

Oxford Diocese, Bishop Wilberforce and the 1851 Religious Census

KATE TILLER

SUMMARY

This article reflects on the experience of the diocese of Oxford in the 1850s, particularly as revealed in the relationship of Bishop Wilberforce with local clergy and laity as they encountered the 1851 religious census and other controversial issues. It uses the original returns of the census together with the work of modern historians and biographers to discuss the interplay of national, local and individual influences at work in the diocese; to assess the strength of Wilberforce's influence on his clergy; and to contribute to debates about the 1851 Census of Religious Worship and its reliability.

The diocese of Oxford was one of the most fiercely contested arenas of religious controversy in mid nineteenth-century England. Its experience was closely scrutinized by contemporaries and has been much discussed by modern historians, particularly as regards the episcopate of Samuel Wilberforce (1845–69).¹ The conjunction of Wilberforce's strong personality, a newly reconfigured diocese and a university responsible for training a significant proportion of the clergy destined for posts across the country, together with contemporary changes in the roles of the established church and of religion in general, made for an intense focus of activity and debate. Some recent research on patterns of Nonconformity in the three counties of the diocese – Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire – in 1851 and longer historical term, has also touched on aspects of the diocesan experience of the 1850s, including the interplay of national, local and individual influences; the strength of Wilberforce's influence on his clergy and debates about the 1851 *Census of Religious Worship* and its reliability.² This short article discusses these findings.

WILBERFORCE and OXFORD DIOCESE

The modern Oxford diocese was a creation of 1845, part of the Church of England's drive to organisational and pastoral reform, moved by both external pressures and internal revival. Historic patterns had been thrown aside to amalgamate, as three archdeaconries, Oxfordshire (which had formed the original diocese of Oxford since 1542), Berkshire (transferred from Salisbury diocese in 1836), and Buckinghamshire (detached from distant Lincoln in 1845).

¹ A.R. Ashwell and R.G. Wilberforce (eds.), *The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce*, 3 vols. (1880–2); R.K. Pugh, 'The Episcopate of Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford 1845–69 and of Winchester 1869–73 with Special Reference to the Administration of the Diocese of Oxford', University of Oxford D.Phil. thesis (1957); S. Meacham, *Lord Bishop. The Life of Samuel Wilberforce 1805–1873* (1970); A. Burns, 'Samuel Wilberforce' (2009), in ODNB; D. McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy 1777–1869. A Study of the Established Church and the Role of its Clergy in Local Society* (1960); D. Newsome, *The Parting of Friends: A Study of the Wilberforces and Henry Manning* (1966).

² K. Tiller, 'Patterns of Dissent: The Social and Religious Geography of Nonconformity in Three Counties', *International Journal of Regional and Local History*, 13:1 (2018), pp. 4–31.

This change coincided with the beginning of Samuel Wilberforce's Oxford episcopate. 1845 was also the year of the conversion to Roman Catholicism of the most high profile of Oxford Tractarian High Churchmen, John Henry Newman. It was a time of increasing sensitivities and tensions within the Church between low church (Evangelical) and high church (Tractarian) parties, and Oxford diocese was frequently on the frontline of these clashes. The incoming bishop had a new diocese of over 600 parishes on his hands and took on that challenge and the contentious climate with formidable vigour and determination. He was resolved from the outset to 'be a "father in God" to men of *all* opinions amongst my clergy' and 'Never to hurry men who come to consult you.'³ This close personal engagement with clergy was matched by the active part Wilberforce took on the national stage, speaking in the House of Lords on an array of topics, diverse but linked by his belief in the continuing centrality of religion in a modern world, that to change men would change society, and that the Church of England should remain the national Established Church to undertake this mission. He spoke in opposition to the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy and to the admission of Jews to parliament; and on divorce, state funding of education, prostitution, slavery, penal policy, transportation and for the end of public executions. Wilberforce operated by the maxim 'I act therefore I am'. He was driven by his Evangelical upbringing, personal sadnesses and public pressures on the Church.⁴ Although modern church historians do not now see him and his Oxford diocese as the first or only exemplar of reformed Anglican organisation or influential modern episcopal leadership, Wilberforce is acknowledged for 'his remarkable achievement of establishing himself as a leading national figure while simultaneously gaining a reputation for a uniquely intimate relationship with his own diocese.'⁵

