



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

## CHURCHGOING IN THE CRADLE OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY: KENTISH EVIDENCE FROM THE SIXTEENTH TO THE TWENTIETH CENTURIES

CLIVE D. FIELD

Churchgoing has been the practical hallmark of Christianity for much of its history, and a central tenet of its teaching. Additionally, in England, for most of the period since the Reformation, between 1552 and 1969, there existed a statutory obligation on the population to attend some place of religious worship on Sundays.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which this duty was observed is increasingly apparent for the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for which there are many national and local sources of church attendance,<sup>2</sup> of which the single best known is probably the 1851 census of religious worship,<sup>3</sup> the Kentish returns for which have been the subject of a splendid modern edition.<sup>4</sup> Gill's book<sup>5</sup> is an especially useful analysis of a good number of these surveys, and he has separately written about churchgoing in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Kent with particular reference to Bromley.<sup>6</sup> However, as yet, remarkably little is known about the level of religious practice for the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries, although this has not prevented some scholars from making rather extravagant claims about the subject, notably Jacob who, on the basis of evidence which he concedes to be 'mostly circumstantial and haphazard' and 'limited and difficult to evaluate', proceeds to provide a very upbeat account of church attendance in the early Hanoverian era, when, according to him, the Church of England 'perhaps reached the zenith of its allegiance among the population of England and Wales'.<sup>7</sup>

This article analyses a hitherto relatively neglected late eighteenth-century source for churchgoing (the clergy visitation returns for the Diocese of Canterbury) within the context of a headline summary of the information which exists, in the published primary and secondary literature, about the situation in Kent prior to 1750 and since 1800. The paper does not attempt to rehearse the religious history of early modern and modern Kent, for which the extended essay by Yates is an excellent introduction at county level,<sup>8</sup> with Killingray offering a useful case study of Sevenoaks.<sup>9</sup>

*Kentish churchgoing before 1750*

During the Middle Ages failure to attend services had been subject solely to ecclesiastical sanctions, such as admonition, penance and excommunication, as applied by the episcopal courts. Under such circumstances, a degree of religious negligence is likely to have existed, and, in Kent, this was confirmed by the visitation of the Archdeacon of Canterbury in 1511-12, on the very eve of the Reformation. In the Deanery of Lyminge the situation had apparently become so bad that a general warning to the laity to attend church had to be issued, accompanied by a threat of defaulters being reported to the Archbishop. In Lydd many resorted to alehouses or conversed in the churchyard during the hours of worship. Elsewhere, Sunday trading was already causing problems. In the Deanery of Canterbury the hackney horse men stood accused of buying and selling at the time of divine service, while in the parish of Canterbury St Mary Magdalen the butchers kept their shops open during worship. A fair number of individuals were cited for seldom or never attending church, including William Mett of Canterbury St Paul, who was alleged to have been absent for four years.<sup>10</sup>

After the Reformation provision for compulsory attendance at the Anglican parish church was made in the Edwardian Act of Uniformity in 1552 and reaffirmed, and penalties for breach augmented, in further statutes of 1558 (which introduced a fine of twelve pence for each absence), 1581, 1587, 1593 and 1605. The Elizabethan and Jacobean regime's principal concern was with Roman Catholic recusants and Protestant sectaries, whose activities were thought to threaten the unity of Church and state and, in the former case, to compromise national security, but these laws were also designed to catch those dubbed by contemporaries as 'practical atheists'. Enforcement was in the hands of both ecclesiastical and civil officers. The Church acted particularly through its system of ecclesiastical courts,<sup>11</sup> with presentments made by churchwardens before episcopal and archidiaconal visitations. In the articles issued preparatory to visitation, it was usual to include a specific question about church attendance. Thus, in his articles of 1563, Archbishop Parker of Canterbury enquired whether there were 'anye that commonly absente them selves from theyre owne church or otherwise idely or lewdly prophaneth the Sabbath day', and similar wording was adopted in other articles in the Diocese of Canterbury up to the English Civil War, although the preoccupation seemed increasingly to be with the conformity of those aged sixteen years and above.<sup>12</sup>

However, apart from persons with theological and ideological reasons for absenting themselves from the parish church, the authorities were far from consistent in pursuing the more casual non-churchgoers. Tolerance was normally shown to certain classes of the population, including the

aged, the sick and the poor (who would have been unable to pay the shilling penalty),<sup>13</sup> and such action as was taken was often targeted against exceptional transgressors only, in terms either of the unusual length of their absence and/or their ability to influence the behaviour of others. For instance, at Reculver in 1618 there was cited 'Richard Bowerman, for that he does (above many others that are often absent, whose reformation I wish by example of one principal offender, than their molestation by the expense of money) very often absent himself from our parish church'. At Birchington in 1622 Nathaniel Wyhall was in trouble not just for missing worship himself but for being a drummer and leading the youth of the parish away during the time of divine service.<sup>14</sup> Churchwardens were also pursued, either for non-attendance themselves (as with William Bridge at Seasalter in 1591),<sup>15</sup> or because they failed to cite their neighbours for the offence (like John Keete at Reculver in 1640-41).<sup>16</sup>

Presentments before the ecclesiastical courts for non-attendance probably, therefore, only represented the tip of the iceberg, which may explain their relatively small number; thus, at Cranbrook in the Weald, Kent's largest and most populous parish, a mere 14 of 717 presentments over a period of 47 years were for absence from church.<sup>17</sup> What this may have implied for actual levels of churchgoing on the ground is hard to conjecture, and Archbishop Whitgift's so-called ecclesiastical census of 1603 is not especially illuminating in this regard. Detailed returns for the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester have not survived, and the summary figures appear incomplete. Although parochial data are available for Rochester from a similar survey in 1608, it covers only communicants, not religious practice as a whole.<sup>18</sup> In the absence of firm statistics, Clark has ventured the opinion that 'probably something like a fifth of the population of Kent stayed away from church on a regular basis in the late sixteenth century'. This estimate was founded upon the numbers of unabsolved excommunicates (who were barred from church), tramps and the suburban poor, and people living in extra-parochial areas of the county.<sup>19</sup>

During the second half of the seventeenth century the state intermittently toyed with concessions to religious liberty, to allow a degree of freedom of worship while continuing to insist upon the necessity of people attending some form of Christian devotions, but not necessarily Anglican. The religious diversity in Kent during the 1640s and 1650s exemplified the challenge faced by the authorities.<sup>20</sup> Parliament first enacted a measure of toleration in 1650, which was reversed by the Act of Uniformity of 1662, after which there was a renewed attempt to coerce attendance at the parish church. This can be traced in the reappearance, in visitation articles for the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester, of calls on churchwardens to present absentees and to impose the shilling fine.<sup>21</sup> But the focus was mainly on prosecuting the ringleaders of the nascent Dissent, not on

proceeding against careless absenters. This policy was briefly reversed in 1672-73 when Charles II's Declaration of Indulgence was in operation, which caused a large number in the Diocese of Canterbury to cease to attend Church of England services,<sup>22</sup> not all of them avowed Dissenters, the measure being often used as a shelter for giving up public worship altogether. By 1676 enforcement had been resumed, and the taking of the Compton Census in that year brought many in the Diocese of Canterbury back to the fold. This high-point of Anglican conformity is often illustrated by Laslett's citation of the impressive number receiving Easter Holy Communion at Goodnestone in Kent in 1676, underpinning his claim that 'all our ancestors were literal Christian believers, all of the time'.<sup>23</sup> The census itself revealed that, in the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester combined, 9.2 per cent of the population were Nonconformists (10.6 per cent in Canterbury and 6.3 per cent in Rochester) and 0.2 per cent Roman Catholic.<sup>24</sup>

But a more general neglect continued to coexist with the piety of Dissent, as lamented by the vicar of Leeds and rural dean of Sutton in the early 1680s:

There is great reason to complain of many of ye meaner sort of people besides dissenters from ye church who absent themselves from ye publick worship, and this is ye generall complaint of all parishes amongst us. But this must in a great measure be imputed to those who are in comission for ye peace who can be induced by no argument to putt ye act for twelve pence a Sunday in execution.<sup>25</sup>

This accords with Chalklin's assessment of the Kentish picture:

Non-belief was probably rare before the eighteenth century, but passive churchmanship on account of indifference and in the shape of frequent absenteeism from services (except under the compulsion of the law) and, still more, of non-attendance at communion was common, at least after the Restoration, especially among the lower classes.<sup>26</sup>

The situation was to worsen dramatically, and permanently, as a result of James II's Declarations of Indulgence of 1687 and 1688 and, more particularly, the Toleration Act of 1689. The latter allowed liberty of worship to Trinitarian Dissenters only, subject to stringent conditions, and reaffirmed the general obligation on others to attend Anglican services, but the Act was widely interpreted, by ecclesiastical and civil law officers as well as the people, as ushering in a period of religious voluntarism, whereby it was a matter of personal choice whether to worship God in public or not.

