

Tory Anti-exclusionism in Church and State:

Richard Thompson of Bristol in 1678-85.

William Gibson

Oxford Brookes University

wgibson@brookes.ac.uk

Abstract

This article examines the career of Richard Thompson, briefly Dean of Bristol in 1685, as an example of a clergyman of Tory royalist and anti-exclusion principles. Thompson's public attack on the Popish Plot and impugning of the exclusionist cause led to his attempted impeachment by the House of Commons in December 1680. Only the prorogation of parliament in January prevented his impeachment. Nevertheless Thompson remained a figure strongly associated with the anti-exclusion cause in Bristol. His fractious behaviour brought him to the attention of Archbishop Sancroft on a number of occasions. But this did not prevent his advancement to a prebend and then the deanery of Bristol. His sermon during the Monmouth rebellion is one of the highest expressions of Tory theology. Thompson's extreme High Tory position therefore also serves to illustrate the spectrum of views within Toryism in the late 1670s and 1680s.

Keywords: Thompson; Bristol; exclusion; royalism; impeachment; toryism, parliament.

On 11 April 1685, for the third time, Richard Thompson was issued with a royal warrant for his appointment as dean of Bristol. The two previous attempts had been aborted through misfortune. Thompson's first appointment to the deanery had been made by Charles II in May 1684 but a clerical error meant that the first warrant could not be effected. There was also some determined campaigning against Thompson's appointment by senior figures in the Church of England. The Archbishop of Canterbury, William Sancroft, and some members of the Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions, which had some previous dealings with Thompson, strongly opposed the appointment.¹ Moreover John Lake, the bishop of Bristol,

and much of the Chapter, sought to exploit the erroneous warrant to prevent Thompson's appointment.² But Thompson had Tory allies in Bristol, including the MP Sir John Knight who supported his appointment and the King insisted on it.³ Consequently, a second warrant was issued for Thompson's appointment on 2 February 1685. But the King had died on the 6 February, making the warrant void. So James II's warrant finally achieved the appointment which the new King said was 'in pursuance of our said deare brother's royall intentions' and so that that appointment could be 'done and completed as if the demise had not happened.'⁴ Thompson was finally installed as dean on 25 May 1685. The reason why Thompson was such a controversial choice of dean of Bristol was that he represented an advanced type of provincial Tory royalist clergyman who contributed to turbulence of the Exclusion Crisis in 1679-1681. His zealous position made him a lightning conductor for exclusionists in parliament. Thompson also shows how widely differentiated the Tory interest was, with advanced High Churchmen like Thompson at the furthest extreme. It was for this reason that he attracted such opposition.

Richard Thompson's life has not been well-covered, partly because the sources are scattered. He was born in Wakefield, Yorkshire, and matriculated at University College Oxford in 1663; he graduated BA in 1667 and entered Magdalene College, Cambridge where he received an MA in 1670. Something of Thompson's early life is known from his own account, *The Visor Pluckt Off*, published at the height of his troubles.⁵ In it, Thompson claimed that he was of 'honest Protestant parentage both by Father and Mothers side.' As a scholar on the Old Foundation at University College, Oxford he had expected to be advanced to a fellowship but was 'unjustly put by a fellowship' and consequently migrated to Magdalene College, Cambridge to progress to be an MA. He was ordained deacon in 1667; however he delayed ordination as priest until he reached the canonical age in 1671.⁶ On ordination he was asked by Dr Thomas Pierce, the President of Magdalen College, Oxford, to

serve as curate of his living of Brington in Northamptonshire, which he did from 1670 until 1673. This was a lucky chance since Robert second Earl of Sunderland lived nearby at Althorp and seems to have worshipped at Brington.⁷ It was a connection that stood Thompson in good stead, since it was Sunderland who, as James II's secretary of state, finally effected the warrant of his appointment to the deanery of Bristol. While curate of Brington, Thompson claimed to have received 'some special marks of favour' from the Earl.⁸ In 1673 Thompson was appointed to the nearby living of Duston, Northamptonshire.

Thompson also remained friendly with Pierce who was appointed Dean of Salisbury in 1675. Pierce had been a fractious and unpopular president of Magdalen College and his appointment to Salisbury was partly motivated by a desire to move him.⁹ Pierce had preached sermons at Brington marked 'more by bitterness of gall than the smoothness of oil.' Pierce's appointment was also to shift Thompson from Northamptonshire to Wiltshire. He was invited to go with Pierce to 'live with the Dean in his own house at Sarum.' Pierce exercised a considerable influence on Thompson and it may be from him that he learned to be a dogged and uncompromising High Churchman. It was claimed that one of Pierce's pamphlets, defending the king's sovereign rights, hastened the death of Bishop Seth Ward of Salisbury.¹⁰ In 1676, Pierce appointed Thompson to a prebend of Salisbury and in the same year to the wealthy living of St Mary's, Marlborough which was in the gift of the Dean.¹¹ Pierce also seems to have introduced Thompson to the Narborne family of Studeley near Calne in Wiltshire.¹² In 1677 Thompson passed a year travelling on the grand tour as the chaplain to John Narborne, spending much of the time in France.

For a clergyman of Thompson's advanced royalist churchmanship to spend time in a Catholic country was to replicate the experience of Charles II and James II in exile. It caused him to consider his opinions about Catholicism. It also gave Thompson a reputation among his enemies of being a crypto-Catholic, or at least a Catholic sympathiser. Thompson was

later forced to deny that he had studied at the seminaries at St Omer and Douai or that he had travelled to Italy.¹³ He also wrote that while in Paris he stayed at the academy of the Protestant Mons. Foubert and ‘frequented the English Embassadors Chappel, receiving the Sacrament whenever it was administered, preacht twice, and said prayers often in that Chappel during his stay there.’ Thompson also claimed that while in Gien he had only worshipped at the Protestant church and this had made ‘the Papists there despair of warping him to their Communion, unto which he had been solicited by some offers of preferment.’ When in Blois, Thompson recalled that he only ever stayed in the houses of Catholics ‘when the necessities of travel would admit of no other.’ He conceded that he had sought out leading Catholics for discussion and had attended sermons by Peres Bourdalou and Menestrie and acknowledged that he had seen the mass celebrated, ‘but ‘twas curiosity not religion carried him hither.’ According to Thompson, his experiences in France confirmed his faith in the Church of England rather than undermined it; and he declared that he would ‘choose to live out of an Alms-Basket within the communion of the Church of England’ rather than convert to Rome.¹⁴ Nevertheless, that Thompson felt the need later to make such a full denial of his flirtation with Rome suggests that some believed he had been tempted to convert.

