Religion in a Working Men’s Parish
1843 - 1893

IAN BECKWITH

WHILE it now seems incontestable that a large part of the Victorian working class, like Mayhew’s now famous coster-monger, “never was in a church”, it may be useful to investigate the quality of working class religion in this period at a local level. The aim of this short study is to describe the life and work of a working class parish over a period of fifty years in the nineteenth century. In 1893 the parish of Holy Trinity, Gainsborough, in the Diocese of Lincoln, celebrated its first fifty years of existence by publishing a jubilee history. The fact that this was clearly regarded by contemporaries as a working class parish gives the account special interest.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century Gainsborough was a small but thriving inland port on the River Trent. It stood at the highest point of navigation for sea-going vessels at that time, and so considerable entrepot trade had developed there in the eighteenth century. Goods from other parts of the country were carried coast-wise to Hull and thence, via the Humber and Trent, to Gainsborough for warehousing pending their transhipment further upriver to the large industrial centres of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire. In return cargoes of manufactured goods from these areas, together with agricultural produce from Lincolnshire and Nottinghamshire, made their way through Gainsborough to Hull and thence to London and overseas. At this time Gainsborough’s population was steadily increasing, like that of most other towns in the Midlands. At the beginning of the eighteenth century it had probably been about 3,000; by the time of the first Census it stood at 4,506. Ten years later (1811) the number had risen to 5,172, and, by 1841, two years before the establishment of the parish of Holy Trinity, the population of Gainsborough had reached 7,860.1

In 1811 just over 5,000 people lived in Gainsborough proper. The rest of the population was distributed over the four hamlets of Morton, Walkerrith, East Stockwith, and Thonock, within the parish of Gainsborough. The built-up area of the town extended along the Trent side for about a mile and a quarter north to south, and was about a quarter of a mile broad from east to west. Within this area there were, in 1811, 1,169 houses. A considerable section of the population lived in yards, which had grown up, usually in the back gardens of large town houses, during the eighteenth century. These yards consisted of rows of cottages,
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running at right angles to the line of the street and usually approached through a tunnel entrance. The cottages in these yards were three-storied and faced a row of lavatories and lean-to sheds. By 1881 it was estimated that, of the 2,319 houses in the town recorded by the census of that year, 1,200 or more were contained by the 121 yards, and that half the inhabitants of the town lived in these yards. The population of these yards was probably rather unstable. One yard which has been studied in some detail experienced, according to the census evidence of those years, a complete turn-over of its inhabitants between 1841 and 1881. Ten years later the Census showed that a further turn-over had taken place so that there had apparently been at least two changes of occupants in this yard in twenty years. It has been suggested that the cholera epidemics which swept the town in the 1830’s and ’50’s, and which struck hardest in the crowded yards, were responsible for this drastic turn-over of population. However, the actual death-rate was not as bad as was thought at the time, and the fact that the names of the inhabitants of this yard turn up in the ’80’s in other parts of the town indicates that the high turn-over of householders in the yards was due to re-housing in newly developing areas of the town.

In the ’40s and thereafter the town was steadily extended to the east and north as new streets were built in an area thenceforward known as the “New Town”. By now the economic foundations of the town were changing. The arrival of the railway in 1849 seriously damaged the river trade which fell off and ceased to employ the majority of the town’s men folk. However, the technical advances in agriculture, then just beginning in Lincolnshire, led to the establishment, in Gainsborough, of agricultural engineering by William Marshall in the year before the railway arrived. Marshall’s Britannia Works grew up, on the only area available for industrial development, that was over the open farm land to the east of the town, and, as we have seen, there followed the creation of a “New Town” on the land to the south of the new works. Other engineering works were set up in Gainsborough, but Marshall’s dominated the town throughout the later nineteenth century, as indeed to a large extent it still does. By 1885 the eleven and a half acres of buildings employed 1,520 men, and gave support to 1,064 families. Nearly half the town was thus dependent upon Marshall’s for its living at that date. Ten years later sixty-one per cent of the total population of Gainsborough depended upon Marshall’s works.