Prosecutions for non-churchgoing accordingly fell away almost to nothing, despite attempts by bishops and archbishops to rally church-

wardens to action, as by the Archbishop of Canterbury who asked, in his visitation articles of 1695, whether there were 'any in your parish, who under pretence of liberty of conscience, wholly neglect all publick worship of God; neither going to church, nor to any assembly ...?'.<sup>27</sup> The formulation continued to be used well into the eighteenth century.<sup>28</sup> The articles for the Canterbury peculiars in London, constituted as the Deanery of the Arches, in 1703 were yet more specific: 'Do any upon that pretence ... wholly abstain on Sundays from coming to any publick place where there are prayers or sermons, but spend their time in alehouses, or in the works of their ordinary calling?'.<sup>29</sup> In the same year the Archbishop of Canterbury followed up with advice to the clergy to incentivise the poor to come to church by discriminating against absentees in the distribution of parochial charities.<sup>30</sup> The minister of Wingham and Stodmarsh likewise railed against the situation, in pastoral directions to his parishioners first published in 1726 and still in print in 1793. He complained that 'there are too many among you, as in all other parishes, grossly defective' in coming to church, and that the law had been 'slackened in favour to the scrupulous *Dissenters*; and the wicked negligent *absenters* have taken the advantage and plead liberty of conscience to stay at home, and not serve God at all'. He argued that absentees should be presented before the courts, even if it drove them into the arms of Nonconformity, and he bemoaned an increasing trend to fortnightly, monthly or still less frequent attendance.<sup>31</sup> His technique of publishing a tract was emulated at Shoreham in mid-century, where the clergyman criticised the numerous excuses which kept people from worship.<sup>32</sup>

#### *Canterbury diocesan returns of 1758 and 1786/88*

With the presentment and ecclesiastical court system falling into progressive disuse as a means of tracking what was happening with popular religious practice, and with churchwardens increasingly prone to file returns of *omnia bene* at episcopal and archidiaconal visitations, Hanoverian bishops adopted an alternative strategy of dealing directly, and less judicially, with their clergy. Beginning with William Wake when Bishop of Lincoln in 1706, incumbents were asked to submit answers to a pre-circulated questionnaire in advance of visitation, and additional to the formal articles of enquiry which continued to be issued to the wardens. Wake exported the practice to the Diocese of Canterbury in 1716, on his translation as Archbishop, and by the 1760s it seems to have been adopted in most dioceses. Unfortunately, the earliest clergy visitation returns did not include a specific numerical query about church attendance (which did not emerge until the 1820s and 1830s), but some ministers did volunteer more qualitative information, usually when answering the question about the incidence of Dissent. For example, in the 1724

Canterbury returns, complaints of absenteeism surfaced at Canterbury St Dunstan, Norton and Sandwich St Clement.<sup>33</sup> At that time dioceses were more interested in communicant statistics which, as has been argued elsewhere<sup>34</sup> and confirmed by research on the Diocese of Canterbury,<sup>35</sup> were not a valid proxy for – and tended to be much lower than – levels of church attendance, notwithstanding a membership-style requirement in the canons of 1604 for parishioners to take Holy Communion at least thrice a year, one of which was to be at Easter.

Although congregations were not explicitly enumerated for visitation purposes, from the 1730s six English dioceses did include in the visitation articles to be completed by the clergy one question which touched on churchgoing:

Are there any persons in your parish who profess to disregard religion, or who commonly absent themselves from all publick worship of God on the Lord's Day? And from what motives and principles are they understood so to do? And what is the number of such persons, and is it increased of late? And of what rank are they?

This formulation was pioneered by Thomas Secker when Bishop of Oxford in 1738 and was used in eleven more eighteenth-century visitations of that diocese for which returns exist.<sup>36</sup> He exported the question to Canterbury on his appointment as Archbishop in 1758. The returns for this visitation have survived,<sup>37</sup> but they have mostly not yet been printed (apart from those for Surrey peculiars),<sup>38</sup> although there is a modern scholarly edition of the *speculum*, or abstract, which was made from them (and other sources).<sup>39</sup> Despite a tradition of quadrennial visitations in the Diocese of Canterbury,<sup>40</sup> the next set of clergy replies which are extant are for 1786 (1788 for the peculiars), by which time John Moore was Archbishop.<sup>41</sup> This also included Secker's question about church attendance, but it had been discontinued by the next series of returns in 1806. The question was likewise posed, with minor variants of wording,<sup>42</sup> in visitations of the Dioceses of Norwich (from 1777),<sup>43</sup> Chester (from 1778), Salisbury (in 1783) and Durham (from 1792). It should be noted that no clergy returns survive for the eighteenth-century Diocese of Rochester which, prior to 1845,<sup>44</sup> was effectively limited to fewer than a hundred benefices in Kent to the west of the River Medway. However, they do exist for around three dozen parishes physically situated in the area of the Diocese of Rochester but which were peculiars of the Diocese of Canterbury and constituted as the Deanery of Shoreham.

Of the six dioceses which ran the question about church attendance, Canterbury is undoubtedly one of the more interesting.<sup>45</sup> It was, of course, the cradle of English Christianity and the mother diocese of the whole Anglican communion, and so its success in maintaining popular religious practice might have been regarded as setting the norm for the rest of the

Church of England. At the same time, the Diocese of Canterbury was in certain regards a microcosm of the attributes of, and many of the issues facing, the wider Church. Small and compact in size, it maintained a predominantly rural character and yet was experiencing some degree of urbanisation, and the social and religious challenges brought in its wake. It had an unusually large number of peculiars, spanning parts of the Dioceses of Chichester, Lincoln, London, Norwich, Oxford, Rochester and Winchester, which introduced a good cross-section of other parts of the country. It was, by eighteenth-century standards, comparatively effective as an administrative and pastoral machine, and it exhibited some signs of modernisation and change. It was not immune from Nonconformity, albeit there had been a relative decline on the incidence recorded in the Compton Census (from 9.2 to 5.8 per cent half a century later),<sup>46</sup> while Methodism<sup>47</sup> was slow to take root and Roman Catholicism was weak.<sup>48</sup> More untypically, three-fifths of livings in the Diocese of Canterbury were concentrated in the hands of ecclesiastical patrons, so there was perhaps more than the usual dependence on archiepiscopal or other Church patronage. No fewer than 105 benefices were in the gift of the Archbishop himself. This may have impacted somewhat on the transparency and veracity with which the clergy replied to visitation returns, being anxious to present themselves in a good light to their bishop, and not to admit to too many pastoral difficulties. As Jago has noted for the Diocese of York,<sup>49</sup> this is one of a number of limitations of visitation return evidence, and one which is certainly manifest in the Canterbury responses of 1758 and 1786/88.

Across these two visitations forms survive for 597 parishes, 296 in 1758 and 301 in 1786/88, including peculiars in the Deanery of Shoreham in west Kent (but excluding those in other counties). The replies concerning non-attendance at church are summarised in **Table 1**.<sup>50</sup> From this it will be seen that 24 per cent of incumbents answered the question about disregarders of religion and common absentees in the negative. As it seems likely that persons in the former rather than the latter category would have been foremost in their minds when responding to this enquiry, given that atheism and infidelity would have been perceived as a greater threat to the Church than laxity in religious practice, it is probable that this proportion is inflated so far as non-churchgoing is concerned. A question focusing only on common absentees would doubtless have elicited fewer claims of there being none.

A further 15 per cent of ministers made a qualified denial. They informed their Archbishop that there were no disregarders of religion or common absentees *so far as they knew*. This was an important reservation, in an age when there was a significant amount of pluralism and non-residence in the Diocese of Canterbury, not all of it related to the poverty of particular livings. As late as 1810 59 per cent of benefices were served by a cleric



TABLE 1. PERCENTAGE OF PARISHES IN THE DIOCESE OF CANTERBURY (INCLUDING SHOREHAM DEANERY) REPORTING COMMON ABSENTEES FROM PUBLIC WORSHIP IN 1758 AND 1786/88

|   | None | None known | Ambig. answer | Some | Many | No answer |
|---|------|------------|---------------|------|------|-----------|
| <i>Date</i>                             |      |            |               |      |      |           |
| 1758                                    | 22.6 | 15.2       | 23.0          | 32.1 | 5.7  | 1.4       |
| 1786/88                                 | 24.9 | 15.3       | 24.6          | 22.6 | 6.3  | 6.3       |
| <i>Community Size</i>                   |      |            |               |      |      |           |
| 1-25 houses                             | 36.9 | 18.8       | 15.9          | 19.3 | 1.7  | 7.4       |
| 26-50 houses                            | 25.8 | 16.7       | 21.2          | 28.0 | 5.3  | 3.0       |
| 51-100 houses                           | 18.4 | 16.3       | 25.2          | 33.3 | 4.1  | 2.7       |
| 101+ houses                             | 10.9 | 8.8        | 35.0          | 30.7 | 14.6 | 0.0       |
| <i>Diocesan Comparisons</i>             |      |            |               |      |      |           |
| Canterbury, 1758 and 1786/88            | 23.8 | 15.2       | 23.8          | 27.3 | 6.0  | 3.9       |
| Oxford, 1738, 1759, 1771, 1774 and 1793 | 26.5 | 15.2       | 9.8           | 27.5 | 9.2  | 11.9      |
| Norwich, 1777 and 1801                  | 28.0 | 15.3       | 16.2          | 24.4 | 7.9  | 8.1       |
| Salisbury, 1783                         | 20.0 | 13.5       | 7.8           | 25.2 | 13.9 | 19.6      |

Source: see endnote 50.

who was technically non-resident, albeit he may have lived nearby.<sup>51</sup> Under such arrangements, the direct familiarity of incumbents with parochial affairs may have been quite limited, with a great dependence on curates or churchwardens for intelligence about specific matters, in particular about the extent to which individuals went to church, to meeting or to no place of worship. A related problem was the elongated shape of many Kentish parishes, which meant that, very often, the church in a neighbouring parish might be much closer to home than that in the parish to which residents theoretically belonged. It was widely claimed in the returns, partly in truth but probably more in unfounded hope, that, for convenience, people would go to the nearest church, and forsake the ministrations of their parochial clergyman. Accordingly, these 15 per cent of qualified denials almost certainly conceal some absenteeism or irregularity, occasionally glimpsed in the inherent contradiction of a particular return. For instance, at Ospringe in 1758, where there were supposed to be no known absentees, the church was 'generally full where there is a sermon, but scandalously thin when there is none'.

Another 24 per cent of clergy gave a highly ambiguous or evasive response to the question on churchgoing, the clear inference in each case

being that absenteeism was a problem to some degree or another, even if it was not overtly admitted. Some claimed that they had no disregarders of religion but were silent about the existence of common absentees. Others stated that they had none who 'make it a practice totally to absent themselves', implying that irregularity was more of an issue; or alleged that nobody stayed away through any principle of irreligion or for wilful reasons, which somehow seemed to make the absence acceptable. Still others claimed that they had received no specific notice about non-attenders from the curate or a parish officer or that otherwise they had 'no reason to complain'. Many reported that their people were 'generally very regular', or that they were 'as decent as in most parishes' in coming to services. Several noted a 'tolerably large congregation' or commented that 'few parishes [are] better attended'. These last observations were often qualified by statements such as 'especially in summertime' or 'unless prevented in winter by badness of ways' or 'as circumstances will permit'.