In 1678 Thompson was recalled from France by the news that he had been nominated by Bishop Seth Ward to the living of Bedminster near Bristol. Bedminster was annexed to the prestigious livings of St Thomas’s Bristol and St Mary Redcliffe, bringing Thompson a base in the centre of the city.¹⁵ Bristol was a turbulent city made politically problematic by the presence of a large number of religious dissenters, including Quakers. While the government probably overstated the size of Bristol’s dissenting community, it was nevertheless concerned about its inclination to riot.¹⁶ Moreover many Bristol dissenters were merchants and in some cases wealthy landowners who played a role in local and national politics.¹⁷ Initially Thompson’s relations with his parishioners seem to have been unremarkable. There is a claim

that he was a popular preacher with his congregations.¹⁸ There is also a record of a tithe dispute over cattle and an account by Thompson that he received the Easter offerings and also receipts of mortuary payments for burial in the chancel of St Thomas's.¹⁹ Later on however there was a suggestion that Thompson's churchwardens were reluctant to present dissenters to the church courts for their failure to attend church.²⁰

Thompson's arrival in Bristol coincided with two circumstances. First was the decline of royalist Anglican clergy in Bristol. The two leading royalists incumbents, who had been active in that cause since the 1640s, Richard Towgood, the dean of Bristol, and Richard Standfast, rector of Christ Church, were aging and in decline. A new generation of Anglican clergy who were sympathetic to dissent was emerging: Thomas Cary, John Chetwind, Thomas Palmer and Samuel Crossman were all Bristol clergy who were prepared to cooperate with Presbyterianism.²¹ In these circumstances, Thompson quickly became the standard-bearer of Bristol royalist Tory High Churchmen. The second circumstance that attended Thompson's arrival in Bristol was the outbreak of the Popish Plot in London.²² The Popish Plot was the discovery of a supposed plot to kill Charles II and install the Duke of York on the throne. For almost three years London was in the hands of mounting fears of a Catholic coup. Historians have rarely examined the provincial effects of the Plot. In Bristol, the large dissenting population was especially threatened by the prospect of a Catholic plot and reacted strongly to it. The Popish Plot had a polarising effect in Bristol in part because of the religious politics of the city but also because of the local influence of the Marquess of Worcester who, though an Anglican, came from a Catholic family.²³

On 30 January 1679, the Anglican ceremonial anniversary of the execution of Charles I, Thompson preached in St Thomas's Bristol. It was a performance that divided opinion and there were starkly different accounts of the sermon. Thompson's opponents claimed that he said that 'there was no Popish plot, but a Presbyterian plot.' This was a common saying and

has been ascribed in Bristol to more than just Thompson.²⁴ Moreover there was some evidence of a small dissenters' plot in the wake of the Rye House Plot, and one which had some supporters in Bristol –Ichabod Chauncy and John Griffeth, two leading Bristol dissenters being implicated in it. So possibly Thompson had some local knowledge of a dissenters' plot.²⁵ Hostile accounts of the sermon included claims that Thompson said that the 'devil blusht at the Presbyterians', that they were rebellious, that they were liable to damnation for not attending the parish church, that Calvin had advocated king-killing and that Presbyterians were as great traitors as Jesuits. By all accounts it was an astonishing performance.²⁶ But it was not the only inflammatory sermon that Thompson preached at that time. He also gave a sermon at the funeral of a Mr Wharton, at which he passed comment on the recent petitions for the call of parliament. Thompson said that Wharton was no 'schismatical petitioning rebel'. It was claimed that Thompson had admitted attending Roman Catholic masses 'beyond the sea' and passed 'aspersions' on various Bristol dissenting ministers, saying that those who went to their meetings were 'brats of the devil' who he would fill the jails with and set their meeting houses 'afire'. Thompson even railed at Henry VIII for dissolving the monasteries. Most astonishing was an attack on Queen Elizabeth I who Thompson referred to as a 'lewd infamous woman, the worst of women –no better than a church robber, her father began the work and she finished it'. In contrast, Charles II was a 'soft' king and a Solomon and the Duke of York 'a prince of brave spirit who would be faithful to his friends.' Thompson even, if accounts are to be believed, argued for the Catholic doctrines of confession and extreme unction and hoped that he would not long be separated from the Church of Rome. Thompson said that excommunicants who had not received absolution were 'surely damned.' He also asserted that John Knight, was a fanatic and could not be believed.²⁷ (This John Knight was cousin of the MP for the city and had long supported the Quakers and dissenters in Bristol. He had also been a supporter of the

Parliamentary cause against Charles I.)²⁸ Accounts of these sermons circulated widely among Thompson's opponents and it seemed unlikely that they would pass unnoticed.

The sermons did not escape Archbishop Sancroft's attention; he wrote to Thompson in September 1679 about an action that the Bishop of Bristol had taken against him. Thompson's reply to the Archbishop was that he had been admonished to present a copy of his sermon to the Bishop of Bristol and the case against him in the bishop's court had been dismissed. Thompson commented that 'if his Grace shall see fit to pass the same sentence on it, he will be content to humble himself in dust and ashes.' Thompson also mentioned that he was aware that John Knight had told the Archbishop that Thompson had married his landlady's daughter and could give a true account of the reasons for it rather than the rumours publicly circulated by the Bishop and Thomas Holt, the chancellor of Wells.²⁹ He later wrote to the Archbishop that he was the victim in Bristol of 'malignant clamour, libels and lampoons' but claimed that they were baseless since his record was 'unblemished'. He even suggested that the Archbishop might broker an exchange of his living which would take him away from Bristol and would be more conducive 'to the furtherance of his studies and the ease of his mind.'³⁰