How was this remarkable regime experienced locally in the years around the 1851 religious census? And how was that unique survey of church accommodation and attendance influenced by it? Wilberforce as a 'doing' bishop, visited, preached, confirmed and fundraised. He had clear practical and spiritual agendas, pursued through gradual change and expressed with conviction and persistence. However, he did not operate by ordering individuals but by persuasion and negotiation. The resulting volume and detail with which he communicated is epitomised by his letter-writing⁶ and background note-keeping.⁷ His son estimated that he completed an average of 6,430 letters a year, on one occasion simultaneously dictating four letters to secretaries while writing a fifth himself.⁸ There were central, diocesan initiatives, like the Culham teacher-training college (opened 1853) and the Cuddesdon theological college, opened 1854 and key to training the clergy who would realise Wilberforce's vision. But, in tangible and practical terms, results were seen locally in a multitude of restorations of existing churches and the building of new ones, the creation of new parishes, and more generally the suppression of clergy absenteeism and pluralism, the building of parsonage houses, an increase in the number of services on Sundays and weekdays, more sermons, celebrations of holy communion and confirmations, the revival of organisational links within the diocese using rural deans and archdeacons, and the establishment of the ideal of a properly trained resident clergyman, preferably a family man, who would act as an influence and an exemplar for all his flock.⁹

All of this was going on alongside his high-profile national campaigning, his combative ripostes to the challenges of Nonconformity and of secular and scientific thinking, and whilst

³ Ashwell and Wilberforce (eds.), *The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce*, vol.1, pp. 319–20 cite his self-imposed guidance of 1845 on his future conduct and targets as bishop.

⁴ Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, esp. ch. 3.

⁵ Burns, 'Samuel Wilberforce'.

⁶ R.K. Pugh (ed.), *The Letter-Books of Samuel Wilberforce 1843–68*, ORS, 47 (1970).

⁷ R.K. and M. Pugh (eds.), *The Diocese Book of Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford 1845–1869*, ORS, 66 (2008).

⁸ Quoted in Burns, 'Samuel Wilberforce'.

⁹ McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy*, p.15. See also F. Knight, *The Nineteenth-Century Church and English Society* (1995), ch. 3.

coping with painful public and private rifts within Anglicanism, some involving members of his own family.¹⁰ He was faced with fiercely opposed views amongst the parish clergy, patrons and other laity in the diocese.¹¹ This was very clear in the months around the religious census, taken in March 1851, which show the closeness of Wilberforce's contacts with local clergy and laity.

In September 1850 a papal bull was issued establishing a Catholic hierarchy in England, headed by Cardinal Wiseman as archbishop of Westminster and without acknowledging the royal supremacy. An Ecclesiastical Titles Bill, penalising use of the titles, was introduced in parliament by the prime minister, Lord John Russell, and public meetings to petition the Queen against the Papal Agression were organised all over the country. Wilberforce sought to make that at Oxford 'a sort of Diocesan Synod'. It assembled on 22 November 1850 when the large numbers of clergy attending necessitated an adjournment to the Sheldonian Theatre. Here, as he had feared, Wilberforce's speech was interrupted by members of the Low Church party wanting to extend the protest to opposing Tractarian influences linked to Rome within the Church of England. Wilberforce had to deploy all his mediating fluency in responding to his 'Reverend Brethren'. One of his correspondents likened the Sheldonian encounter to his mastering and guiding his audience 'as a fine horseman subdues to his will the spirited animal which no brute force could have ruled. I believe that hundreds of your clergy who did not before know you are most deeply and favourably impressed.' The outcome was a diocesan petition to the Queen signed by 632 clergy of the diocese's 808 (the precise figures are Wilberforce's).¹²

Wilberforce was also going out to his clergy on their own local, pastoral ground. A notable example of 1850 was his Lenten mission to towns – Wantage, Faringdon and Banbury, the last well-known for its strong and varied Dissent. There the bishop led events from Friday evening to Wednesday morning. Characteristically he broke away on Monday, to go to London for an important parliamentary debate, but there was time around this for an intensive series of ordination and confirmation services with claimed congregations of up to 2,700, solemn and impressive public processions of massed clergy, Church school meetings, stirring sermons and addresses on the fundamentals of faith – the sinner and repentance, perseverance, and fellowship in Christ. The mission was presented as emblematic of the bishop 'giving to the earnest parochial clergy of his diocese active personal assistance in raising the lukewarm or reclaiming the erring children of her Church.'¹³