In 27 per cent of parishes there were acknowledged to be some absentees. Several incumbents, such as those of Detling and Whitstable in 1786, added that this was the experience of all places. The number of hardened non-attenders deemed worthy of mention was small, mostly in single figures. However, it could still constitute a not insignificant proportion of the population in several villages, including Graveney in 1758 (12 non-churchgoers from 23 households) and Bicknor in 1786 (seven from eight). Moreover, some of the absences were of very long standing, such as the couple at Graveney in 1758 who had not been to church in twelve years. By 1786/88 a few clergymen were reporting 20 defaulters, among them Canterbury St Peter (with 100 houses), Hayes (with 58) and Tonge (with 20). At Hayes the 20 excluded those who were said to be unavoidably detained or disabled, so, in the aggregate, only a minority of adult parishioners possibly worshipped here on any given Sunday. All these figures seem to have been predicated on optimum attendance levels, which, in rural parts, were evidently achieved when several factors coincided, especially the service being held in the afternoon, with a sermon, in the summer and with good weather and accessible paths. At these times parishes such as Boughton under Blean in 1758 might record a congregation almost equivalent to two persons from every household in the community. When these conditions did not apply, far fewer attended. Thus, in 1758 at Ivychurch, a small village of 18 houses and 54 people, the attendance in winter was not above seven to ten adults and sometimes only three or four, compared with 15-30 in summer. Likewise, Snave was said in 1758 to have but four obdurate absenters, and yet its congregation in the winter fell to as few as four or five persons out of 37 inhabitants above the age of sixteen. Fortnightly attendance had taken root at Eastling by 1758.

Many absentees were reported in 6 per cent of parishes. Although superficially a small proportion, several incumbents, as at Canterbury St Paul and Gillingham in 1758, expressed the view that their experience was fairly typical. As the minister of Headcorn commented in that year: 'they do as commonly they do at other places, they come to church, or stay at home, as they please'. Most of the county's major towns were among these communities with widespread absenteeism: Ashford, Canterbury, Cranbrook, Dover, East Malling, Gillingham, Maidstone, Northfleet, Orpington and Whitstable. The causes of this were not far to see. As John Denne remarked of Maidstone in 1758:

Your Grace's diligent observation and long experience will naturally point out the reasons why the inhabitants of large & populous parishes are more in danger of being corrupted than those in smaller districts. They believe themselves here more at liberty because they are not, nor can possibly be, so well known. I can say with great truth that the higher ranks of people in my parish are in general religiously disposed; and I apprehend that the corruption of the lowest order is owing to that spirit of licentiousness which reigns particularly in this place at all parliamentary elections. The magistrates have it in their power to prevent much of this corruption by taking a proper care in licensing of ale houses.<sup>52</sup>

But it by no means followed that, relatively, towns always had the biggest problem. For example, at Keston in 1758, with just 30 households, 'full half the parish never go to church in their lives'. Similarly, Grain in 1758, with 23 houses mostly distant from the church, often had fewer than 20 in the congregation and in bad weather nobody. Nevertheless, as Table 1 illustrates, there does seem to have been a direct relationship between non-attendance and community size. Incumbents reporting no absentees, or none that were known to them, were in the majority (56 per cent) in settlements with 1-25 houses, but they steadily dwindled to reach a fifth in the largest parishes, with 101 or more homes. Conversely, the number admitting to some or many non-attenders rose from 21 to 45 per cent across the same spectrum, and there was an equivalent increase (from 16 to 35 per cent) in those giving ambiguous answers. This pattern seems to have been quite independent of the distribution of Dissent.

Differences between the two visitations were less acute, but a fairly marginal improvement between 1758 and 1786/88 is hinted at. Clergy claiming that they had no absentees, or none known to them, were 38 per cent at the former date and 40 per cent at the latter. Those giving an ambiguous answer, or acknowledging some or many absentees, decreased from 61 per cent to 54 per cent. The discrepancy may, in part, be attributed to the greater number of non-responses in 1786/88, but it may also have reflected the temporary impact of a national movement for moral reform in the 1780s. One manifestation of this was King George

III's proclamation on morality on 1 June 1787, commanding his subjects to come to public worship on Sundays, on pain of royal displeasure and rigorous prosecution. This was considered to be a factor at Orpington in 1788 where the clergy and the magistrates had made a concerted effort to enforce it. Another innovation was the emergence of Sunday schools, on which the minister of Boughton under Blean in 1786 pinned his hopes for an eventual recovery of churchgoing.

Divergences between the Diocese of Canterbury and the Dioceses of Oxford, Norwich and Salisbury were equally not very great. Somewhat fewer clergy in Canterbury (39 per cent) said they had no absentees, or none known to them, than in Oxford (42 per cent) or Norwich (43 per cent). The Salisbury figure was smaller, 33 per cent, but the situation here was complicated by the 20 per cent who did not answer. Those with some or many absentees were less numerous in Canterbury (33 per cent) than in Oxford (37 per cent) and Salisbury (39 per cent), but they were rather more than in Norwich (32 per cent). The superficially greater proportion of ambiguous replies for Canterbury is a function of a more rigorous allocation of responses to this category than in two of the other dioceses. In the original analyses for Oxford, in particular, and, to a lesser extent, Norwich, both undertaken several years ago, some ambivalent replies were then treated as equivalent to non-responses.

When asked to comment on the social status of absentees, the clergy who replied overwhelmingly and unhesitatingly tended to describe them in generic terms as 'of inferior rank', 'of no note', 'meagre persons', 'labouring people', 'the meaner sort', and even 'the dregs of the people'. Some 49 responses in 1758 and 32 in 1786/88 were along these lines. While this may have reflected reality, there was an implicit argument (spelled out explicitly at Sandhurst in 1786) that the non-churchgoers were too inconsequential for the archbishop and they to worry about and too socially insignificant to influence others by their laxity of religious observance. A few returns gave more specific lower-class occupations, such as the shipwrights of Gillingham and the chalk-cliff men of Northfleet in 1758, the latter being characterised as having much the same principles and morals as the miners of the North who looked on Sunday as a day of rest and recreation. Examples from 1786/88 included the ploughboys of Betteshanger, the papermakers of Buckland, the printing shop workers of Crayford, the fishermen and servants in husbandry of Halstow and the mill and tannery workers of Loose. By 1786/88 high wages among some of the artisan groups were blamed for non-attendance, enabling them to afford to indulge their pleasures, as at Crayford and Littlebourne.

Only six parishes reported absentees from all ranks. Absentees of more substantial social standing were more assiduously noted, as setting a poor example which others of lower station might emulate. They included gentry at Fordwich and Shoreham in 1758, who contrasted with the

religious role models of their counterparts at Bekesbourne in 1758 and Ickham in 1786. Farmers were criticised at Graveney, Ivychurch, Minster in Thanet, Snav and Wrotham in 1758, at Shoulden in 1786, and at Hunton, Shadoxhurst and Sturry in 1788. Butchers were cited at Herne in 1758, tradesmen at Chilham in 1758, innkeepers at Sittingbourne in 1758 and Canterbury St Mary Bredman in 1786, and a lawyer at Shoreham in 1788. The highest ranks generally were negligent at Canterbury St Alphege and St Mary Northgate and Canterbury St Peter in 1786 and at Orpington in 1788, while at Lynsted in 1806 'the principal inhabitants very seldom attend church in winter'.<sup>53</sup>

Little information was recorded about the gender and age of absentees. Few non-attenders were identified individually, but, of those who were, men easily outnumbered women. However, there were examples to the contrary. Thus, in 1758 both absenters at Hothfield were women, at Canterbury St Paul a Mrs Rookes had only been to service once in ten years, and at Wrotham a farmer's widow had not been more than two or three times in eleven years, and then only for family events such as christenings. Very old people, especially when infirm, were often singled out as being less able to attend, not least considering the very great distances between the parish church and many homes. But at Stockbury in 1786 the minister noted that it was the younger generation who were absenting themselves and who accounted for the decline in the congregation.

In seeking to explain non-attendance at church, the clergy were at great pains to reassure their archbishop that absenteeism was but rarely attributable to infidelity but mostly to indolence and 'the general dissipation of the times'. The only major exception was, ironically, the cathedral city of Canterbury, of which George Heany reported in 1786:

Many persons in all parishes here profess to disregard religion. They declare that they do not believe that the Christian religion is true. One man, who is much attended to, pronounced at a club in Northgate the clergy to be an useless body and might be well spar'd. Nobody differed from him in opinion.<sup>54</sup>

Otherwise, the excuses given, either by the clergy or – at one remove – by the absentees, were fairly mundane. Age, infirmity, deafness, agricultural duties, distance and the badness of the roads were each mentioned by a handful of incumbents. A dozen parishes cited the want of proper clothing for the poor to wear to worship, but there was only one claim of insufficient accommodation in church (at Ramsgate St Laurence in 1758). Eight ministers complained about the effects of excessive drinking and the large number of alehouses (eight to serve 180 houses in Crayford in 1788). At Stourmouth in 1758 the absence of an alehouse in the parish was positively quoted as the reason for 'a sober and regular people'. Privateering and

smuggling were also seen as evil influences in coastal districts; it was said at Dover in 1758 that the former 'corrupts their morals and obliterates all sense of humanity & justice'. Drink and smuggling were often linked, in the shape of the illicit retailing on Sundays of foreign spirits in private houses, as noted at Aldington in 1786. Then there was a tail of more idiosyncratic explanations. In 1758 these included: indebtedness and fear of pursuit by creditors (at Boughton under Blean); 'imaginary ill-usage of the parish officers' (Chislet); marital discord (Graveney); 'a rash vow, made in passion occasion'd by some family disputes' (Otterden); an altercation over church seating (Wrotham); and an argument with the then curate, twelve years before (Wrotham).