Given the claims made by his opponents about the contents of the sermons, Thompson began a campaign of damage limitation of which *The Visor Pluckt Off From Richard Thompson* was an important element. It is unclear exactly when it was published but certainly at some point after the 30 January 1679 sermon and probably while Thompson was facing action from the Commons. It was a litany of Thompson's defences. First he claimed to have taken the oaths of allegiance and supremacy at least eight times and that he had refused no tests as a 'true Protestant' and that he stood ready to 'embrace any future tests that shall lawfully be imposed on him.' He denied he was a Catholic; and he offered five pieces of evidence of his good faith as an Anglican parson. First it was 'notoriously known' that he had

converted many Anabaptists and Quakers and public baptised them; secondly that he had catechised nearly two hundred children in the Church in preparation for confirmation; thirdly he had read the prayers and preached only according to the Book of Common Prayer; fourthly that ‘many’ worthy gentlemen of Bristol owed their support for the Church of England to him, and finally that the Church’s enemies persecuted him which made him ‘beloved’ by the true subjects of the King.³¹

Thompson’s damage limitation included asking two people to give public endorsements of him. The first was Sir John Lloyd, Lord Mayor of Bristol, who on 18 September 1679 certified that Thompson had been ‘traded’ by ‘fanatics’ as a Church-papist and a Jesuit and nicknamed St Thomas –on the basis that Thompson had doubts. Lloyd claimed that Thompson was ‘well known to me’ and was a person of ‘most innocent and exemplary life and conversation, a most constant and careful dispenser of God’s most Holy Word unto the people under his charge’ and an opponent to the King’s enemies. The second certificate was from Bishop Guy Carleton, who had recently been translated from Bristol to Chichester. Carleton regarded Thompson as ‘a person of much more than ordinary endowments for learning’ and an excellent preacher. He claimed that before Thompson came to Bedminster and St Mary’s Redcliffe his parishioners were a ‘perverse ill-principled people’ but Thompson’s work had ‘brought them to conformity and made some Christians indeed who before he came were only reputed so.’ He had converted dissenters and Carleton claimed his he was ‘an excellent pattern for all citie ministers to imitate.’ The bishop was able to make these claims, he said, ‘because whilst I was Bishop of Bristol he lived under my own eye.’ In a parting shot at the city, Carleton commented that Thompson was one of three clergy of any quality in Bristol.³² The attempts to defend his reputation seem to suggest that Thompson was aware that he was under threat.

The fourth parliament of Charles II's reign opened on 4 November 1680. It was largely taken up with the bill of exclusion which was reintroduced on the first day of the sitting. Repeated attempts to exclude James, Duke of York from the throne on the grounds of his Catholicism had become a source of contention between Charles and parliament and the parliament was short-lived; the King prorogued the meeting on 18 January 1681. Nevertheless the House of Commons took the time to attend to troublesome matters such as the reports of Thompson's sermons. Early in December 1680 Thompson was taken into the custody of the Commons. At the same time the Commons also acted against Sir Robert Cann, one of the MPs for Bristol, who was charged with denying the existence of the Popish Plot.³³ Thompson petitioned to be released on 6 December, which request was allowed to lie on the table.³⁴ On the following day the Sergeant at Arms was permitted to allow Thompson bail, pending his impeachment, if there was sufficient surety.³⁵ But on 8 December Thompson remained in custody and his petition for release was handed to a committee of the Commons.³⁶ The committee contained stern exclusionists who would have been expected to adopt a strongly punitive approach to Thompson, these included John Birch, Sir Thomas Player, Sir William Bastard, Thomas Pilkington, Sir Trevor Williams, Sir William Roberts, Sir John Hartupp, Sir Jonathan Keate and John Trenchard, all of whom were allies of the leading Whig exclusionist, Lord Shaftesbury. Indeed the majority were Thompson's opponents. A day later it was reported that Thompson was to 'answer at the bar of this House for his high misdemeanour against the privilege of this House.'³⁷ By 23 December the committee had met and Colonel Birch read their report to the Commons on the following day.

The committee recorded that, since Thompson denied the charges against him, he was brought face to face with his accusers. There were fifteen, clearly all were residents of Bristol, though their names were not recorded in the report of the committee. The first two witnesses reported the accounts of the Thompson's sermon of 30 January 1679 including all

the most inflammatory words that his opponents claimed that he had spoken.³⁸ The third witness made a rather more damaging accusation. He was a dissenter who had been cited by the bishop of Bristol to receive communion, presumably to enable him to hold public office under the Test Act of 1672. He was absent from Bristol on business and consequently attended Holy Communion in the parish of Purl in Wiltshire, and produced a certificate that he had done so from the incumbent of that parish. Thompson, however, claimed that he should be excommunicated because to receive communion in other than his home parish was ‘damnation to his soul.’ The reference to excommunication suggests that Thompson may have been collaborating in a strategy that Charles II and some High Church bishops were pursuing which was to excommunicate large numbers of dissenters and use the sentence as a means to deny their votes in parliamentary elections. The policy had the potential to exclude enough votes to relieve Charles of the stubborn exclusionist element in parliament. The voiding of the votes of excommunicants had been ruled legal, though within a few years that ruling was overturned. Nevertheless excommunication had heavily political overtones and it may have seemed to the Commons that Thompson was involved in manipulating the electorate for Bristol.³⁹

The fourth and fifth witnesses reported that Thompson’s 30 January sermon was the talk of Bristol Fair and that they had heard him say that the Popish plot was a Presbyterian plot. The next two witnesses reported that Thompson had maligned parliament. Firstly he had said that the parliament that had enacted the burial in woollens law was ‘a company of old fools and fanatics’ and schoolboys could have made a better law. Secondly he had attacked the petitions circulating to call a parliament. The petitions were instigated by Lord Shaftesbury, the leading exclusionist, to seek to push ahead with exclusion of the Duke of York. Another witness claimed that Thompson had called parliament a ‘seat of rebellion’ and that the devil set MPs on their work and would pay them their wages. Two witnesses reported

Thompson saying that he would rather cut his hand off than sign a petition to call a parliament.