At the start of the nineteenth century Gainsborough was, as has been noted, a single parish divided into four townships. The parish church was Christ Church, alias All Saints’ and this served the entire parish. A chapelry had existed in the outlying township of East Stockwith in the thirteenth century, but there is no evidence of its continued existence after the Reformation. The parish church provided three services on Sundays and Festivals, and prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays. Its incumbent was non-resident, and for the services at the Poor House and in the outlying hamlets responsibility fell on the two curates. It was one of these, the Reverend Charles Hensley, who, in the early 1840’s broached the plan for more church accommodation with three new churches, one at the south end of the town (the “New Town” area), one at Morton, and one at East Stockwith. It was decided to commence with a church at the south end of the town, and Holy Trinity was opened for public worship in 1843. The churches at Morton and East Stockwith were built in 1846. It may be conjectured that behind Hensley’s scheme lay an awareness of the Established Church’s weak position particularly in the outlying areas of the parish where Nonconformity appeared to be gaining ground. Since the early years of the seventeenth century dissent had found Gainsborough fertile ground, and in the early nineteenth century there were several nonconformist places of worship in the townships. Morton had two dissenting meeting houses, East Stockwith had two, Walkerith had one; Gainsborough itself had five chapels. In 1827 the Wesleyans were said to have two local preachers in the District and 610 members distributed among nineteen chapels. Fourteen years later the local preachers had doubled in number and so had the membership. On the other hand the number of chapels had increased by only three.
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The Census of Religious Worship of 1851 provides some indication of the state of religious observance in Gainsborough soon after the opening of Holy Trinity church, and on the eve of the town’s main leap into industrialisation.

In 1851 the population of the town and its outlying hamlets was 8,293. According to the 1851 Census of Religious Worship 75.5% (6,278) of this population was in a church or chapel in Gainsborough on the Sunday when the count was taken. No allowance has been made here for the likelihood that many people attended both morning and evening service at their place of worship, although the words of one minister that only one congregation attended both morning and evening services indicates that this was so. The roundness of some attendance figures such as the 670 who attended one Wesleyan chapel at both morning and evening services suggests the need for caution in evaluating these figures. Thus 75.5% is probably a very inflated figure, and was made more so by the influx of worshippers to the Friends’ Meeting House and the Roman Catholic church from villages lying some distance outside the parish.

The 1851 Census gave the Nonconformist chapels a lead over the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches in the matter of attendance, as the table in figure 1 shows. Within the ranks of the Nonconformists the Wesleyans had 58% of the total Nonconformist attendances, and 37.5% of all religious attendance in the town, compared with the Primitives’ 24% and 15.7%.

Although the Nonconformist chapels accounted for a larger proportion than the Anglicans of the total seating accommodation, the Anglican churches had rather more free seating than did the Nonconformists: 44.2%, as opposed to 34.2%, in spite of the fact that all the seats in the Friends’ Meeting House were free. This higher proportion of free seats among the Anglican churches suggests on the whole that other factors must be looked for to explain their low attendances. Clearly, rented pews were not an impediment to attendance in the Nonconformist chapels.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Proportion of total population</th>
<th>Proportion of total church-going population</th>
<th>Proportion of all seating in Gainsborough</th>
<th>Proportion of all free seats in Gainsborough</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>33.6%</td>
<td>42.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonconformists</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>55.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholics</td>
<td>.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Based on the Census of Religious Attendance 1851.

From the start the new parish of Holy Trinity was regarded as being in the front line of the Church’s struggle to make contact with the new industrial working class. Moreover, the nature and conduct of this struggle, insomuch as it operated in this small sector of the nineteenth century new Holy War, is well documented in a commemorative book, published in 1893, to which reference has already been made.