On the whole, the impression one is left with by this late eighteenth-century visitation evidence is of a body of parochial clergy relatively powerless to stem a drift towards absenteeism. They had few sanctions left in their armoury. Abuse of the Toleration Act, complained of at Whitstable in 1758, remained at the root of their difficulties, and, as the incumbent of Hayes noted in the same year, the laws on Sunday observance were not effectively enforced. Just one minister (of Hythe in 1758) noted any attempt to take offenders through an ecclesiastical disciplinary route, implicitly to absolutely no avail. The Archbishop's paraphrase of the return from Bapchild in 1758 probably represented the norm: 'Churchwardens will not present persons for neglecting to send their children or servants to church, or to come themselves. And the minister would only raise a flame by presenting'.<sup>55</sup> Generally, absentees were said to be quite impervious to admonition by clergy, churchwardens or magistrates. The minister of Folkestone in 1758 was atypical in crediting himself with reducing the number of non-attenders through charitable hand-outs to the poor, but at Ham in the same year the warden's attempt to bribe an absentee cottager in a similar way seems entirely to have failed.

#### *Kentish churchgoing since 1800*

The Canterbury visitation returns of 1758 and 1786/88 thus open a window on to churchgoing habits and suggest that, even in the mother diocese of the Anglican communion, there was a degree of absenteeism or irregularity affecting, on the most desanitised reading of the evidence and noting the various references to the universality of the problem, at least four-fifths of parishes. To that extent, within the context of recent historiography about the fortunes of the Church of England between the Restoration and the ecclesiastical reforms of the 1830s and 1840s,<sup>56</sup> they paint a slightly pessimistic picture, certainly in relation to Jacob's assertions about early eighteenth-century religious practice.

While it is still not possible to compute the total size of Anglican (or non-Anglican) congregations in Kent *c.* 1800, what can be said with

confidence is that demographic growth coupled with slow investment in new ecclesiastical fabric meant that a significant proportion of Kent's population could no longer be accommodated at any one time in Anglican churches, meaning that many must have been absent, willingly or no. Parliamentary returns in 1815-18 revealed that in England and Wales as a whole Anglican sittings were provided for 48 per cent of the inhabitants. At 56 per cent, the figure for the Diocese of Canterbury was perhaps lower than one might have expected, while in the Diocese of Rochester it was only 36 per cent. Moreover, 216,000 people lived in 22 parishes in the Diocese of Canterbury and 16 parishes in the Diocese of Rochester, each containing more than 2,000 residents and with an average provision of church seats of 23 per cent. Least accommodation was available in Walmer (11 per cent), Deptford (13 per cent), Gillingham (14 per cent), Chatham (16 per cent), Deal (18 per cent), Folkestone (22 per cent), Woolwich (23 per cent), Dover St Mary, Greenwich and Tonbridge (all on 24 per cent), Gravesend and Maidstone (both 26 per cent), Rochester (27 per cent), Northfleet (28 per cent) and Sevenoaks (29 per cent).<sup>57</sup>

What is also apparent is that, nationally, the first half of the nineteenth century witnessed what Watts has described as an 'extraordinary upsurge in church- and chapel-going',<sup>58</sup> a claim which has recently received some empirical validation in Gill's local research on the years 1821-51.<sup>59</sup> This increase was due to the frenetic competition between the Church of England and Nonconformity, which led to a major expansion of places of worship, services and evangelistic endeavours. A glimpse of this rivalry was provided by a country-wide survey conducted under the auspices of the *Congregational Magazine* (and perhaps, on that ground, not wholly free of bias) in 1834, which included 19 Kentish towns and villages with a combined population in 1831 of 62,750 (see **Table 2**).<sup>60</sup> It recorded the number of 'hearers', presumably to be interpreted as regular adult worshippers, on the basis of a network of local respondents. The figures were generally very rounded, so must be considered as approximations only. According to these returns, one-third of the inhabitants of these Kentish communities attended church or chapel, rising to 44 per cent if Sunday scholars are also included. In these localities the various Dissenting denominations were already outstripping the Established Church, accounting for 52 per cent of adult hearers and 78 per cent of Sunday scholars. It is hard to detect any statistically meaningful pattern in the results for individual places, but there was some tendency for the Church of England to fare best in settlements with fewer than 4,000 residents.

A handful of other Kentish surveys of churchgoing may be noted from the 1840s, for instance in Greenwich in October 1846 when attendances of adults and children, making no deduction for those who went to more than one service on a Sunday (a practice known as 'twicing', and very prevalent in the mid-nineteenth century), were equivalent to 43 per cent

## CHURCHGOING IN THE CRADLE OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY

TABLE 2. CHURCH ATTENDERS (HEARERS)  
AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION  
IN 19 KENTISH TOWNS AND VILLAGES IN 1834

|                                  | Church of<br>England | Roman<br>Catholic | Free<br>Churches | Total       |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|------------------|-------------|
| <i>Under 1,000 inhabitants</i>   |                      |                   |                  |             |
| Eastchurch                       | 17.6                 | 0.0               | 14.1             | 31.7        |
| Egerton                          | 20.8                 | 0.0               | 20.8             | 41.6        |
| Minster                          | 13.2                 | 0.0               | 14.3             | 27.5        |
| Newnham                          | 22.9                 | 0.0               | 28.7             | 51.6        |
| <i>1,000-4,000 inhabitants</i>   |                      |                   |                  |             |
| Headcorn                         | 29.3                 | 0.0               | 14.2             | 43.5        |
| Lenham                           | 9.1                  | 0.0               | 13.7             | 22.8        |
| Marden                           | 21.3                 | 0.0               | 23.2             | 44.5        |
| Northfleet                       | 37.7                 | 0.0               | 7.1              | 44.8        |
| Sittingbourne                    | 13.7                 | 0.0               | 13.7             | 27.4        |
| Staplehurst                      | 32.0                 | 0.0               | 27.6             | 59.6        |
| Whitstable                       | 18.2                 | 0.0               | 21.3             | 39.5        |
| <i>Over 4,000 inhabitants</i>    |                      |                   |                  |             |
| Dartford                         | 12.7                 | 0.0               | 15.9             | 28.6        |
| Deal                             | 12.4                 | 0.0               | 13.1             | 25.5        |
| Faversham                        | 13.5                 | 0.0               | 21.7             | 35.2        |
| Gravesend                        | 11.8                 | 0.0               | 12.8             | 24.6        |
| Milton next<br>Gravesend         | 6.9                  | 0.0               | 18.4             | 25.3        |
| Ramsgate                         | 25.7                 | 0.0               | 16.4             | 42.1        |
| Sevenoaks                        | 11.7                 | 0.0               | 13.4             | 25.1        |
| Sheerness                        | 10.1                 | 1.3               | 23.3             | 34.7        |
| <i>Mean of All 19<br/>Places</i> | <i>15.7</i>          | <i>0.2</i>        | <i>17.0</i>      | <i>32.9</i> |

Source: see endnote 60.

of the population;<sup>61</sup> or in Canterbury in May 1848 when, on the same basis, the figure was 69 per cent.<sup>62</sup> However, the 1851 ecclesiastical census provides a much more comprehensive picture, fortuitously conducted somewhere around the probable peak of attendance levels. There is a useful commentary on the Kentish results in the county edition of the returns,<sup>63</sup> plus an analysis by Yates of the figures for Kentish towns,<sup>64</sup> and several other local studies,<sup>65</sup> so a full discussion is not required here. But an overview at registration district level may be offered, derived from calculations by Watts which endeavour to remove the effect of twicing from the totals of general congregations and Sunday scholars (see **Table 3**).<sup>66</sup> It



TABLE 3. ESTIMATED CHURCH ATTENDERS AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN KENTISH REGISTRATION DISTRICTS IN 1851 (CORRECTED FOR TWICING)

| Registration District | Church of England | Roman Catholic | Free Churches and Others | Total       |
|-----------------------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| LONDON                |                   |                |                          |             |
| Greenwich             | 16.0              | 1.6            | 12.4                     | 30.0        |
| Lewisham              | 27.4              | 0.0            | 6.4                      | 33.8        |
| <i>Sub-Total</i>      | <i>19.0</i>       | <i>1.2</i>     | <i>10.8</i>              | <i>31.0</i> |
| COUNTY                |                   |                |                          |             |
| Bromley               | 21.5              | 0.0            | 12.9                     | 34.4        |
| Dartford              | 19.6              | 0.5            | 13.4                     | 33.5        |
| Gravesend             | 16.6              | 0.8            | 14.6                     | 32.0        |
| North Aylesford       | 21.7              | 0.0            | 12.2                     | 33.9        |
| Hoo                   | 23.7              | 0.0            | 11.4                     | 35.1        |
| Medway                | 18.1              | 0.8            | 13.8                     | 32.7        |
| Malling               | 27.0              | 0.0            | 8.3                      | 35.3        |
| Sevenoaks             | 26.7              | 0.0            | 12.1                     | 38.8        |
| Tunbridge             | 28.3              | 0.5            | 15.8                     | 44.6        |
| Maidstone             | 29.2              | 0.0            | 13.8                     | 43.0        |
| Hollingbourn          | 21.1              | 0.0            | 10.8                     | 31.9        |
| Cranbrook             | 27.3              | 0.0            | 19.4                     | 46.7        |
| Tenterden             | 36.0              | 0.0            | 14.8                     | 50.8        |
| West Ashford          | 31.4              | 0.3            | 16.0                     | 47.7        |
| East Ashford          | 23.7              | 0.0            | 8.4                      | 32.1        |
| Bridge                | 32.7              | 0.0            | 7.4                      | 40.1        |
| Canterbury            | 19.4              | 0.0            | 20.9                     | 40.3        |
| Blean                 | 29.9              | 0.0            | 8.0                      | 37.9        |
| Faversham             | 26.7              | 0.0            | 17.2                     | 43.9        |
| Milton                | 32.0              | 0.0            | 15.2                     | 47.2        |
| Sheppey               | 13.8              | 2.0            | 19.6                     | 35.4        |
| Thanet                | 28.2              | 0.8            | 22.7                     | 51.7        |
| Eastry                | 28.6              | 0.8            | 15.0                     | 44.4        |
| Dover                 | 28.3              | 1.0            | 12.9                     | 42.2        |
| Elham                 | 31.1              | 0.0            | 14.0                     | 45.1        |
| Romney Marsh          | 36.5              | 0.0            | 14.4                     | 50.9        |
| <i>Sub-Total</i>      | <i>25.6</i>       | <i>0.4</i>     | <i>14.3</i>              | <i>40.3</i> |
| LONDON + COUNTY       | 24.2              | 0.6            | 13.6                     | 38.3        |
| ENGLAND               | 20.2              | 1.7            | 17.2                     | 39.1        |