A witness who heard Thompson talk of his time in France with John Narborne also gave damning evidence. He said that Thompson claimed that he had often attended masses when in France and sometimes gave a half crown to get a good seat so he could hear the preacher and that he was 'like to be brought over to that religion.' Other witnesses reported Thompson's attacks on Elizabeth I and Henry VIII and the Reformation. Another repeated the claim that Thompson had called the Popish plot a Presbyterian plot and that 'the end of it will be to bring the King's head to the block.'

The last witness was perhaps the most devastating. He claimed that in December 1679 Thompson had visited the witness's sick mother and had spoken informally about his beliefs. Thompson was reported to have said that the Roman Catholic church was the true church and that he accepted its teachings including confession and extreme unction. Speaking of the Duke of York, Thompson said that it was the English people's fault that he was a Catholic since they had driven him overseas. The Duke would be faithful to his friends and that 'the Church would be militant.' The same witness had also met Thompson in Bristol where on one occasion he had said that he 'commended the Romish priests for their single life; and is himself so; saying it was better for a clergyman to be gelt than to marry.'

The weight of witnesses against Thompson was significant. The report of the Committee indicated that he saw the witness in person and had the chance to question all of them. When confronted by each witness, Thompson had replied that he 'should not say anything at present.' When all the witnesses had been heard, Thompson was asked to explain himself. The Committee reported that Thompson 'did, for the greatest part, confess words spoken to that effect; and in other things, endeavoured to turn the words with more favour to himself: But the witnesses being of great credit, and many more being ready to have made

good the same things, the Committee looked upon the business to be of a high nature.’ The Committee therefore reported the proceedings in full to the Commons. The House then resolved *nemine contradicente* that Thompson should be impeached on a charge that he had ‘publicly defamed his Sacred Majesty; preached sedition; vilified the Reformation; promoted Popery, by asserting Popish principles...; and endeavoured to subvert the Liberty and Property of the Subject and the Rights and Privileges of Parliament; and that he is a scandal and a reproach to his function.’ Accordingly a committee was formed to prepare Thompson’s impeachment.⁴⁰ On the same day the Commons resolved to advance bills to relieve Protestant dissenters from some constraints, to investigate a Popish plot in Ireland, to banish all Catholics from the King’s realm and to further investigate the Popish plot in London.

Thompson was now in some difficulty. According to the Committee he had virtually admitted that he had used the words he was accused of saying. It was probably in advance of the Commons investigation that he had published *The Visor Pluckt From Richard Thompson*. The two final certificates in the piece were from his old patron, Thomas Pierce, dean of Salisbury with the precentor, chancellor and two canon residentiaries of the Cathedral, who subscribed to a statement of Thompson’s probity and commitment to the Church of England. The final certificate was from Aldermen John Hicks and Richard Crump of Bristol, together with twenty three other citizens, who were present at the 30 January sermon in 1679 where they heard Thompson ‘preach very solemnly’.⁴¹ They stated that ‘we do not remember that the said Mr Thompson did then say in his prayer or sermon that there was no Popish plot but a Presbyterian plot, or anything to that effect.’ They claimed that they had heard Thompson ‘detest and abhor’ the Popish plot and that he was a loyal subject to the King and ‘of a very sober and pious life and conversation.’⁴²

In 1735, Thomas Salmon commented of Thompson's treatment, 'it is easy to discern what stamp this House of Commons were of.' He suggested that the purpose of the action against Thompson was 'to terrify the people from speaking, or thinking, otherwise than the Faction were pleased to prescribe.'⁴³ T. B. Howell and William Cobbett, writing in 1816 of the attempt to impeach Thompson, noted that a few months later Charles II had censured parliament for 'arbitrary orders for taking our subjects into custody, for matters that had no relation to the Privilege of Parliament.' And it seems reasonable to agree with Howell and Cobbett that the King probably had Thompson and others in mind.⁴⁴ Certainly the petition of Bristol to the Oxford Parliament against illegal punishments was taken as a reference to Parliament's treatment of Thompson and others.⁴⁵

Thompson was not alone in being subject to parliamentary scrutiny. It was a feature of the intransigence of the second exclusion parliament that it was determined to act against its enemies.⁴⁶ A list was drawn up of those people taken into the custody of parliament who were called abhorers, since they abhorred the petitions for the holding of a parliament and defended the decision of the King to seek to avoid holding one. Thompson's inclusion on the list, as one of two clergymen, seems also to suggest that he may have attacked the Bristol petitioners as the witnesses claimed. A published *List of Abhorers* quoted Magna Carta and laws of Edward III which outlawed imprisonment without trial.⁴⁷ In the end it was the stubborn insistence of the Commons on pursuing exclusion that led to Thompson's release, since on 10 January 1680/1 Charles II dissolved parliament and indicated that he would call elections for a further parliament to be held in Oxford.⁴⁸ Thompson returned to Bristol and resumed his living of Bedminster and St Thomas's and St Mary Redcliffe. He did so to great acclaim from the Tories. Roger L'Estrange reported that in Bristol Sir John Knight and Thompson were 'working towards a very good conclusion' and on 30 August 1681 there was a great parade in the city, presided over by Knight at which there was also a sermon and a

feast. Less than a year later L'Estrange claimed that there was not a single conventicle left in Bristol.⁴⁹ The Tories' riotous behaviour in the city was said to be partly inspired by the creation of the Bristol Artillery Company, which was a royalist venture.⁵⁰

Nevertheless Thompson lived in some concern that the new parliament to be held in Oxford might resume action against him. In *A New Ballad from Whigg-Land* in 1681 the poet asked:

Where will Abhorrrers hide themselves
 When th'Parliament draws near?
 L'Estrange and They and Thompson too,
 Will hide themselves I fear...⁵¹

But the Oxford parliament again annoyed the King and so it did not have time to resume its action against the Abhorrrers. When the Bristol MPs returned from the Oxford Parliament early in 1681 the city aldermen and leading Tories presented an address to them which attacked the vilification of Thompson 'in scurrilous language peculiar to such Commonwealth Protestants.'⁵²