Its aftermaths also demonstrate the Wilberforce effect, for good or ill. In the 1850s Banbury saw the creation of two new Anglican churches, St Paul, Neithrop, and Christ Church, South Banbury, both consecrated in 1853 and both aimed at providing for the expanded and populous areas of the town.¹⁴ The vicar of Banbury, the Revd William Wilson, was an Evangelical, appointed in 1849 following the intervention of Wilberforce who was seeking to turn around the Church's fortunes in a town whose vicar was absentee, unpopular and had been in post for thirty-four years. Wilson was certainly galvanised by the bishop's example and urgings to action. In 1850 he adopted Wilberforce's combative attitude to Dissenters, following his instructions to refuse to preach a sermon in the parish church for one established local charity and insisting that another should be managed by Anglicans and give preference to Anglican applicants for relief. This was not popular. The *Banbury Guardian* commented that

¹⁰ Newsome, *The Parting of Friends*, pp. 24–5 and ch. 8, which conveys the intense debate and grief brought by the secessions to Rome during the early 1850s of two of Samuel Wilberforce's brothers and his brother-in-law, Henry Manning, later Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster.

¹¹ For more on this: K. Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire 1851. The Return of the Census of Religious Worship*, ORS, 55 (1987), esp. pp. xii–xv; K. Tiller (ed.), *The Religious Census Returns for Berkshire 1851*, Berkshire Record Society, 14 (2010), esp. pp. ix–xii.

¹² Ashwell and Wilberforce (eds.), *The Life of the Right Reverend Samuel Wilberforce*, vol. 2, pp. 54–65.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 31–4.

¹⁴ *VCH Oxon.* 10, pp. 99–100, 105–6; B. Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, Banbury Historical Society, 19 (1982), pp. 107–121.

The Bishop of Oxford, not intentionally of course, but not understanding Banbury . . . has caused people to fly from the Church . . . of all the charities in the town there is not one that stands so high in the favour of all sects as does the Old Charitable Society'

This was a pluralist and independent town, and in 1858 the Banbury Agricultural Association unprecedentedly declined to propose the bishop's health at its annual dinner.¹⁵

To this already tense backdrop, the 1851 religious census (which was strongly opposed by Wilberforce) added another dimension. In 1854 both Wilson and the incumbent of the new South Banbury parish questioned its accuracy.¹⁶ It is clear that both the census and Bishop Wilberforce were part of a highly contested atmosphere in the diocese and many localities within it.

WILBERFORCE and THE 1851 RELIGIOUS CENSUS

The 1851 religious census was the only such official, national enquiry ever undertaken. The exercise was characteristic of the mid nineteenth century, 'an age so prone to self-enquiry and reform' as Horace Mann of the Census Office and principal organiser of the whole project, himself put it.¹⁷ The census was part of attempts to systematically investigate and measure the processes and consequences of change, to quantify the nation, define problems and propose solutions. Those solutions might be improved drains, but equally moral, spiritual and social redemption was seen as a legitimate part of the remit. So to know whether there was sufficient provision of sittings in places of worship to enable all the population in each census registration district to attend, and how many people actually sat on the available seats on a specific Sunday was another relevant extension of enquiries by the state. Questions on the age, endowment and income of Anglican places of worship were also included.

There was a vocal Anglican campaign against the taking of the religious census, in which Bishop Wilberforce took a prominent part. In the Lords on 27 March 1851, four days before the census date, presenting a petition from the deanery of Newbury, he argued that questions should either be made obligatory or dropped altogether. As it was, replies would not be made in many instances, or be vague and incorrect, and then published 'to the prejudice of the great interests over which the ministers of the Church were bound to watch . . . if consulted by the clergy of his diocese . . . he should be inclined to advise them not to answer the queries'. Earl Granville, replying for the government, said that to do this would 'redound greatly to the disadvantage of the ministers of the Church of England.' The bishop of Salisbury agreed.¹⁸ Some later historians too have concluded that it would have been an own goal for Anglican clergy, to whom the religious census forms were sent, to refuse to respond. This and their well-established sense of duty to support officialdom and its record keeping, meant they complied. In the words of Snell and Ell, high levels of clerical completion of forms 'suggest little heed was taken of anyone who advocated non-compliance.'¹⁹ D.M. Thompson has doubted that Oxfordshire clergy resisted the census, their Bishop notwithstanding.²⁰ Was this the case?