Source: see endnote 66.

will be seen that an estimated 38 per cent of Kentish residents went to church or chapel on 30 March 1851, slightly less than the all-England average. Attendance in Kentish London,<sup>67</sup> at 31 per cent, was lower than the rest of the county (40 per cent), with three districts (Tenterden, Thanet and Romney Marsh) surpassing 50 per cent. Contrary to the 1834 data, apart from Canterbury and Sheppey, Anglicans still outnumbered Nonconformists, proportionately more so than in the country as a whole, while Roman Catholicism was relatively very weak. If the raw statistics are utilised, uncorrected for twicing, attendances in Kent represented 57 per cent of the population.<sup>68</sup>

Church attendance in Kentish London was enumerated at two further points in the late nineteenth century, in October 1886 and November 1887 by the *British Weekly*<sup>69</sup> and on several Sundays in March and April 1903 by the *Daily News*,<sup>70</sup> as part of investigations covering the whole metropolis. **Table 4** summarises the results and contrasts them with the raw figures for 1851, covering general congregations and Sunday schools meeting at the same time.<sup>71</sup> Strict comparisons between the three censuses are rendered difficult by the enormous administrative and social changes to which metropolitan Kent was subject during these fifty years, among

TABLE 4. CHURCH ATTENDANCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION  
IN KENTISH LONDON IN 1851, 1886-87 AND 1903  
(UNCORRECTED FOR TWICING)

|              | Church of<br>England | Roman<br>Catholic | Free Churches<br>and Others | Total       |
|--------------|----------------------|-------------------|-----------------------------|-------------|
| 1851         |                      |                   |                             |             |
| Greenwich    | 22.2                 | 2.6               | 17.7                        | 42.5        |
| Lewisham     | 43.0                 | 0.0               | 9.3                         | 52.3        |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>27.6</i>          | <i>1.9</i>        | <i>15.5</i>                 | <i>45.0</i> |
| 1886-87      |                      |                   |                             |             |
| Greenwich    | 11.3                 | 1.1               | 10.0                        | 22.4        |
| Lewisham     | 31.4                 | 0.8               | 16.8                        | 49.0        |
| Woolwich     | 15.2                 | 1.7               | 15.5                        | 32.4        |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>17.6</i>          | <i>1.2</i>        | <i>13.3</i>                 | <i>32.1</i> |
| 1903         |                      |                   |                             |             |
| Deptford     | 7.3                  | 1.2               | 9.3                         | 17.8        |
| Greenwich    | 13.7                 | 2.1               | 11.1                        | 26.9        |
| Lewisham     | 17.0                 | 1.3               | 14.6                        | 32.9        |
| Woolwich     | 10.6                 | 3.6               | 12.9                        | 27.1        |
| <i>Total</i> | <i>12.2</i>          | <i>2.0</i>        | <i>12.1</i>                 | <i>26.3</i> |

Source: see endnotes 69-71.

them a trebling of its population, from 134,000 to 446,000. Further complications are methodological differences in the way the counts were made, including the services which were covered (for example, afternoon congregations were only noted in 1851) and the state of the weather (thus, in 1903, the days on which attendances were surveyed were fine in Greenwich and Lewisham, dull in Woolwich and very wet in Deptford).

Setting these considerations aside, it will be evident from Table 4 that churchgoing in Kentish London declined during the later nineteenth century, from 45 per cent of the population in 1851 to 32 per cent in 1886-87 to 26 per cent in 1903. Much of the fall occurred in the Church of England, which fared especially badly between 1851 and 1886-87 (mirroring the apparent relative reduction in average congregations in the Diocese of Rochester between 1864 and 1881),<sup>72</sup> while the Nonconformist decrease was more gradual and less severe. This conclusion derives from data which are uncorrected for twicing. As twicing became less common during the second half of the century, with only 13 per cent of attendances at six churches and chapels in Deptford and Woolwich in 1903 comprising twicers,<sup>73</sup> the uncorrected data somewhat exaggerate the declension. The actual decline in the number of individual churchgoers, as opposed to attendances, on an average Sunday in Kentish London was perhaps from 31 per cent of the population in 1851 to 23 per cent in 1903. The fall was probably disproportionately concentrated among men, so that by 1903 61 per cent of adult worshippers in metropolitan Kent were women.

The 1903 census also extended to Greater London and thus to the Beckenham, Bromley and Chislehurst districts of Kent, all surveyed on 11 October, which was a wet day.<sup>74</sup> Total attendances, uncorrected for twicing, in these three places equated to 33 per cent of the inhabitants, four points higher than the Greater London average but 18 points fewer than for the very much less populous Beckenham, Bromley and Chislehurst of 1851.<sup>75</sup> Bromley recorded the best attendance (at 38 per cent), seemingly owing much to the strength of the Free Churches there (who comprised 44 per cent of worshippers), while Beckenham scored 29 per cent and Chislehurst 32 per cent. Overall, in these three districts, the Church of England accounted for 63 per cent of attendances (down from 86 per cent in 1851), the Free Churches for 35 per cent (up from 14 per cent) and the Roman Catholics for 2 per cent (compared with none in 1851). Women constituted 63 per cent of adult attendances.

The only other Kentish towns for which there is churchgoing evidence around this time are Maidstone and Margate. At Maidstone a census was conducted of morning and evening services in January 1880, but just among persons aged twelve or fourteen and above, and omitting two Anglican and the Roman Catholic places of worship, and perhaps a few smaller Dissenting chapels, also.<sup>76</sup> Including a conservative estimate for these missing churches, but making no deduction for twicing, adult

attendances perhaps represented 25 per cent of the town's population in 1880, a substantial fall from the 57 per cent for general congregations alone (i.e. excluding Sunday scholars) in 1851.<sup>77</sup> The Church of England delivered two-thirds of all attendances, much the same proportion as at the earlier date. A further ecclesiastical census of Maidstone was conducted by the *Kent Messenger* in May 1926, worshippers at morning and evening services being then equivalent to 17 per cent of the inhabitants, with the Anglican share at 62 per cent, the Free Churches at 34 per cent and the Roman Catholics at 4 per cent. About two-thirds of adult congregations were made up of women.<sup>78</sup>

At Margate in February 1882 morning, afternoon and evening congregations, including estimates for three unenumerated services but with no adjustment for twicing, represented 55 per cent of the population.<sup>79</sup> This compared with 76 per cent (general congregations and Sunday scholars) or 65 per cent (general congregations alone) in 1851.<sup>80</sup> Three fifths of the Margate attenders in 1882 were Anglican as against one half in 1851, reflecting the fact that decline was particularly concentrated among Nonconformists.

Apart from these local surveys, the picture of religious practice in Kent is otherwise unclear between 1851 and the late twentieth century, when the organisation now known as Christian Research undertook churchgoing censuses in England in November 1979, October 1989, September 1998 and May 2005.<sup>81</sup> These are not entirely free of methodological difficulties, including a significant degree of estimation to correct for the non-response of ministers of each place of worship. The results for non-metropolitan Kent are presented in **Table 5**, from which it will be seen that overall churchgoing has reduced by almost a third, relative to population, between 1979 and 2005, now standing at just over 6 per cent on an average Sunday. While the fall has affected all three principal denominational groupings, the Anglicans have lost most ground (with their congregations down by 40 per cent, mainly in the 1980s and 1990s), and they are now only fractionally ahead of the Free Church grouping.

TABLE 5. CHURCH ATTENDANCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN NON-METROPOLITAN KENT IN 1979, 1989, 1998 AND 2005

|      | Church of England | Roman Catholic | Free Churches and Others | Total |
|------|-------------------|----------------|--------------------------|-------|
| 1979 | 4.6               | 1.9            | 3.4                      | 9.9   |
| 1989 | 3.5               | 1.7            | 3.2                      | 8.4   |
| 1998 | 2.5               | 1.6            | 2.9                      | 7.0   |
| 2005 | 2.5               | 1.5            | 2.4                      | 6.4   |

Source: see endnote 81.

However, the apparently lower rate of decline among the latter is mainly due to the emergence of Pentecostal, independent and so-called 'new' churches, whose growth has masked the decline of some of the historic Free Churches, notably the Methodists who have suffered a declension of 65 per cent in Kent and the United Reformed Church which has lost 59 per cent of its adherents. The Baptists have held their own somewhat, merely reduced by 23 per cent.

As a whole, Kentish congregations have become progressively older, with the proportion aged 65 and above up from 18 per cent in 1979 to 28 per cent in 2005, 11 points more than in the population. The percentage of each age group in the county attending Sunday worship in 2005 climbed from 5 among those aged 15 to 19, to 7 for those in their twenties, to 16 for those aged 30 to 44, to 23 for those between 45 and 64, to 28 per cent for the over-65s. There remains an imbalance of female worshippers (53 per cent in 1979, 58 per cent in 1989 and 57 per cent in 2005), but it is less acute than formerly and than might be expected (women account for 51 per cent of all Kentish residents). Reflecting the make-up of the county's population, congregations are still overwhelmingly (more than 91 per cent) white. In terms of churchmanship, the evangelicals are advancing (accounting for 39 per cent of all Kentish attendances in 1989 and 49 per cent in 2005).