Thompson's suffering before the House of Commons was not quickly forgotten and mention of it appeared in a number of tracts after Charles's abandonment of attempts to come to an accommodation with parliament. In 1682, in an anonymous tract called *Speculum Crape-Gownorum*, the author attacked attempts to claim that the Exclusion Bill was contrary to Scripture and the claim that the Commons was a company of hot-heads for 'reprimanding and making Thompson kneel at their Bar.'⁵³ Tories who attacked the Exclusion MPs used Thompson as an example of the Commons over-reaching its power. Sir William Jones in *A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the Two Last Parliaments* attacked the Commons for 'arbitrary' orders to take people into custody. Noting that 'Thompson of Bristol' was committed to imprisonment for a breach of privilege but his offence was not a

breach of privilege. Jones claimed it was ‘strange and new... that the House of Commons should order men to be taken into custody for matters not relating to privilege.’ He asked where it would end if the Commons could arrest a man for any offence.⁵⁴ Thompson’s association with France remained continuing grounds for comment. In a Whig ballad *A Letany for St Omers* Thompson was named in a list of Abhorrrers who were allies of the devil.⁵⁵ In another ballad, *A New Ballad With the Definition of the Word Tory*, he was termed ‘scandalous Thompson’ who was one of ‘St Omer’s Hedg-Burds’.⁵⁶

Thompson did not return to a quiet and peaceable life in Bristol; he remained a troublesome Tory priest. At some point after his release he was obliged to write to Henry Maurice, chaplain to Archbishop Sancroft, to explain that he had fallen out with Bishop William Gulston of Bristol, a fellow Tory, for refusing to publish an absolution which the bishop had commanded he should do. Thompson argued that the order from the Bishop had not come to him directly, but he also left Maurice in no doubt that he disagreed with the bishop. Nevertheless he concluded that he hoped his letter would satisfy the Archbishop as he was ‘no contender of authority lawfully exercised.’⁵⁷

Among the Bristol Anglican clergy there were attempts to pour oil on troubled waters. John Chetwind urged Protestants, Anglicans and Dissenters, to unite against the Catholic threat in a Gunpowder Plot sermon in 1684.⁵⁸ The same point was made by Samuel Crossman in his sermons in 1681. However Charles II did not forget Thompson’s suffering in the anti-exclusion cause. In June 1683 the King appointed him to a vacant prebendal stall in Bristol Cathedral.⁵⁹ In April 1684 the King issued an order to the University of Oxford to confer the degree of doctor of divinity on Thompson.⁶⁰ In May 1684 he appointed Thompson as a royal chaplain in ordinary.⁶¹ And a week or so later he appointed him dean of Bristol. Thompson’s appointment as dean was exceptional because, as Robert Beddard has shown, Archbishop Sancroft’s voice dominated the Commission for Ecclesiastical Appointments at

this time. It was clear that the Commission was in the hands of Tory royalists and a majority of the episcopal appointments were of Sancroft's allies. He had been instrumental in Lake's translation to Bristol to bolster the Tory influence of the Duke of Beaufort. But Sancroft sought to block Thompson's nomination to the deanery, despite his being a Tory. Sancroft thought he was theologically suspect and had been insubordinate to Bishops Gulston and Carleton. What prevented Sancroft from preventing Thompson's appointment was 'the King's peremptory declaration for him'⁶² Grant Tapsell has also shown that it was clear to Sancroft that Thompson's troublesome nature would damage Charles II's interests in Bristol, but the King could not appreciate this, probably because he had not been party to the reports Sancroft had received from successive bishops about him.⁶³

Given the three attempts to appoint Thompson to the deanery, it was only on 25 May 1685 that he was finally installed as dean in the Cathedral. His relations with the Chapter, which had been appalled at his appointment, were not good and it was said that he routinely thumped the table in chapter meetings and bellowed 'I am Dean of Bristol'. Thompson also opposed the Bishop's proposal for weekly communions in the Cathedral, drove one of the minor canons out of his post and persecuted a second to illness. Bishop Lake took to writing complaining letters to Archbishop Sancroft.⁶⁴

Thompson also came to Sancroft's attention over an issue of rebaptism. A Mrs Allis, who had been baptised in Scotland by a layman, was now resident in Bristol and had scruples and sought advice on whether she should be rebaptised by a clergyman. She sought advice partly because she had heard Bishop Lake of Bristol preaching on the issue of baptism. On Thompson's entry to the deanery he took a different view from the Bishop and told Mrs Allis that not only was rebaptism unnecessary but it was also 'profane' and used 'strong language' about Bishop Lake.⁶⁵ Lake, who clearly could not cope with Thompson, referred the matter to Sancroft. Thompson wrote a contrite letter to the Archbishop seeking his pardon for the

‘injudicious words’ he used in the case. However he argued that he was justified in not permitting the rebaptism of Mrs Allis.⁶⁶ He also conceded that he may have preached ‘too heated sermons’ on the issue of baptism.⁶⁷ Nevertheless Sancroft was stern with Thompson and wrote telling him that he should cooperate with his Bishop and warned him ‘against forming parties.’⁶⁸

By the time Jonathan Trelawny had been appointed Bishop of Bristol, in November 1685, he discovered the Cathedral was in a poor state. When Trelawny visited the Cathedral, without announcing his presence, he found that because the choir was caught in the warfare between the dean and bishop there was a ‘scandalous neglect’ of their duty. The choir refused to sing an anthem and in the afternoon the organist did not attend.⁶⁹ Moreover Thompson had been fighting an attempt by Bishop Lake to hold a visitation of the cathedral even though the Archbishop had intervened through the Commissioners for Ecclesiastical Promotions in April 1684.⁷⁰ Thompson pleaded forgiveness from the Commissioners and spoke in a second letter of his ‘injudicious words’ to the bishop.⁷¹ Thompson’s relations with both Bishops Carleton and Lake had been badly affected by his refusal to prevent the noise from a wood wharf, in the control of the dean and chapter, making the bishop’s palace uninhabitable.⁷²