““To any person visiting this Parish”, the authors of this book stated, “the first thing which would strike him is the large proportion of working men which go to make up the members of the congregation. To churchmen this should be gratifying, as the history of church work in this parish, if it does anything, testifies to the fact that the Church of
England still has the power of drawing all classes to her . . . . some of the most zealous workers, within the Guilds, Choir or Sunday School teachers [sic] are taken from those, who, during the week are fully occupied by hard work in the neighbouring well-known foundry of Messrs. Marshall. 12

The population of the parish was nearly 2,500 in 1861. Ten years later it had risen to just over 3,400, and in another ten years stood at 6,245. By 1891, by which time the parish of St. John the Divine had been carved out of the southern-most section of Holy Trinity parish, the combined population of the two parishes was more than 9,000. 8 Most of this population growth was the result of the rapid development of Marshall's engineering works. Indeed the new parish incorporated all that new housing development on the south-east side of the town in the area known as the "New Town", to which reference has already been made. Thus it was that the "Parish of Holy Trinity (was) essentially and exclusively a Parish of working people". 8 Much of this population influx into the "New Town" area came from the neighbouring villages, particularly during the 1870's and 80's. At the moment little is known of the religiousness of the rural parishes of nineteenth century Lincolnshire. 9 At Lea-by-Gainsborough, where two thirds of the inhabitants were agricultural labourers, the 1886 Visitation reckoned the average number of communicants to be ten out of a population of 186, most of whom were "Church". One reason for this low figure, said the rector, was the difficulty of getting "farm lads" together. "We get hold of them in winter", he wrote, "and lose them again at May-day unconfirmed." Furthermore attendance at the early services was said to be difficult for men with horses. At the Ascension Day morning service in 1882 the congregation was small, "May-Day Holiday preventing many attending". 10 At Roxby near Scunthorpe in 1891 it was said "The good folk have been somewhat unfortunate of late in the clergy who have resided among them, nor are they disposed to take too kindly to every person who may be sent, and whom they never see except on Sunday." 11

If this state of affairs applied generally in the villages surrounding Gainsborough it had a significant bearing on the pastoral problems of an urban parish like Holy Trinity. On this the contributors to Fifty Years Church Work in a Working Man's Parish showed considerable insight:-

"... Another consequence of the influx of new people to the Parish", they wrote, "is the need of special efforts from time to time to rouse those who are as yet untouched by religious influences. Many who come amongst us attracted by the regular work and general prosperity which the town has for many years enjoyed, have hitherto led careless irreligious lives, and have no desire to come to God's house or to listen to God's message. Others who have been attendants at Church in their former homes, coming to a strange place cannot make up their minds to go to Church, because, instead of being surrounded by familiar faces they see only strangers; so they put off going week after week and at last drop into habitual neglect of religious worship." 12

This diagnosis made a distinction between those who "never was in a church" and the lapsed church-goers who lacked roots in their new home. Rootlessness was an important factor in the problems facing the clergy of Holy Trinity.

Another factor, of which passing mention has already been made, was the instability of the population within the parish itself. The high turn-over of the population of the yards in the oldest parts of the town was also happening in the new housing areas, such as the "New Town".

"There is . . . . a continual leakage from our congregation which has to be made up . . . . Every available piece of ground is now built upon that there is no room for those pleasant strips of garden which afford enjoyable occupation for leisure hours, and give opportunity for some friendly competition and rivalry. Therefore, one after another, those who can afford to do so move away either to Lea Road or North Warren Road or Morton, [i.e. new residential areas to the south and north of Gainsborough] or some more
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open part where they are not over-looked by neighbours, nor shut in by houses as we are in every part of the Parish on this side of the railway.”

As the upper echelons of the working class inhabitants moved away from the neighbourhood in search of spacious living elsewhere.

"... We must recognise the fact that the character of the population is changing. Our parish is fast becoming the poorer part of the town”14. “There are each year fewer people who can afford to pay for sittings in Church.”15

Until their removal in 1869 the first four seats in the nave were high pews “thus presenting a kind of offensive barrier between the free seats and the chancel”. Speaking in 1868 of the intention to free the seats in the nave, the vicar hoped “that the working classes, to whom this change is specially useful, will contribute voluntarily towards the expense of this work.”16 Holy Trinity parish was thus being steadily depressed as the inhabitants of the tenement yards in the older parts of Gainsborough moved into the “New Town” area. In addition to these problems there were many men living in lodgings in the parish who lacked the stability of family life. Ministering to their needs formed a special part of Holy Trinity’s mission.