Christian Research has also analysed the results for 1989, 1998 and 2005 by local authority areas, and the relevant data for metropolitan and non-metropolitan Kent appear in **Table 6**. It will be noted that, whereas in 1989, churchgoing in the Kentish London boroughs and county combined was fractionally below the national average, by 2005 it was slightly above it. Somewhat surprisingly, too, given London's historic reputation for relative irreligiosity, church attendance in the Kentish London boroughs as a whole was higher at all three dates than in the county. This was substantially due to the performance of Lewisham where, in 2005, 11 per cent of the population still went to a place of worship on a typical Sunday, doubtless reflecting a strong black Christian presence. Otherwise, Bexley and Greenwich recorded figures lower than the Kentish norm, and in Bromley there has been an appreciable fall over recent years.<sup>82</sup> In the county Sevenoaks alone exceeded a 10 per cent participation rate by 2005, likewise sharing the distinction with Gravesham of bucking a continuing slide in churchgoing between 1998 and 2005, following on from the universal decline from 1989 to 1998. Tunbridge Wells was not far behind, with Canterbury and Ashford being the only other authority areas to surpass the Kentish mean. Of all seventeen boroughs and authorities, Swale had by far the lowest rate of churchgoing in all three years. Some interesting comparisons between the situation in 1851 and 1998 for the major towns have been drawn by Gill.<sup>83</sup>

These statistics again relate to attendances on one particular Sunday,

## CHURCHGOING IN THE CRADLE OF ENGLISH CHRISTIANITY

TABLE 6. CHURCH ATTENDANCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN LOCAL AUTHORITY AREAS OF METROPOLITAN AND NON-METROPOLITAN KENT IN 1989, 1998 AND 2005

|                       | 1989        | 1998       | 2005       |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|------------|
| LONDON                |             |            |            |
| Bexley                | 7.5         | 5.7        | 4.5        |
| Bromley               | 10.7        | 8.1        | 6.6        |
| Greenwich             | 8.3         | 6.8        | 6.4        |
| Lewisham              | 14.6        | 11.5       | 10.9       |
| <i>Sub-Total</i>      | <i>10.4</i> | <i>8.1</i> | <i>7.2</i> |
| COUNTY                |             |            |            |
| Ashford               | 9.7         | 9.2        | 7.6        |
| Canterbury            | 9.6         | 8.8        | 8.2        |
| Dartford              | 11.4        | 7.3        | 5.9        |
| Dover                 | 7.7         | 6.1        | 5.2        |
| Gravesham             | 5.8         | 4.4        | 4.8        |
| Maidstone             | 6.8         | 5.7        | 5.5        |
| Medway                | 6.7         | 5.0        | 4.8        |
| Sevenoaks             | 11.1        | 9.5        | 10.3       |
| Shepway               | 7.6         | 7.1        | 6.5        |
| Swale                 | 4.9         | 4.7        | 4.0        |
| Thanet                | 9.6         | 8.1        | 6.7        |
| Tonbridge and Malling | 9.3         | 7.0        | 6.4        |
| Tunbridge Wells       | 12.5        | 10.5       | 9.7        |
| <i>Sub-Total</i>      | <i>8.4</i>  | <i>7.0</i> | <i>6.4</i> |
| LONDON + COUNTY       | 9.2         | 7.4        | 6.7        |
| ENGLAND               | 9.9         | 7.5        | 6.3        |

Source: see endnote 81.

and not to individual attenders over time. In order to arrive at a complete picture of churchgoing, allowance has to be made for irregular (less than weekly) attendance. In its 2005 census Christian Research tried to explore this phenomenon, categorising regular Kentish worshippers into twice weekly (17 per cent), once weekly (67 per cent), fortnightly (11 per cent) or monthly (5 per cent), very similar proportions to the national average.<sup>84</sup> No denominational breakdown was given for Kent, but other studies by Christian Research of congregational attitudes and beliefs in the Erith, Orpington and Sidcup deaneries of the Church of England in 2000-02 appeared to suggest that Anglicans were somewhat less prone to attend each Sunday than other Christians, a quarter of them in these deaneries worshipping once, twice or three times a month but not weekly.<sup>85</sup> There is

possibly even a longer – less than monthly – churchgoing tail in the entire population than this. In Orpington in May 1987, for example, 48 per cent of adults in a telephone survey claimed to have attended a religious service within the previous twelve months, five-eighths of them six times or fewer. This implied an occasional church attendance rate of 31 per cent, which was almost certainly an exaggeration, especially considering that a fifth of this group did not believe in God, a third did not believe in an afterlife nor in the biblical life, death and resurrection of Christ, and a half never prayed.<sup>86</sup> Inflated claims of religious practice are a well-known attribute of public opinion polls in general.

Nevertheless, that ‘normal’ Sunday attendance is no longer a full guide to churchgoing has been confirmed by changes made to its data collection by the Church of England in very recent years. **Table 7** presents the various totals for adults, young people and children for the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester in 2000-05.<sup>87</sup> Traditionally, over the past few decades, the Church has counted usual Sunday attendance, avoiding major Christian festivals (with their inflationary effect) and peak holiday times (with their deflationary impact). This is now the lowest indicator

TABLE 7. CHURCH ATTENDANCE AS A PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION IN THE CHURCH OF ENGLAND DIOCESES OF CANTERBURY AND ROCHESTER IN 2000-05

|                       | Average weekly | Average Sunday | Weekly high | Usual Sunday | Easter day | Christmas Eve/day |
|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|-------------|--------------|------------|-------------------|
| DIOCESE OF CANTERBURY |                |                |             |              |            |                   |
| 2000                  | 3.1            | 2.6            |             |              | 3.7        | 7.4               |
| 2001                  | 2.9            | 2.6            |             | 2.3          | 4.0        | 7.6               |
| 2002                  | 2.7            | 2.4            |             | 2.3          | 3.7        | 7.6               |
| 2003                  | 2.9            | 2.4            |             | 2.2          | 3.7        | 7.5               |
| 2004                  | 3.0            | 2.5            | 4.6         | 2.2          | 3.6        | 7.1               |
| 2005                  | 3.0            | 2.5            | 4.6         | 2.1          | 3.5        | 8.1               |
| <i>Mean</i>           | <i>2.9</i>     | <i>2.5</i>     | <i>4.6</i>  | <i>2.2</i>   | <i>3.7</i> | <i>7.6</i>        |
| DIOCESE OF ROCHESTER  |                |                |             |              |            |                   |
| 2000                  | 2.7            | 2.3            |             |              | 3.3        | 7.0               |
| 2001                  | 2.7            | 2.3            |             | 2.1          | 3.3        | 6.3               |
| 2002                  | 2.6            | 2.2            |             | 2.0          | 3.1        | 6.5               |
| 2003                  | 2.6            | 2.3            |             | 2.1          | 3.1        | 6.4               |
| 2004                  | 2.5            | 2.2            | 3.5         | 2.0          | 3.2        | 6.4               |
| 2005                  | 2.6            | 2.2            | 3.7         | 2.0          | 2.9        | 6.7               |
| <i>Mean</i>           | <i>2.6</i>     | <i>2.3</i>     | <i>3.6</i>  | <i>2.0</i>   | <i>3.1</i> | <i>6.5</i>        |

Source: see endnote 87.

of Anglican religious practice, having declined in the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester from around 3 per cent of the population in the late 1970s to 2 per cent today. Marginally higher is the level of average Sunday attendance, defined as the mean of attenders at Sunday services, typically over a four-week period in October. Slightly bigger still is average weekly attendance, designed to capture an increasing trend for public worship on days other than Sunday, again mostly over a four-week period in October. The greatest non-festival measure is the weekly high attendance, recording the largest Sunday congregation over the four weeks. In the Diocese of Canterbury this figure is more than double the usual Sunday attendance, and in Rochester four-fifths more. Attendance on Easter Day, the single most significant act of public worship in the Christian calendar, is actually lower than the weekly high figure for an ordinary Sunday. This shows how far Easter has become a (secular) holiday weekend. Congregations on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day are more than twice those at Easter, and Christmastide services now represent the Church of England's furthest reach over the people in terms of churchgoing, drawing in over 7 per cent in the Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester combined, two-fifths more than for the Church of England nationally. On all indicators Canterbury somewhat surpasses Rochester.

### *Conclusions*

Kent has often been regarded as the cradle of English Christianity. It was here that the reconversion of England commenced through St Augustine's mission in 597. It was Canterbury which developed as the nation's spiritual hub, the site of its most magnificent cathedral, its most celebrated place of pilgrimage, and the centre of the worldwide Anglican communion. Superficially, the county also seemed well-placed to score highly on the barometer of religiosity, having a predominantly rural character (and thus, apart from the districts which became absorbed into London, generally escaping the most serious challenges posed to the Church by large-scale industrialisation and urbanisation), a substantial number of Anglican benefices (with an implied concentration of pastoral care), and a reasonably efficient ecclesiastical machinery. Cumulatively, these factors might have been expected to translate into an exceptional level of churchgoing. In reality, church attendance in the county has been far from extraordinary, probably hovering somewhere around the national average for the last four and a half centuries, and, most likely, as much below as above it, even though the latter is the position which Kent currently occupies.

A number of reasons for this middling pattern of churchgoing might be suggested. Historically, Kentish Christianity has disproportionately depended upon the Church of England, which, in terms of people in



the pews, was first dealt a hefty blow by the Toleration Act of 1689 (from which ensued both non-attendance and a greater irregularity in worship among nominal Anglicans); and then, following expansion in the early nineteenth century, started to experience decline from the 1850s and suffered especially badly in the 1980s and 1990s. While there has been some Nonconformity, it has been fairly localised, for instance Old Dissent in towns and Wealden parishes, and Methodism – the largest Nonconformist denomination nationally – has always struggled, relatively, in the southern counties. Moreover, the historic Free Churches have lost much ground since the Second World War, and, although there has been some compensating growth in the newer forms of Pentecostal, charismatic and independent Christian expression, Kent (apart from in some of its metropolitan districts) has lacked the substantial presence of black minorities among whom such forms of worship flourish. Similarly, Kentish Roman Catholicism has been comparatively weak in relation to many parts of England, removing yet another driver which usually tends to push up levels of religious practice. As in the rest of the country, Kent's residents still largely profess to be Christian; at the 2001 census 75 per cent of them in the non-metropolitan county identified themselves as Christian (3 points more than for England as a whole), with just 2 per cent of other faiths (against 6 per cent in England), 15 per cent with no religion, and 8 per cent who did not respond.<sup>88</sup> Yet, as for their compatriots, Kentish folk are no longer particularly disposed to translate that profession into anything like regular attendance at public acts of worship. Perhaps one in ten now go to church at some stage in the year.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> For an account of the development of the law, and its implementation, see Clive D. Field, 'A Shilling for Queen Elizabeth: The Epoch of State Regulation of Church Attendance in England, 1552-1969', forthcoming.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to these sources, see Clive D. Field, 'Non-Recurrent Christian Data', in *Religion, Reviews of United Kingdom Statistical Sources*, ed. W. F. Maunder, vol. 20 (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1987), 189-504, and especially 288-97.