Thompson’s eventual appointment as dean had coincided with the first few weeks of James II’s reign. Within a month the Duke of Monmouth had landed in the West Country, seeking to raise it against his uncle. Among those who responded to James II’s call to defend him against Monmouth was Henry, 1st Duke of Beaufort (formerly the Marquess of Worcester) who was Lord Lieutenant of Bristol and commander of the city’s militia. On 21 June 1685, a day after Monmouth had been proclaimed King in Taunton, Thompson preached before the Duke in Bristol Cathedral. In the published version of the sermon, Thompson laid out his objective: ‘it was design’d to promote loyalty’ and to do so ‘in defiance of the Excluding Bill and all the Trayterous Votes and Designs of the Associated Commons’ at a

time when Monmouth ‘the Mock-King of Lyme had assured his adherents that this city was most assuredly his own.’⁷³

The sermon was a barn-storming statement of advanced Tory theology. Thompson claimed that God ‘would not have princes turn’d out of their temporal jurisdictions, nor the sword wrested out of their hands’ and that the role of the subject was ‘patience and meekness’. He went further than many Tories by demanding ‘active obedience’ to a ruler as long as his rule was not sinful. God’s design, claimed Thompson, was ‘to have men obey not to have them punished.’ In cases of a ruler acting sinfully, the subject could suspend their active obedience in favour of passive obedience.⁷⁴ Subjects were not to ‘deprave the King’s government by loud murmurings, by libels, or other seditious discourses to alienate their subjects’ hearts.’ In the rare case of a sinful king he could only be reproved by a man with ‘a special and extraordinary’ commission from God given by ‘extraordinary revelation.’⁷⁵ The obedience due to the king was not limited by scandals or by ‘a scrupulous conscience.’ Such scruples were not strong enough to break the duties of a subject ‘for a doubting conscience is not properly a conscience because it prescribes not rules.’⁷⁶ When a ruler did not follow the dictum of rendering unto God the things that are God’s, it did not relieve the subject of the duty of continuing to render the ruler his obedience.⁷⁷ This was predicated on Thompson’s extreme patriarchalism: since all power came from God and rulers were the ministers of God, to resist a ruler was to resist God.⁷⁸ He directly addressed the Whig position when he claimed that ‘to say that the precepts of obedience and submission were only provisional... is to teach a doctrine that is most highly prejudicial and dangerous to Christians.’⁷⁹

At the end of the sermon, and printed in black letter type for strong emphasis, Thompson cast off biblical teaching to address the specific circumstances of Monmouth’s rebellion. He spoke of ‘the foulness of that spirit that ruleth in the hearts of the now rebels in arms’ and claimed that they ‘colour their most horrid treason’ by efforts ‘to poison the minds

of their followers.’ He asserted James II’s ‘most undoubted right of blood’ of the throne. He mentioned the ‘Black Box and the Excluding Bill more black than that’ and asserted James’s lineal right going back to Edward III.⁸⁰ ‘No Prince ever mounted the throne... with a title more undoubtedly apparent and clear’ said Thompson. He also suggested that he might have had some direct knowledge of James since he said ‘few that have the honour to know him, do not think he is the worthiest person to have been chosen our King.’ He spoke of James’s magnanimity, sobriety and fortitude ‘in bearing the worst of evils from the hands of a sort of Men-Devils among us’. He asserted that James had ‘never yet broke his word’. Finally, in a menacing passage, he referred to James’s friends and allies abroad and their willingness to ‘assert his right’ with ‘invincible strength’.⁸¹

It was an extraordinary performance and one which could not have failed to attract attention, even from more moderate Tories. Indeed a short while later he was forced again to write to Archbishop Sancroft to deny ‘an alleged or assumed reflection made by him upon the Bishop of Bristol in a sermon preached... before Henry Duke of Beaufort.’⁸² But Thompson also seems to have been willing to draw attention to the sermon since he sent a copy to the Duke of Ormond on 6 July 1685, telling Ormond that he preached it ‘whilst the enemy were making very hasty approaches to the walls and gates’ of Bristol.⁸³ It is possible that Thompson hoped that further preferment might come his way as a consequence of the sermon. Certainly James II showed a tendency to appoint such extreme Tory clergy to the bench of bishops. The appointments of Thomas Cartwright to Chester in 1686 and Timothy Hall to Oxford in 1688 were both men of Thompson’s kidney. But Thompson’s career was cut short; he died on 29 November 1685. Thompson’s death was greeted with relief by some. Bishop John Lake, who had recently been translated to Chichester, wrote to Sancroft that he was ‘freed from the impertinence and insolence of our Dean’.⁸⁴

To later historians of dissent, Thompson was a figure who represented the advanced Anglican repression of the Restoration era. The author of *Athenae Britannicae* wrote in 1716 that Thompson was ‘worse’ than other High Churchmen of the era. He accused Thompson of wanting to burn down dissenters meeting houses.⁸⁵ Daniel Neal regarded him as one of those who sought to turn the Popish plot into an attack on Protestants and a forerunner of Henry Sacheverell.⁸⁶ James Pierce wrote in 1718 that ‘it is not easy to express how greedily the English clergy catch’d at that opportunity of venting their malice against not only the poor Dissenters but all Presbyterians abroad.’ Reciting the accounts of Thompson’s sermons, he commented ‘Thompson for this was made Dean of Bristol.’⁸⁷ It was inevitable that Thompson was regarded by some as an apologist for Catholicism, if not a fellow-traveller. This may have been the case. When Thompson died in 1685 his widow sold to Walter Harte an early fifteenth century manuscript book of hours of the Virgin including penitential psalms and prayers to the Virgin Mary that he had owned.⁸⁸ Of course Thompson’s interest in a pre-Reformation devotional work might have been simply antiquarian, but it adds substance to the possibility that the allegation that he might convert to Catholicism might have been accurately reported. Petrakos asserts that it is unclear whether Thompson was a Catholic or not.⁸⁹