The census went ahead, and Horace Mann subsequently reported that nationally only 10 per cent of Anglican clergy refused to make a return, in which case district registrars were asked

¹⁵ Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, p. 110.

¹⁶ E.P. Baker (ed.), *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns for the Archdeaconry of Oxford in the Year 1854*, ORS, 35 (1954), pp. 12–14.

¹⁷ *Parliamentary Papers (1852–3). Religious Worship, England and Wales. Report and Tables*, p. clviii.

¹⁸ *Parliamentary Debates*, 3rd series, vol. 115 (House of Lords, 27 March 1851), cols. 113–14.

¹⁹ K.D.M. Snell and P.S. Ell, *Rival Jerusalems. The Geography of Victorian Religion* (2000), p. 40.

²⁰ D.M. Thompson (ed.), *Religious Life in Mid-19th Century Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire. The Returns for the 1851 Census of Religious Worship*, Cambridgeshire Record Society, 21 (2014), pp. 2–3, 13–14.

to obtain information on accommodation and attendance and make returns.²¹ Examination of the original religious census returns for the three counties of Wilberforce's diocese shows much higher rates of non-return by Anglican clergy.²² In Berkshire 65 of the 196 returns for Church of England places of worship (that is a third) were made not by clergy but by a registrar or others (compared with only 4 per cent of the Nonconformist returns). Another 10 per cent of Anglican returns are incomplete in some respect. Figures for non-respondent Anglican clergy were also high in Oxfordshire, with 60 of 258 places of worship (23 per cent), and in Buckinghamshire, with 42 of 220 (19 per cent). Even so Thompson has suggested that the Oxfordshire non-respondent rates may not indicate rejection of the religious census in the absence of explicit statements to that effect.²³ Specific statements of opinion are relatively rare in the returns, but do occur, as for example at Fringford where the rector, H.D. Roundell, uses the remarks box of the census form to state that 'Not knowing the law which requires me to reply to all the above inquiries, neither the real object of them, and suspecting no good to the Church of England to be intended by them I humbly venture to decline to reply to them.'²⁴ In this he sums up the suspicions regarding legality and motive which many, including Wilberforce, had aired elsewhere. However he does make a return, confining himself to the age of the church and the number of sittings and leaving the Census Office to make one of their many follow-up inquiries through registrars or other local figures of authority. Incomplete returns, or non-clerical returns for Anglican places of worship (as counted above) occur in a high proportion of cases in all three counties. Clive Field has concluded that Wilberforce's intervention in the Lords 'undoubtedly contributed to a substantial boycott of the census by the Anglican clergy of the diocese.'²⁵ Intriguingly we know from the return dated 31 March 1851 for Chilton parish church (then Berkshire, now Oxfordshire) that news of the bishop's views had reached local clergy. The Revd C. Gaisford (the rector) remarks 'The B[ishop] is inclined to advise his Clergy not to answer these Questions. "Oxford Journal".'²⁶

The evidence of the original returns, whether isolated specific statements of intent, or selective completion, or the particularly high levels of clerical non-completion necessitating 'alternative' returns all point to clerical resistance to the census. Geographical clusterings of non-clerical returns are another indicator of clerical intent, suggesting groups of clergy of like mind in not participating. The cluster effect is noted, for example, in north Buckinghamshire particularly from Bletchley to Newport Pagnell.²⁷ In Oxfordshire there is a swathe of unreponsiveness to the south and east of Oxford, including Cuddesdon, where Wilberforce's episcopal palace and new clerical training college were situated. Other concentrations were in the Cropredy area and north-east of Bicester.²⁸ Overall levels of non-clerical returns across

²¹ H. Mann, 'On the Statistical Position of the Religious Bodies in England and Wales', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, 18 (1855), p. 144.

²² Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire*; Tiller (ed.), *The Religious Census Returns for Berkshire*; E. Legg (ed.), *Buckinghamshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship 1851*, Buckinghamshire Record Society, 27 (1991).

²³ Thompson (ed.), *Religious Life in Mid-19th Century Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire*, pp. 13–14. One of Thompson's grounds is that non-clerical respondents may include churchwardens who, in effect, represented the Church complying with the census. This may or may not be the individual case, but numbers of such respondents are too small (five each in Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and eight in Oxfordshire) to materially effect the argument for wider clerical non-compliance.

²⁴ Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire*, p. 39.

²⁵ C. Field, 'A Godly People? Aspects of Religious Practice in the Diocese of Oxford, 1738–1936', *Southern History*, 14 (1992), p. 54.