Of the four men who served Holy Trinity as priests during the first fifty years of the parish’s existence, the outstanding personality belonged to George Langton Hodgkinson, the third incumbent.17 G. L. Hodgkinson’s ministry in the parish lasted for fourteen years and this period was a highly creative one for the life of the Church in Gainsborough. Undoubtedly it was Hodgkinson who inaugurated many of the pastoral techniques described in Fifty Years Church Work. He was clearly a well-loved priest and it is perhaps a measure of the mark he made in what was after all an essentially rural diocese that this incumbent of a new urban industrial parish was made Prebend of the Decem Librarum in 1876. He was a clerical member of the Diocesan conference and was appointed to the Committee set up in the Diocese in 1887 for Higher Education in Religious Knowledge. He left Holy Trinity in 1891 for St. Lawrence parish, Northfield, in the new Diocese of Birmingham. St. Lawrence’s was a parish also undergoing urbanisation, from the development of the Bourneville Estate which began in 1895, and it is probable that Hodgkinson’s experience at Holy Trinity, Gainsborough, was a cardinal factor in his appointment in this new industrial diocese.18

"In the industrial city", in the words of a recent writer, "was no squire, no parson, no tradition, no community. Instead there was a proletariat."19 Men like the Reverend George Langton Hodgkinson set out to create a new tradition and a new community life. The techniques he used in his pastoral work were intended to educate as well as to convert the people: "they enabled them (the working men of his parish) not only to give a reason for their belief, when called upon, but also taught them to use their tongues effectively in public..."20 Doubtless the drift out of the parish on the part of the skilled artisan and his family was the inevitable result of the values inculcated by Hodgkinson and his curates.

Mann gave as one of the reasons for the indifference of the poor to religion, which the Census of Religious Worship revealed in 1851, a misconception about the motives of parsons, who, because they received pecuniary support for their work, were thought to be acting from selfishness. “The Ministers,” he said, “are distrusted - the poor keep stubbornly aloof: how shall access to them be obtained?” One of Mann’s solutions was the use of a lay agency to reach minds “indifferent or hostile to the regular clergy.”21 The use of lay-readers was an important feature of the pastoral work in Holy Trinity. One of these lay-readers, German Wheatcroft Danks, was in fact made deacon in 1872, served his title in Holy Trinity, and became Vicar of the new parish of St. Paul, Morton-by-Gainsborough. Danks himself, on the basis of his own experience, strenuously advocated the appointment of a large body of readers in the Church, to be a distinct order authorised by the Bishop, in the Diocesan Conference of 1873, when he described himself as “an old reader.”22 Danks was "middle class" in origin, having been manager of the Gainsborough branch of the Nottingham Bank before his ordination. Another Holy Trinity lay-reader who perhaps came closer to Mann’s ideal of a
really effective lay-agency, able to gain ready access to the poor, and "having no professional garb" was J. Donson, a seed porter in one of the four oil-cake mills in the town.

A lay agency such as this needed training and it is perhaps significant that, in the year in which G. W. Danks became a reader, a Men's Guild was established. Hodgkinson regarded this as "one of the first and most important moves that we made." It was obviously a work which was close to his heart because he recorded that "The monthly meetings of the Men's Guild were always the happiest hours of my Parish life". He described the Men's Guild as "the backbone of our work". It was an important forum of parish affairs. "Nothing was ever originated in the Parish without being first talked over at a meeting of the Men's Guild". The Men's Guild originated in the first Parish Mission, conducted in 1872 by Father Luke Rivington, s.s.j.e. This mission revealed:-

"that many men during their daily work were very much questioned and scoffed at by their comrades, and as it is always much easier to put a question than to successfully answer it, many new converts to the Church were often times placed in a false position." The Guild met on Saturdays with two objects: to prepare its members for the Sunday Communion, and to give instruction in Church History, Faith, and Ritual. The role of the Men's Guild was described thus:-

"To many working men, especially those who had not homes of their own and were in lodgings, this was a very valuable boon, as it not only taught them the necessity of preparation for the Holy Eucharist but also gave them facilities for the same, which they could not otherwise have had." One of the results of the Men's Guild meetings was a conference of working men held at Holy Trinity in 1873 under Bishop Wordsworth's chairmanship. This conference discussed the reasons for the Church's loss of influence among the working classes and how this influence could be regained. Papers were read by a machine-tool fitter, a joiner, a mechanic, a seed porter (J. Donson), a tin-plate worker, an iron turner, and a chemist. Here was positive evidence of Hodgkinson's success in teaching his artisan parishioners to use their tongues effectively in public.