Thompson represents an extreme position in anti-exclusionism and demonstrates the complexity and diversity within Toryism in this period. As Grant Tapsell has shown, the motives that drew opponents of James II together in 1688 were diverse and opposition to him should not be seen as evidence of political unanimity.⁹⁰ The same is true of Toryism in the exclusion period. The motives of those who opposed the exclusion of James from the throne were not uniform; there was a significant diversity in Toryism. Mark Goldie has treated Toryism, especially among High Church clergy, as a tendency and a range of opinions rather than a single set of principles.⁹¹ Mark Knights also sees the emerging political parties as

communities of sentiments rather than fully developed homogenous groups.⁹² This is the context within which Thompson's life should be viewed; his was a particular and zealous form of Tory obedience to the king. It was marked by aggressive antagonism to dissenters and to parliament –at least a parliament that sought to legislate to control the succession to the throne. It also encompassed hostility to the Reformation and perhaps a more than a tincture of sympathy for Catholicism. In this respect he was not entirely representative of the Tory mainstream, and perhaps for this reason he attracted the attention of the Whigs in parliament. Even fellow Tories and High Churchmen, like William Gulston and William Sancroft, found Thompson too extreme. In refusing to compromise to any degree in obedience to the king, Thompson represented a marked contrast to the subtle and flexible Tories, like Francis Turner, who was chaplain to James II, and preached his coronation sermon in 1685. Turner, a convinced Tory, embraced a moderate form of contract theory, and spelled it out in his sermon.⁹³ This would not have found favour with Thompson, nor would Sancroft's sanctioning of resistance to James in 1688.

In the context of exclusion politics, the case of Thompson demonstrates that the Church was at the centre of political events. Much scholarship has been devoted to the ways in which the Exclusion Crisis and the ensuing divisions between Whigs and Tories affected publishing, clubs, civic corporations and the militias. But the exclusionist agenda was also alive in the Church of England. This drove a wedge between the Church and Dissent in the last years of Charles II, one that the Church had to work hard to correct in the reign of James II. Thompson's concession to the Committee of the House of Commons that he may have spoken the words described by the witnesses against him suggests that he was an extreme High Churchman who had flirted with Catholicism. In the heightened politics of the Exclusion Crisis Thompson's sermons represented the most extreme expression of Tory high churchmanship that seemed to be in alliance with the King against the troublesome

parliaments. It was perhaps an untypical form of Toryism. That the Commons sought to impeach Thompson suggests that it regarded him as a potent force against its interests, who had to be publicly dealt with. Mark Goldie is right that Thompson, had he lived, might have become a Non-Juror, though the topsy-turvy world of 1689 makes it difficult to be absolutely certain of this.⁹⁴ What is certain, however, is that Thompson brought to provincial politics those religious concerns which were being played out in parliament in 1679-85.

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¹ Miller, *After the Civil Wars*, 280. Idem, *Cities Divided*, 216.

² Strickland, *Lives of the Seven Bishops*, 119.

³ Smith, *Fighting Joshua*, 27.

⁴ The warrant of appointment by James II recently came up for sale, see http://www.sophiedupre.com/stock_detail.php?stockid=34610 (accessed 21 December 2015).

⁵ Anon., *The Visor Pluckt Off*, most bibliographical references give 1680 but 1681 is the date given in Wood & Bliss, *Athenae Oxonienses*, vol. 4, 297.

⁶ Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*; Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses*.

⁷ The parish church of Brington was Sunderland's place of interment.

⁸ *The Visor Pluckt Off*, 1

⁹ Parkin, 'Pierce, Thomas (1621/2–1691)'.

¹⁰ *Wiltshire The Topographical Collections of John Aubrey*, 36.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Pierce wrote the monumental inscription for Walter Narborne, see *Wiltshire The Topographical Collections of John Aubrey*, 36.

¹³ St Omer was to feature in the Popish Plot because some Jesuits from the seminary there spoke in defence of some of the Catholics who were accused of treason.

¹⁴ *The Visor Pluckt Off*, 1-2.

¹⁵ And also to St Thomas the Martyr church in Bristol.

¹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers Domestic*, 1675-6, pp. 7-10. Terrill, *Records of the Church of Christ Meeting*, 213-4.

¹⁷ Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 165.

¹⁸ Nicholls, & Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 73.

¹⁹ Bristol Record Office, AC/36074/31 and P/St.T/R/1(b).

²⁰ Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 185 fn. 36.

²¹ Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 171.

²² For which see Kenyon, *The Popish Plot*; Hay, *The Jesuits and the Popish Plot*; Pollock, *The Popish Plot*.

²³ Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 172.

²⁴ <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1660-1690/constituencies/bristol> (accessed 20 December 2015)

²⁵ Lacey, *Dissent and Parliamentary Politics*, 162. There is certainly evidence that Bristol Quakers were engaged in politics (p. 310).

²⁶ Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 74.

²⁷ Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 74.

²⁸ The confusion over the John Knights is considerable in the literature. There were three men of the same name and family: John Knight of Sugar House (the cousin of the MP) and two MPs, both knighted, father and son. John Miller has finally resolved the differences in Miller, *Cities Divided*, 202. The confusion is made more complex by the fact that during the Exclusion Crisis Sir John Knight MP seems to have switched from the persecution of dissent to a more sympathetic position – *ibid*, 208.

²⁹ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Tanner Ms, Letters 35, f. 93. Presumably the Bishop and Chancellor of Wells has suggested that Thompson was obliged to marry the landlady's daughter because she was pregnant.

³⁰ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Tanner Ms, Letters, 35 f. 128.

³¹ *The Visor Pluckt Off*, 2.

³² *The Visor Pluckt Off*, 3.

³³ Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 172.

³⁴ *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 9, 1667-1687*, 6 December 1680.

³⁵ *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 9, 1667-1687*, 7 December 1680.

³⁶ The Committee consisted of Colonel Birch, Sir John Moreton, Mr White, Mr Papillon, Mr Upton, Sir Thomas Player, Mr Pilkington, Sir William Bastard, Mr Arnold, Sir Trevor Williams, Mr Wandesford, Sir William Roberts, Sir John Hartup, Sir William Cooper, Sir Jonathan Keate, Mr Duboys, Mr Hamden, Sir Robert Clayton, Mr Love, Mr Trenchard, Serjeant Seys, Sir Henry Calverly, Sir Henry Foord, Sir Gilbert Gerrand. *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 9, 1667-1687*, 8 December 1680.

³⁷ *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 9, 1667-1687*, 9 December 1680.

³⁸ For the report of the committee see *Journal of the House of Commons: Volume 9, 1667-1687*, 24 December 1680.