²⁶ Tiller (ed.), *The Religious Census Returns for Berkshire 1851*, p. 21.

²⁷ Legg (ed.), *Buckinghamshire Returns of the Census of Religious Worship*, p. ix. Whilst levels of non-clerical returns were relatively high in Buckinghamshire, that they were the lowest of the three counties may reflect the fact that this was the last archdeaconry to be integrated by Wilberforce (in 1852) into his diocesan meetings of rural deans and archdeacons. He had initially considered that Buckinghamshire clergy acted like 'Presbyterian chiefs doing without a Bishop' (quoted by Burns, *The Diocesan Revival*, p. 87).

²⁸ Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire*, p. xvii.

the three counties, together with the evidence from specific individuals and areas, strongly suggest resistance to the census in a diocese where the bishop was in exceptionally close communication with his clergy, and had very clearly stated reasons to oppose the census.

Controversy was renewed when the official report of the religious census, prepared by Horace Mann, was published. Summarizing the returns for England and Wales, it showed that Protestant Dissenters provided nearly half the church accommodation, that over 40 per cent of those worshipping in the morning and afternoon were Dissenters, that two-thirds of evening worshippers were Dissenters and that the number present at the best-attended Dissenting services exceeded the number present at the best-attended Anglican services. Further it estimated that of 12,549,326 potential worshippers 5,288,294 stayed away.²⁹ The results were much discussed.³⁰

Bishop Wilberforce's worst fears were realised. Once again he sought to discredit the whole exercise, and particularly the role of Dissenters in it. In the Lords on 11 July 1854 Wilberforce declared the report unsound.³¹ He claimed many clergy had refused to make returns, resulting in unreliable figures. 'In his own diocese, in which not a very great number of clergymen refused to send the return, he desired that every clergyman should take the trouble, on several consecutive Sundays, to have the congregations numbered, and to send him the average . . .' This, he declared, showed an Anglican attendance 19,011 higher (at 117,421) than that in the official return. But the greatest errors, he claimed, lay in the inflation of figures for Dissenters of 'nearly all denominations'. Errors were unsurprising as 'many of their ministers were often not in the same rank of life as the clergy of the Established Church', although the ministers of large town chapels did tend to be educated and dependable. The trouble was that 'inquiries were extended to very little places – to all the small licensed rooms in remote villages – to men who had not the advantages of education – and who were not the objects of general view and observation; and with regard to these he had no hesitation in saying there was continually a misrepresentation in point of fact as to the relative numbers of the Established Church and of the Dissenters.' Specifically he alleged that support had been drummed up on Census Sunday, that people attended a different chapel morning and evening to inflate numbers, that they crossed parish boundaries to attend chapel, that special sermons were arranged, that some meeting houses could not have held the numbers claimed unless congregations included very small children, that bad weather kept Anglicans from distant parish churches, and that 'the Dissenters were wide awake on the occasion.'

Earl Granville, refusing on behalf of the government to make available the original returns, remarked that the weather had been equally bad for all worshippers. Horace Mann refuted claims of blatant exaggeration,³² but Wilberforce was tenacious in pursuing evidence of inadequacies. He used the mechanism of his next visitation,³³ adding a special question,

Can you give me any information as to the correctness of the numbers given in the recent Census of members of the Church and of Dissenters, or as to the mode in which the returns were made on which those estimates were founded?

The majority either did not answer Question 19 or simply wrote 'No' or 'I cannot'. A common theme across the county was that Dissenting attenders crossed parish boundaries and their numbers could not be related to local residence. Just 6 per cent were prepared to accuse Dissenters of deliberately inflating attendances. A few places provided specific insights as to how the religious census had been conducted. At Chipping Norton 'Our own people were

²⁹ *Religious Census Report*, p. lxxxix. Mann omitted from his calculations of 'potential' worshippers and 'valid' absentees such as the very old, very young, invalids and transport workers.

³⁰ Earl Granville reported that 21,000 copies of the *Report* were sold (*Parliamentary Debates*, col. 32).

³¹ *Parliamentary Debates*, cols. 23–33.

³² Mann, 'On the Statistical Position of the Religious Bodies', pp. 141–6.

