, Noble Hildersam is dead
Ashbie thy lamp is quencht & thou art madd
At heart, or else at heart thou wilt be sadd
Wher will you runne to find a font so pure
That could so full & still so fresh endure
Can that faire Orbe whence radiant fire he threw
With glow-wormes fill, or candlerush renew?
Yet all his learning was but as a limme
To the main body, as a piece of him;
Father & founder to the poor he was
The layman's counselor, the Clergies glasse
His high blood swell'd him not; in wealth of witt
Excelling, he as trifles rated it.
And from full store of tryalls I may spend
This surplusage; He was a faithfull Frend.
His life a woven roabe, without a seame
His heavenly temper an eternall theme
For tongues and penns, but his immortall mind
Raignes with Eliah. In a throne designd
Twixt him and Esay, Harke Coelestiall Quires
Prophets, Apostles, strike their Ivorie lyres
And peales of ioy resound on golden strings
While Seraphins doe clap their silver wings.

Thomas Pestell

from H. Buchan (ed.), *The Poems of Thomas Pestell* (Oxford, 1940), p. 10.

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