³⁹ For the attempt to exclude dissenters' votes on grounds of excommunication, see Gibson, 'Electoral religion in the reign of Charles II'.

⁴⁰ The committee of impeachment's members were Sir Wm Jones, Colonel Titus, Sir John Knight, Sir Tho. Lee, Serjeant Maynard, Mr Vernon, Sir John Trevor, Colonel Birch, Sir Rich. Cust, Mr Sterne, Sir Fr. Winnington, Mr Hamden, Lord Russell, Mr Powle, Sir Tho. Meers, Sir Tho. Player, Mr Paul Foley, Colonel Mildmay and Mr Vaughan. *The Report from the Committee of the Commons in Parliament, appointed* Petrakos erroneously suggests that the Commons found Thompson guilty of these charges, Petrakos, "'Those Times Can Tell the Story'", 395.

⁴¹ Jonathan Barry suggests that a number of these supporters were member of the Bristol Artillery Company - Barry, 'The Politics of Religion in Restoration Bristol', 173.

⁴² *The Visor Pluckt Off*, 3. Pierce's statement was dated 13 September 1679 and that of Aldermen Hicks and Crump 13 November 1680 –both before the committee had heard the witnesses against Thompson.

⁴³ Salmon, *A Critical Review of the State Trials....*, 403-4.

⁴⁴ Howell, *A Complete Collection of State Trials and Proceedings for High Treason....*, vol 8, 1-7.

⁴⁵ Miller, *Cities Divided*, 212.

⁴⁶ Jones, *The First Whigs*, 151.

- ⁴⁷ *A List of Abhorrrers*. The other parson imprisoned by the Commons during this period was Joseph Pagett, rector of Thurlaston, Leicestershire.
- ⁴⁸ Chris Patrakos makes a mistake in the year dating and erroneously assumes that Thompson was in custody for eighteen months. Petrakos, “‘Those Times Can Tell the Story’”, 395.
- ⁴⁹ Goldie, ‘Roger L’Estrange’s *Observator* and the Exorcism of the Plot’, 74-5.
- ⁵⁰ Landon, ‘The Bristol Artillery Company and the Tory Triumph in Bristol 1679-1684’. Jones, *The First Whigs*, 164.
- ⁵¹ *A New Ballad from Whigg-Land*.
- ⁵² *Bristol’s Second Address*....
- ⁵³ *Speculum Crape-Gownorum* , 24.
- ⁵⁴ Jones, *A Just and Modest Vindication of the Proceedings of the Two Last Parliaments*, 15.
- ⁵⁵ *A Letany for St Omers*. The Abhorrrers were said to:
- From all that do his Slipper kiss,
And so his Backside (sweetly) miss
From all will not his Grandeus hiss
And into his slipper piss...
- ⁵⁶ *A New Ballad With the Definition of the Word Tory*.. Richard Thompson may sometimes be confused with Nathaniel Thompson, the printer, who was a Catholic. –Rostenberg, ‘Nathaniel Thompson, Catholic Printer and Publisher of the Restoration.’
- ⁵⁷ Bodleian Library, Oxford, Tanner Ms, 34 f. 45.
- ⁵⁸ Chetwind, *Eben-ezer, a thankful memorial of God’s mercy in preserving England*....
- ⁵⁹ Le Neve & Hardy, *Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae*, vol. 1, 227.
- ⁶⁰ Johnston, *The King’s visitatorial power asserted*, 283-4.
- ⁶¹ Blackburne & Bickley, *Calendar of State Papers Domestic, Charles II, 1684-5*.
- ⁶² Beddard, ‘The Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions, 1681-84’, 25, 33-4.
- ⁶³ Tapsell, ‘Charles II’s Commission for Ecclesiastical Promotions, 1681–1684: A Reconsideration’, 735-754.
- ⁶⁴ Strickland, *Seven Bishops*, 120.
- ⁶⁵ Strickland, *Seven Bishops*, 122.
- ⁶⁶ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, Letters 32 f. 7.
- ⁶⁷ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, Letters 32, f. 46.
- ⁶⁸ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, Letters 34, f 81.
- ⁶⁹ Strickland, *Seven Bishops*, 374.
- ⁷⁰ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, 129, f. 46.
- ⁷¹ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, Letters 32, ff. 7, 46
- ⁷² Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, 129, ff 103, 108, 109, 113.
- ⁷³ Thompson, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Bristol*, iii-iv.
- ⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-4. This is something noted by Pincus, *1688, The First Modern Revolution*, 133.
- ⁷⁵ Thompson, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Bristol*, 6-7.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-11.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 14.
- ⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 17.
- ⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 19.
- ⁸⁰ The Black Box had featured highly in Monmouth’s campaign to avoid the succession of his uncle, it was claimed that the box contained the marriage certificate of Charles II and Lucy Walters, Monmouth’s mother which would have made him the legitimate heir to the throne. –Jones, *The First Whigs*, 124.
- ⁸¹ Thompson, *A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church of Bristol*, 20-25.
- ⁸² Bodleian Library, Carte Ms, 130 f. 297.
- ⁸³ Bodleian Library, Carte Ms, 217, f. 214.
- ⁸⁴ Bodleian Library, Tanner Ms, 129, f. 148
- ⁸⁵ *Athenae Britannicae*.
- ⁸⁶ Neal, *The History of the Puritans*, 574.
- ⁸⁷ Pierce, *A Vindication of the Dissenters*, 248-9.
- ⁸⁸ Now in the British Library, Stowe Ms 16.
- ⁸⁹ Petrakos, “‘Those Times Can Tell the Story’”, 395, n.4.
- ⁹⁰ Tapsell, ‘Immortal seven (*act.* 1688)’.
- ⁹¹ Goldie, ‘The Damning of King Monmouth: Pulpit Toryism in the Reign of James II’, 33-55; and Goldie, ‘The Political Thought of the Anglican Revolution’, 102-36.
- ⁹² Knights, *Politics and Opinion in Crisis, 1678-1681*.
- ⁹³ Gibson, *James II and the Trial of the Seven Bishops*, 49.

⁹⁴ Goldie, 'The Damning of King Monmouth', 51.