<sup>3</sup> There is an extensive literature on the ecclesiastical census, to which guides will be found in Clive D. Field, 'The 1851 Religious Census of Great Britain: A Bibliographical Guide for Local and Regional Historians', *Local Historian*, 27 (1997), 194-217 and *Church and Chapel in Early Victorian Shropshire: Returns from the 1851 Census of Religious Worship*, ed. Clive D. Field, Shropshire Record Series 8 (Keele: Centre for Local History, University of Keele, 2004), lvii-lx. The census poses a number of methodological and interpretative challenges, discussed in Clive D. Field, 'Methodism in the 1851 Religious Census of England and Wales: A Methodological Reappraisal', in *Methodism in its Cultural Milieu*, ed. Timothy S.A. Macquiban (Oxford: Applied Theology Press, 1994), 169-90 and *Church and Chapel in Early Victorian Shropshire*, ed. Field, xiii-xxv.

<sup>4</sup> *Religious Worship in Kent: The Census of 1851*, ed. Margaret Roake, Kent Records 27 (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Robin Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003). It should be noted that, despite its title, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700*, by Robert Currie, Alan D. Gilbert and Lee Horsley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977) is not really about churchgoing, but mainly about church membership.

<sup>6</sup> Robin Gill, 'Religion', in *Kent in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Nigel Yates (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2001), 321-33; *Changing Worlds* (London: T. and T. Clark, 2002), 73-86; 'Religion, 1870-2000', in *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, eds Terence Lawson and David Killingray (Chichester: Phillimore, 2004), 170-71.

<sup>7</sup> William M. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion in the Early Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 19, 52-77, 224.

<sup>8</sup> Nigel Yates, Robert Hume and Paul Hastings, *Religion and Society in Kent, 1640-1914* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994), 1-90.

<sup>9</sup> David Killingray, 'Churches in the Modern Age', in *Sevenoaks People and Faith: Two Thousand Years of Religious Belief and Practice*, ed. David Killingray (Chichester: Phillimore, 2004), 41-65.

<sup>10</sup> *Kentish Visitations of Archbishop William Warham and his Deputies, 1511-1512*, ed. Kathleen L. Wood-Legh, Kent Records 24 (Maidstone: Kent Archaeological Society, 1984), 61, 73-74, 83, 105, 113, 122, 131, 143-44, 147, 151, 169, 200, 203, 279.

<sup>11</sup> For an introduction to the ecclesiastical courts in early Elizabethan Kent, see Arthur J. Willis, *Church Life in Kent, Being Church Court Records of the Canterbury Diocese, 1559-1565* (London: Phillimore, 1975). For a later period, see Jean M. Potter, 'The Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of Canterbury, 1603-1665' (University of London M.Phil. thesis, 1973).

<sup>12</sup> For full information, see the three editions of visitation articles for the period 1536-1642: [for 1536-75] *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation*, ed. W. H. Frere, Alcuin Club Collections 14-16 (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1910); [for 1575-1603] *Elizabethan Episcopal Administration*, ed. W.P.M. Kennedy, Alcuin Club Collections 26-27 (London: A.R. Mowbray, 1924); [for 1603-42] *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church*, ed. Kenneth Fincham, Church of England Record Society 1 and 5 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1994-98).

<sup>13</sup> For instance at Whitstable in 1578; Arthur Hussey, 'Visitations of the Archdeacon of Canterbury', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 27 (1905), 223.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 (1902), 16, 48.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 27 (1905), 214.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 25 (1902), 55.

<sup>17</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'Cranbrook and the Fletchers: Popular and Unpopular Religion in the Kentish Weald', in *Reformation Principle and Practice: Essays in Honour of Arthur Geoffrey Dickens*, ed. Peter Newman Brooks (London: Scholar Press, 1980), 184.

<sup>18</sup> *The Diocesan Population Returns for 1563 and 1603*, eds Alan Dyer and David M. Palliser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), lxxiii, lxxv, lxxxii-lxxxiii, 312, 516-23.

<sup>19</sup> Peter Clark, *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent, 1500-1640* (Hassocks: Harvester Press, 1977), 156, 437.

<sup>20</sup> Jacqueline Eales, "'So Many Sects and Schisms': Religious Diversity in Revolutionary Kent, 1640-60", in *Religion in Revolutionary England*, eds Christopher Durston and Judith Maltby (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), 226-48.

<sup>21</sup> For example, John Warner, *Articles of Visitation and Inquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical ... Exhibited to the Ministers, Church-Wardens and Side-Men of every Parish within the Diocese of Rochester* (London: printed for Richard Royston, 1662), 6-7; John Warner, *Articles of Visitation and Enquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical ... Exhibited to the Church-Wardens and Sidemen of every Parish within the Diocese of*

Rochester (London: printed by Andrew Coe, 1666), 5; John Dolben, *Articles to be Enquired of in the Primary Visitation ... and Exhibited to the Church-Wardens and Side-Men of every Parish within the Diocese of Rochester* (London: printed for T. Garthwait, 1668), 5; John Lee, *Articles to be Enquired of and Answered unto by the Churchwardens and Sworn-Men in the Visitation of the Right Worshipful the Arch-Deacon of Rochester* (London: printed in the year 1677), 4; William Sancroft, *Articles of Visitation and Enquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical, Exhibited to the Ministers, Church-Wardens & Side-Men of every Parish within the Diocese of Canterbury* (London: printed by Tho. Newcomb, 1682), 13.

<sup>22</sup> *The Compton Census of 1676: A Critical Edition*, ed. Anne Whiteman (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), 7.

<sup>23</sup> Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost* (London: Methuen, 1965), 71-72.

<sup>24</sup> *The Compton Census of 1676*, ed. Whiteman, 5-35, 401-11. Cf. C.W. Chalklin, 'The Compton Census of 1676: The Dioceses of Canterbury and Rochester', in *A Seventeenth Century Miscellany*, ed. Irene J. Churchill, Kent Records 17 (Ashford: Kent Archaeological Society, 1960), 153-74; Mary J. Dobson, 'Original Compton Census Returns: The Shoreham Deanery', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 94 (1978), 61-73; Christopher Buckingham, 'Where Have All the Papists Gone; or, The Catholics of Kent Assessed in the Compton Census of 1676', *Kent Recusant History*, 1 (Spring 1979), 5-12; Matthew Reynolds, 'Religious Denominations in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century: The Compton Census', in *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, eds Lawson and Killingray, 83-85.

<sup>25</sup> C. Everleigh Woodruff, 'Letters Relating to the Condition of the Church in Kent during the Primacy of Archbishop Sancroft (1678-1690)', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 21 (1895), 183.

<sup>26</sup> C.W. Chalklin, *Seventeenth-Century Kent: A Social and Economic History* (London: Longmans, 1965), 224.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Tenison, *Articles of Visitation and Inquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical, Exhibited to the Ministers, Church-Wardens and Side-Men of every Parish within the Diocese of Canterbury* ([London]: printed in the year 1695), 4.

<sup>28</sup> For example, William Wake, *Articles of Visitation and Enquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical, Exhibited to the Ministers, Church-Wardens and Sidesmen, of every Parish within the Diocese of Canterbury, at the Second Visitation* (London: printed in the year 1720), 6; William Wake, *Articles of Visitation and Enquiry Concerning Matters Ecclesiastical, Exhibited to the Ministers, Church-Wardens and Sidesmen, of every Parish within the Diocese of Canterbury, at the Fourth Visitation* (London: printed in the year 1728), 6.

<sup>29</sup> *Second Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire into the Rubrics, Orders and Directions for Regulating the Course and Conduct of Public Worship &c.*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers sess. 1867-68, vol. 38, 663.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Tenison, *His Grace the Lord Arch-Bishop of Canterbury's Letter to the Reverend the Arch-Deacons and the Rest of the Clergy of the Diocese of St. David* (London: printed 1703), 15.

<sup>31</sup> [William Newton], *Pastoral Advices and Directions, in Order to a Virtuous Life Here, and Eternal Happiness Hereafter* (London: printed by J. Downing, 1726), iii-v, 14-19.

<sup>32</sup> Vincent Perronet, *An Earnest Exhortation to the Strict Practice of Christianity, Drawn up Chiefly for the Use of the Inhabitants of the Parish of Shoreham in Kent* (London: printed for B. Dod, 1746), 26-27.

<sup>33</sup> Christ Church Library, Oxford, Ms. 286, fos. 73v, 303v, 351v.

<sup>34</sup> Clive D. Field, 'Counting the Flock: A Note on Religious Practice in the Late Eighteenth-Century Diocese of Norwich', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 43 (1998-2001), 318.

<sup>35</sup> Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform, 1660-1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 262-70. Cf. Jacob, *Lay People and Religion*, 57-61, and Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660-1740* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 176-88.

<sup>36</sup> The 1738 returns have been printed as *Articles of Enquiry Addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese of Oxford at the Primary Visitation of Dr. Thomas Secker, 1738*, ed. H. A. Lloyd Jukes, Oxfordshire Record Society 38 (Banbury: printed for the Society, 1957). The other eighteenth-century returns remain unpublished at the Oxfordshire Record Office. These returns have been analysed by Clive D. Field, 'A Godly People? Aspects of Religious Practice in the Diocese of Oxford, 1738-1936', *Southern History*, 14 (1992), 49-53, 65. Secker was evidently struck by 'the great numbers which I find there are in many, if not most, of your parishes, that omit coming' in 1738 and made reference to it in his 1741 visitation charge to the Diocese of Oxford; Thomas Secker, *Eight Charges Delivered to the Clergy of the Dioceses of Oxford and Canterbury* (London: printed for John and Francis Rivington and Benjamin White, 1769), 70, 73-74.

<sup>37</sup> Lambeth Palace Library (hereafter LPL), Ms. 1134/1-6.

<sup>38</sup> *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Surrey: Replies to Bishops' Visitations*, ed. W. Reginald Ward, Surrey Record Society 34 (Guildford: the Society, 1994), 156-70.

<sup>39</sup> *The Speculum of Archbishop Thomas Secker*, ed. Jeremy Gregory, Church of England Record Society 2 (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1995).