³³ Baker (ed.), *Bishop Wilberforce's Visitation Returns*.

accurately counted by 7 or 8 persons specially ordered to do so.' Formal counts were also conducted at Cowley and Hook Norton, where the churchwardens stood at the doors as people left. Here there was evidence of clerical objection, not mentioned in 1851, when the Revd John Rushton declined to complete details of his church's income but was keen to demonstrate numbers of worshippers. Others, perhaps wanting to use the census to highlight different issues, had resisted different questions. At Benson the perpetual curate was ready with details of his income but declined to give figures of sittings and attendances. George Riggs of Charlton-on-Otmoor had actually read Mann's report and felt 'There was evidently an animus against the Church in the mode adopted.' A cluster of clergy at Launton, Stratton Audley and Stoke Lyne had declined to make returns. At Stoke Lyne the Revd J.C. Blomfield, historian of Bicester deanery, told the bishop in 1854 that he had declined to make a return, which was made instead 'I believe by a young Dissenter at Bicester.' This anonymous registrar is unfortunately not named in the original 1851 return.³⁴

It is notable that, by November 1854, Wilberforce himself had retreated from arguing major distortion of figures. He continued to claim that the census results were 'utterly fallacious', but now on the basis of the habitual neglect of regular attendance by most Churchmen. By comparison, for Dissenters 'the Sunday's attendance at the meeting is so eminently the distinctive act of religion . . . that their ordinary congregations go far to exhaust their numbers.'³⁵

Wilberforce had revealed his mistrust and low opinion of worshippers in the 'very little places' and of the 'men who had not the advantages of education', but in the end had been unable to ignore them. Horace Mann did not try to do so in seeking the causes of 'the alarming number of non-attendants',³⁶ whom he identified as 'unconscious secularists . . . engrossed by the demands, the trials, or the pressures of the passing hour, and ignorant or careless for the future.' He was unsparing in pointing to the shortcomings of churches which made social distinctions through seating and offertories, and were insufficiently sympathetic and understanding of poverty, disease and ignorance.

CONCLUSIONS

How should modern historians of Oxfordshire and the religious census, uninfluenced by the controversies and allegiances of the times, regard the evidence? Wilberforce in 1854 also asked incumbents to return figures of their average congregations. Only 4 per cent ignored his request. This information has been used by Clive Field to cross-check with the figures in the original 1851 returns for 202 Oxfordshire parishes. The comparison shows that, whilst there appears to be some understatement of Anglican numbers in 1851, 'the level of under-reporting was hardly dramatic, probably no more than 10 per cent.'³⁷ In the context of his long view of religious practice in the diocese, Field concludes that Anglican non-attendance was a longstanding phenomenon and agrees with Bishop Wilberforce's eventual view of November 1854 (quoted above) that the Dissenters had a different pattern of worship. They were more likely to worship weekly and to attend more than once on a Sunday.

The varying responses in Oxford diocese to the religious census, before, during and after 31 March 1851, also illuminate a wider picture. Wilberforce's aspirations to lead and drive a proactive and modern Church, simultaneously preserving and justifying afresh its role as the national establishment of religion for all, could not be clearer. Detailed examination of the local evidence for his diocese shows how his influence was brought to bear and was reflected in higher than average levels of limited or non-participation by clergy in the religious census.

³⁴ Ibid. pp. 16, 32, 36, 75–6, 85–6; Tiller (ed.), *Church and Chapel in Oxfordshire*, p. 96.

³⁵ S. Wilberforce, *A Charge to the Diocese of Oxford at his Third Visitation*, Nov. 1854, pp. 40–1.

³⁶ *Parliamentary Papers (1852–3). Religious Worship, England and Wales*, p. clviii.

³⁷ Field, 'A Godly People?', p. 55.

National controversies and debates are seen to have a very direct impact at diocesan and local levels, in the case of the census and many other issues. These were known about through press and parliamentary reports, letters, pamphlets, meetings and word of mouth. Local events and personalities in their turn influenced wider events, for example the Sheldonian meeting on Papal Agression, and the Newbury deanery parliamentary petition on the religious census. Religious issues were not just a matter of a narrow stream of church life, but spilled over into local life and identities, coming up against denominational rivalries, increasingly secular organizations, party politics, debates on local welfare and charities and competitive educational provision. It was in such contexts that Wilberforce pressed on. He wrote, 'the sparkling stream, even though it does brawl, is far more lovely than the reek of a stagnant pool.'³⁸ As we have seen in Oxfordshire in the 1850s, the result was sometimes considerable waves.

³⁸ Quoted in Meacham, *Lord Bishop*, p. 205.