Closely associated in spirit with the Men's Guild was the Church Institute, founded in 1868 to gather and educate young churchmen by lectures and debates. This was the first working men's club in Gainsborough and shows the initiative taken by the Established Church in this town to provide amenities for working men. Later, however, other secular clubs were set up, all of which sold intoxicating drinks which made large profits. These secular clubs were therefore able to buy more periodicals and newspapers than could the Church Institute which offered its members papers in a reading room, a small library, a football club, and a cycling club. The members of the Men's Guild and the Institute were enlisted in the evangelical work of the parish. Some of the men held a service on Sunday evenings:-

"not so much meant for children who attended Sunday Schools as for those who go nowhere, and we fear that in spite of the many flourishing Sunday Schools in the town there are many such to be found in our courts and lanes. . . . . a band of earnest men has gone out on Sunday evenings before the service into the courts of Bridge Street (i.e. one of the oldest parts of the town where the overcrowded yards were a nightmare), and in consequence a good congregation has been gathered together. There is much room for work of a missionary character in this part of the town." Hodgkinson expected every Guildsman to undertake some definite church work in the parish. The parish was divided into districts each with a visitor responsible for about thirty houses. An important role in parish visiting was thus played by the men of the Guild and Institute. The parish magazine, started in 1873, also performed an important function in the pastoral work of the parish, and was regarded by the vicar as a means of preparation and instruction, rather than as purely a record of past events. Nor was the well-being of the female sector of the population neglected. A sympathetic
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insight into the problems of working men's wives resulted in a Mothers' Meeting. "Many women who cannot often get away from home because of 'the baby'," Hodgkinson said, "find this a helpful and pleasant change, because they can take 'the baby' with them; and as the meeting is for mothers they don't mind a little crying or fidgeting on the part of the children because they are used to it." For younger women an Evening Continuation School was held twice weekly. Its members paid twopence a week (refunded at the end of the course to regular scholars) to study writing, reading, geography, history, domestic economy, and needlework.

The weekly Gainsborough News in 1887 and 1888 conducted its own census of religious worship in the town which helps to show the impact of this pastoral activity. The count was made at three separate times of the day, on the model of the 1851 Census. The total attendance in the town in the two years was as shown in Table 2. The percentages represent the proportion of the total population, taking the 1891 Census figure of 14,442 as indicating approximately the size of the town in 1887-8. While there had clearly been a decline in

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Church of England</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Roman Catholic</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Nonconformist</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>3,239</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>241</td>
<td></td>
<td>4,507</td>
<td>31.2</td>
<td>7,987</td>
<td>55.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>3,054</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>97</td>
<td></td>
<td>3,599</td>
<td>24.7</td>
<td>6,750</td>
<td>46.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2.*

religious observance since 1851, it seems to have been most severely felt among the Roman Catholic and Nonconformist churches. The Anglican attendance was shared between the three parishes of All Saints, Holy Trinity, and St. John's as follows:-

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>All Saints'</th>
<th>Holy Trinity</th>
<th>St. John's</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1,509</td>
<td>1,055</td>
<td>675</td>
<td>3,239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>1,255</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>902</td>
<td>3,054</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3.*

If the congregations of St. John's, whose parish had been carved out of the southern part of Holy Trinity, are added to the latter's, the combined attendance at these two working class churches exceeded that of the church of All Saints' in both 1887 and 1888. The figures in Table 4 give some indication of the background to the census of religious worship from the time when G. L. Hodgkinson became Vicar of Holy Trinity. They suggest that, to some extent, Hodgkinson was beginning to achieve results, at least so far as the Easter Day communions were concerned. The opening of St. John's church in 1882 made its impact felt in the number of confirmations, Sunday, and Easter communions.