<sup>40</sup> For the practice of visitation of the Diocese of Canterbury, see Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform*, 274-81.

<sup>41</sup> LPL, Mss. VG3/1a-d and (for the peculiars in 1788) VH/55/1. The Surrey peculiars are printed in *Parson and Parish in Eighteenth-Century Surrey*, ed. Ward, 170-82.

<sup>42</sup> These variants are recorded in Field, 'Counting the Flock', 318-19.

<sup>43</sup> Analysed in *ibid.*, 317-26.

<sup>44</sup> In 1845, with the abolition of exempt ecclesiastical jurisdictions, much of the Diocese of Rochester was transferred to the Diocese of Canterbury, leaving the former to focus mainly on Essex and Hertfordshire. However, further reorganisations in 1877 and 1905 returned the boundary between the Dioceses of Rochester and Canterbury to something approaching its pre-1845 state.

<sup>45</sup> The following account draws heavily on Jeremy Gregory's research, especially in *Restoration, Reformation and Reform*, but see also his 'The Eighteenth-Century Reformation: The Pastoral Task of Anglican Clergy after 1689', in *The Church of England, c.1689-c.1833: From Toleration to Tractarianism*, eds John Walsh, Colin Haydon and Stephen Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 67-85 and 'Archbishops of Canterbury, their Diocese, and the Shaping of the National Church', in *The National Church in Local Perspective: The Church of England and the Regions, 1660-1800*, eds Jeremy Gregory and Jeffrey S. Chamberlain (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), 29-52.

<sup>46</sup> Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters: From the Reformation to the French Revolution* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 509.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. John A. Vickers, 'Methodism in the Diocese of Canterbury, 1758', *Bulletin of the London Branch of the Wesley Historical Society*, 4 (May 1967), 5-10.

<sup>48</sup> See *Returns of Papists, 1767, Volume 2: Dioceses of England and Wales, Except Chester*, ed. Edward S. Worrall, Catholic Record Society Occasional Publication 2 ([London]: the Society, 1989), 142-43 (Diocese of Canterbury), 144 (Diocese of Rochester) and Edward S. Worrall, 'Catholics in the Canterbury Diocese in 1767' [with notes by Christopher Buckingham], *Kent Recusant History*, 1 (Spring 1979), 13-19.

<sup>49</sup> Judith Jago, *Aspects of the Georgian Church: Visitation Studies of the Diocese of York, 1761-1776* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1997), 13-14.

<sup>50</sup> This has been compiled from LPL, Mss. 1134/1-6, VG3/1a-d and VH/55/1. Comparative data for the Dioceses of Oxford and Norwich derive from the research reported in Field, 'A Godly People?' and 'Counting the Flock'. For the Wiltshire parishes of the Diocese of Salisbury they have been calculated from *Wiltshire Returns to the Bishop's Visitation Queries, 1783*, ed. Mary Ransome, Wiltshire Record Society 27 (Devizes: the Society, 1972).

<sup>51</sup> Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform*, 171-73.

<sup>52</sup> LPL, Ms. 1134/3, fo. 66v.

<sup>53</sup> LPL, Ms. VG3/2c, fo. 27v.

<sup>54</sup> LPL, Ms. VG3/1a, 244.

<sup>55</sup> *The Speculum of Archbishop Thomas Secker*, ed. Gregory, 159.

<sup>56</sup> The debate between optimists and pessimists is brought out in the introductions and constituent essays in *The National Church in Local Perspective*, eds Gregory and Chamberlain and *The Church of England*, eds Walsh, Haydon and Taylor; and in William Gibson, *The Church of England, 1688-1832: Unity and Accord* (London: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>57</sup> *Accounts of the Population of Certain Benefices or Parishes, with the Capacity of their Churches and Chapels*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers sess. 1818 vol. 18, 8-9, 25.

<sup>58</sup> Michael R. Watts, *Why Did the English Stop Going to Church?*, Friends of Dr. Williams's Library Lecture 49 (London: Dr. Williams's Trust, 1995), 8.

<sup>59</sup> Gill, *The 'Empty' Church Revisited*, 69-90, 220-24.

<sup>60</sup> *Congregational Magazine*, new ser. 10 (1834), supplement.

<sup>61</sup> *London City Mission Magazine*, 11 (1846), 286.

<sup>62</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. 98 (1848), cols. 1069-70.

<sup>63</sup> *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, xvii-xlvi. Cf. Margaret Roake, 'Religion and the 1851 Census', in *An Historical Atlas of Kent*, eds Lawson and Killingray, 168-69.

<sup>64</sup> Nigel Yates, 'The Major Kentish Towns in the Religious Census of 1851', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 100 (1984), 399-423.

<sup>65</sup> In particular, Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: The Nineteenth Century*, University of Leicester Department of English Local History Occasional Papers 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. 4 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1972), 55-62, 83-85; David Cousins, 'Kent and the 1851 Religious Census', *Kent Recusant History*, 5 (Spring 1981), 111-17; Bruce I. Coleman, 'Southern England in the Census of Religious Worship, 1851', *Southern History*, 5 (1983), 154-88.

<sup>66</sup> Michael R. Watts, *The Dissenters, Volume II: The Expansion of Evangelical Non-conformity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 682-85.

<sup>67</sup> The term 'Kentish London' (or metropolitan Kent) is used throughout this paper to denote the metropolitan districts which technically belonged to the ancient county of Kent before 1889 but which formally became part of London thereafter. On religion in Kentish London in the mid-nineteenth century, see also Geoffrey Crossick, *An Artisan Elite in Victorian Society: Kentish London, 1840-1880* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 139-44.

<sup>68</sup> *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship, England and Wales - Report and Tables*, House of Commons Parliamentary Papers sess. 1852-53, vol. 89, ccviii.

<sup>69</sup> *The Religious Census of London, Reprinted from The British Weekly* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1888), 44-48, 52, 97-100.

<sup>70</sup> *The Religious Life of London*, ed. Richard Mudie-Smith (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1904), 237-52. These pages are also reproduced in *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, 428-41.

<sup>71</sup> *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship, England and Wales*, 9.

<sup>72</sup> Joseph Cotton Wigram, *A Charge, Delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Rochester at his Second General Visitation, in November 1864* (London: Rivingtons, 1864), 8; Anthony Wilson Thorold, *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Rochester at his Primary Visitation in 1881* (London: John Murray, 1881), 28. Boundary changes affecting the Diocese of Rochester in 1877 obviously mean that the results for these two visitations are not strictly comparable.

<sup>73</sup> *The Religious Life of London*, ed. Mudie-Smith, 449.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 390-94; also reproduced in *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, 442-46. Analysis of the Bromley data for 1903, including comparisons with churchgoing in 1993, will be found in Gill, 'Religion', 323-25.

<sup>75</sup> *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, 38-41, 50-51.

<sup>76</sup> J. M. Russell, *The History of Maidstone* (Maidstone: William S. Vivish, 1881), 144-45, 161; Yates, Hume and Hastings, *Religion and Society*, 64-65; Gill, 'Religion, 1870-2000', 170.

<sup>77</sup> *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, 165-71.

<sup>78</sup> Peter Clark and Lyn Murfin, *The History of Maidstone: The Making of a Modern County Town* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), 232-33. They give the original source as *Kent Messenger*, 15 May 1926. However, no report of the census is to be found in the county edition of the *Kent Messenger & Maidstone Telegraph* for that date.

<sup>79</sup> *Keble's Margate & Ramsgate Gazette*, 18 February 1882; *Kentish Gazette*, 21 February 1882; Gill, 'Religion, 1870-2000', 170.

<sup>80</sup> *Religious Worship in Kent*, ed. Roake, 312-15.

<sup>81</sup> The results for all four surveys are conveniently tabulated in *UK Christian Handbook, Religious Trends No. 6, 2006/2007: Analyses from the 2005 English Church Census*, ed. Peter W. Brierley (London: Christian Research, 2006), 12.2, 12.49, 12.60-61. See also, for the first three surveys, *Prospects for the Eighties: From a Census of the Churches in 1979 Undertaken by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism* (London: Bible Society, 1980), 73; *Prospects for the Eighties, Volume Two: From a Census of the Churches in 1979 Undertaken by the Nationwide Initiative in Evangelism* (London: MARC Europe, 1983), 49; *Prospects for the Nineties: Trends and Tables from the 1989 English Church Census*, ed. Peter W. Brierley (London: MARC Europe, 1991), 364-67; *UK Christian Handbook, Religious Trends No. 3, 2002/2003*, ed. Peter W. Brierley (London: Christian Research, 2001), 12.18, 12.36-37.

<sup>82</sup> For Bromley Christian Research's data can be compared with Gill's census in 1993. He estimated church attenders in that year as 10.5 per cent of the population; Gill, 'Religion', 323-25 and 'Religion, 1870-2000', 170.

<sup>83</sup> Gill, 'Religion, 1870-2000', 171.

<sup>84</sup> *UK Christian Handbook, Religious Trends No. 6, 2006/2007*, ed. Brierley, 5.10.

<sup>85</sup> Unpublished reports on congregational attitudes and beliefs in the Erith, Orpington and Sidcup deaneries prepared by Christian Research on behalf of the deaneries, and made available to the author by Christian Research with the permission of the relevant Church of England officials.

<sup>86</sup> Unpublished report on attitudes towards religion in Orpington prepared by Research Support & Marketing on behalf of Thames Television plc, and made available to the author by Thames Television.

<sup>87</sup> Compiled from the 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003/4, 2004/5 and 2005/6 editions of Research and Statistics Department of the Archbishops' Council of the Church of England, *Church Statistics* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002-06) and <http://www.cofe.anglican.org/info/statistics/churchstatisticslink.html>.

<sup>88</sup> *UK Christian Handbook Religious Trends No. 4, 2003/2004*, ed. Peter W. Brierley (London: Christian Research, 2003), 4.4-4.5. It should be noted that in the Kentish London boroughs of Greenwich and Lewisham the proportion of professing Christians in 2001 was only 61 per cent; in the fifteen remaining metropolitan and non-metropolitan areas, the figure ranged from 72 per cent (in Bromley and Medway) to 77 per cent (in Sevenoaks).