35
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Confirmations</th>
<th>Sunday Communicants</th>
<th>Easter Communicants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1867</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1873</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1874</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1877</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1876</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1879</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1882</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.
Confirmations and communicants calculated per thousand of the population.

When Hodgkinson first went to Holy Trinity the parish was known as “Poor Trinity”. The income of the living was derived from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, from money invested in the hands of Queen Anne’s Bounty, from rents, fees, and pew-rents. The gross income from these sources amounted to something of the order of £150 a year, but deductions had to be made for the curate’s stipend, rates, and taxes. In 1879 the Ecclesiastical Commissioners augmented their subsidy which brought the gross income to £350, but this was offset by increases in rates consequent upon urban improvement schemes and administrative changes in Gainsborough.24 Table 5 shows some of the salient features of the parish accounts for four years.25 Until the opening of St. John’s in 1882 the offertory showed a steady upward trend, reaching the figure of £250 in 1881. Perhaps some indication of the social and economic level of the parish is to be found in the comment of the vicar in 1870 that “although the amount is larger than the sum collected in 1869, the increase is found in the number of £5 notes, pennies and half-pennies.”26 In both 1870 and 1871, the only years for which details are available, small denomination coins constituted the bulk of the offertory. Coins of one shilling and less in size amounted to £99 in 1870, and to £121 in 1871. The increase in the latter years was chiefly in shillings, sixpences, pennies, and half-pennies. The expenditure on the poor was the second largest single item in the church accounts. The bulk of this went in monthly doles, presumably to the elderly, sick, or widowed. The rest went in casual relief and blankets.27

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Offertory</th>
<th>Expenditure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Poor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1868</td>
<td>£ 153 s. 2 d.</td>
<td>£ 60 s. 10 d.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1869</td>
<td>172 19 5</td>
<td>44 10 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1870</td>
<td>182 4 1</td>
<td>43 5 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1871</td>
<td>188 10 9</td>
<td>41 11 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.
The object of this paper was to describe conditions in a small urban parish faced with a trebling of its population during a fairly brief interval of time, a parish, moreover, composed essentially of working class people. Insofar as any general conclusions can be drawn, they are perhaps these. The evidence of Holy Trinity parish suggests that a census of religious worship may conceal as much as it reveals. Although, compared with the national census of 1851, the local census in 1888 revealed that Gainsborough had apparently undergone a decline in religious observance, nevertheless, as it is hoped this paper has shown, there were areas where a low religious attendance does not necessarily imply anything about the religious life of any one section of the community. While it would be necessary to make a study of the social complexion of the other congregations in Gainsborough before making any assertions, it may be suggested that in the working class area covered by the two parishes of Holy Trinity and St. John's there is evidence that in 1887 and 1888 the attendance at church was better than at the old parish church of All Saints'. Moreover, the contemporary account of the parish, to which so many references have been made during this paper, indicates that complex factors were at work determining the religious life of the parish. These factors were closely associated with the movement of population into and out of the parish. The movement of people into the parish brought with it problems of rootlessness, even among those families accustomed to attending church or chapel in their place of origin. On the other hand the writers of *Fifty Years Church Work in a Working Men's Parish* observed that lack of religion was not necessarily a condition produced by an urban industrial community. Many of the newcomers from the surrounding rural area were not church-goers. The movement of people out of the parish had a depressive effect on parish life, as the better-off artisans made way for the poorer people from the older areas of the town. This trend may be observed in the increasing number of coins of small denomination in the offertory. On the other hand it does not necessarily mean that the number of worshippers was depressed, as the 1887-8 censuses show. On the other hand this is not to say that the process of industrialisation in Gainsborough after 1860 did not have any effects on religious life in the town. Two features which stand out clearly in this respect were the presence of a large number of unmarried men in lodgings, for whom special missionary efforts were needed, and the circumstances of the working class wives, who were without servants to mind their children. Moreover, it seems possible that in the yards (the poorest parts of the parish) irreligion was greater than in the newly-built terraced streets of the "New Town". Whether movement out of the yards into the more respectable "New Town" was accompanied by the beginnings of church-going it is impossible to say. Finally the local censuses of 1887 and 1888 reveal a considerable fluctuation in religious attendance over twelve months, from 55.3% to 46.7%, of the total population, and casts further doubt on the validity of calculations based solely on the count of 1851.

However, perhaps the main purpose of this study has been served if it brings to wider notice the lively contemporary description of a nineteenth century working class parish in action contained in a book *Fifty Years Church Work in a Working Men's Parish*. The final comment should naturally come from the Reverend George Langton Hodgkinson, vicar of Holy Trinity from 1867 to 1891. Writing one year before his departure to the Diocese of Birmingham, he said "Gainsborough ought soon to be a representative town for Church life".40
RELIGION IN A WORKING MEN’S PARISH 1843 - 1893

Notes

7 Fifty Years Church Work in a Working-Men’s Parish; being a History of Holy Trinity, Gainsborough, Gainsborough, 1894.
9 Ibid, p. 25.
11 See Dugdale, Visitation of the parish of Lees-by-Gainsborough in the parish chest. I am grateful to the Rector, the Rev. J. Knight, for permission to examine them.
12 Scunthorpe Star, 14th March, 1891.
14 Ibid, p. 36.
15 Ibid, p. 36.
16 Ibid, p. 36.
18 The others were Charles Hensley, M.A. (Cantab.) 1843-54; William Armstrong Frith, M.A. (Oxon.) 1854-67; Francis Higgs Dulby, M.A. (Oxon.) 1891-1902.
20 O. Chadwick The Victorian Church, 1966, p. 325.
21 Fifty Years Church Work . . . . . . , p. 40.
23 Lincoln, Rutland, and Stamford Mercury, 3rd October, 1873.
24 Notes in Hodgkinson’s own hand, in Parochialia.
25 Fifty Years Church Work . . . . . . , p. 40.
27 The report of the conference was said to have inspired the working men of St. Alban’s, Holborn, to form a society which later became the Church of England’s Men’s Society, but I have not been able to check the truth of this allegation.
28 Fifty Years Church Work . . . . . . , p. 68.
29 Ibid, p. 69.
30 Parish Magazine profits were ploughed back into the parish. Up to 1891 it had contributed £50 to the Church Institute and £60 to lighting, heating, and furnishing a new mission room.
31 Fifty Years Church Work . . . . . . , p. 40.
32 Gainsborough News, 1888. The enumerators claimed that their returns represented a fair sample of the average attendance at each place of Worship. The 1887 figures were possibly inflated by the attendance of the Volunteers at All Saints’ and by special anniversary services at the Primitive Methodist Chapel. The 1888 figures were possibly enlarged by the fact that the census was taken on Whit-Sunday. These figures should be compared with the total accommodation in the various churches and chapels in Gainsborough. The total seating in Anglican churches was 1,975 compared with 1,400 in Nonconformist places of worship.
33 Based on figures in Parochialia. Population for each year is assumed to be approximately that of the nearest preceding census. These figures take no account of such effects as that of the wet weather which Hodgkinson noted reduced Easter communicons in 1869.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 Holy Trinity also disposed of certain charities, most of which were distributed to inhabitants in the yards, the oldest and most depressed part of the parish.
38 Some 150 new houses have been built so that the population cannot now be much short of 6,000 . . .”;
39 Fifty Years Church Work . . . . . . , p. 36.
40 “Holy Trinity is essentially and exclusively a parish of working people.” Ibid, 0p. 25.
41 Lincoln Diocesan Magazine, 1890, p. 188. I am particularly indebted to the Rev. L. Standley, until recently Vicar of Holy Trinity Church, Gainsborough, who kindly placed all the papers in the parish chest at my disposal, and to Mr. J. S. English, the Gainsborough Public Librarian, for allowing me access to books and sources in his charge, including photocopies of the Gainsborough Sheets of the 1831 Census of Religious Worship.