The Diocese of Newcastle 1882-1903: the best of times?

Student Dissertation

How to cite:

For guidance on citations see FAQs.

© 2023 Philip Davies

https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/

Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher’s website:
http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21954/ou.ro.00015c47

oro.open.ac.uk
ABSTRACT

When the Diocese of Newcastle was formed in 1882 the Anglican church in the city was at a low ebb but by 1900 the then bishop, Edgar Jacob, stated that a revival had taken place.

This study examines the work of the Diocese of Newcastle from 1882 until 1903 under the leadership of its first two bishops, to assess the impact made by the creation of the new diocese and to determine the accuracy of the bishop’s statement that a revival had taken place. The study will also examine how the new diocese through its cathedral helped to create an identity for the new city of Newcastle.

This dissertation looks, firstly, at the structural and organisational changes brought about to enable the new diocese to function, using diocesan archive sources to compare the changes made with those made elsewhere in the Church of England. Then, using newspaper reports and the minutes of the town and city council of Newcastle, it considers how the new diocese and cathedral helped create an identity for the new city. Finally, it evaluates the changes made on the religious life of the church through statistics drawn from diocesan, parish and other records.

The study concludes that Jacob was right to say that a revival had taken place. The institutional life of the Church of England diocese had been transformed, and while there is no evidence that significant growth in religious participation had taken place, statistics do show growth in line with the increase in population, thereby strengthening the interpretation of revisionist scholars that decline in participation took place later than during the period of this study.
PERSONAL STATEMENT

Some of this dissertation builds on work submitted for assessment for the Open University A825 End of Module Assessment, Part Two.

No part of this dissertation has been submitted for any other qualification or publication.

I confirm that this dissertation is entirely my own work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Dr. Nick Cott for his invaluable support and advice on the writing of this dissertation, my wife and family for their patience and support, and Bishop Martin Wharton, 11th Bishop of Newcastle, who kindly appointed me to work in the Diocese of Newcastle, thereby sparking my interest in the history of the Anglican church in the area and the people who had brought it to life. Finally, I would also like to thank the staff of the Northumberland Archives, home of the Newcastle Diocesan archive, for their patient support.
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>List of Tables and Illustrations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Modernising the structures</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Cathedral and City: a new identity</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Evaluating the change</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Conclusion</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Illustrations and Tables

Illustrations

Figure 3.1: Royal Charter of 1882 giving Newcastle city status 24
Figure 3.2: St. Nicholas’ Church, Newcastle 1860 by John Storey 28

Tables

Table 2.1: Attendances at Morning Worship in Newcastle 9
Table 4.1: Parishes where additional church accommodation was recommended and dates of construction 40
Table 4.2: Number of Confirmations held in the Diocese, 1882-1911 46
Table 4.3: Males and Female Confirmations, 1882-1910 48
Table 4.4: Baptisms, Byker, St Michael 1880-1905 49
Table 4.5: Baptisms, Byker, St Silas - 1886-1905 49
Table 4.6: Baptisms: Byker, St Silas May 1887: Father’s Occupation 50
Table 4.7: Baptisms St Peter, Wallsend, 1880-1905 50
Table 4.8: Baptisms St Luke, Wallsend, 1885-1905 51
Table 4.9: Baptisms: Wallsend, St Luke, May 1895: Father’s Occupation 51
Table 4.10: Byker, St Michael: Average Sunday School Attendance 53
1: Introduction

When the Diocese of Newcastle came into being in 1882, being carved out of the Diocese of Durham, it formed part of the Church of England’s response to the significant demographic changes which had taken place in the latter half of the nineteenth century and what it saw as the rising tide of secularisation. Church attendance in Newcastle was at a very low ebb.

This study examines the work undertaken under the leadership of the first two Bishops of Newcastle (Ernest Wilberforce 1882-1896 and Edgar Jacob 1896-1903) to revitalise the Church of England in Northumberland following the creation of the Diocese, to determine the accuracy of the claim made in 1900 by Bishop Jacob, that there had been a ‘revival’ and, if so, on what basis it was made.¹ Secondly, the study also examines the place of the new cathedral in the life of the diocese and city to assess what contribution it made to their identity.

Although a general history of Newcastle Diocese was published in 1981, scholarly criticism was levelled for its lack of analysis and, ‘evidence of any intensive research amongst ecclesiastical and civil archives or in the files of local newspapers.’ ² The rationale behind this study was therefore to examine these records and, if possible, contribute to the understanding of the church in the diocese at the time and to see what, if any, light it might shed on the historiography of the period.

¹ Official Report of the Church Congress held at Newcastle upon Tyne, held on September 25th, 26th, 27th 28th 1900 (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1900), pp.30-42.
The period covered by this study sits within the period which scholars such as McLeod and Cox identified as the point when attendance at church, the traditional measure of religiosity, began to decline but which, following further study, revisionists like Williams and Brown described as a period of high religiosity.³

The starting point for this study was the extensive archives for the diocese held at the Northumberland Record Office and the agendas, minutes and reports of the various committees, as well as Visitation Returns and Diocesan Calendars (almanacs) which contained confirmation and other statistics and the report of the Bishop’s Commission undertaken in 1883. These documents were used to examine the steps made, initially by Bishop Wilberforce and then by the committees themselves and subsequently by Wilberforce’s successor, Edgar Jacob, to put in place the structures of the diocese to enable its governance and administration to function. In Chapter One, these changes are compared with those taking place elsewhere in the Church of England at the time using Burns’ study of institutional revival of the dioceses as the reference point. ⁴Where possible, a comparison was also made with the changes made in the Diocese of Southwell formed in 1884, two years later than Newcastle, and studied by Morris for what he calls ‘the National Church Ideal’ – the principles that guided the thinking and actions of the Church of England bishops at the time.

³ Hugh McLeod, *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City*, (London SW11: Croom Helm, 1974).
The second area of focus, considered in Chapter Two, is the new Cathedral, the changes that were made as a consequence of it achieving that status and how it contributed to the sense of identity in the new diocese and city. Local newspapers, and the Town and City Council minutes for Newcastle, located in the Tyne and Wear archives, provided material that was extremely helpful for this area of research.

In Chapter Three, an evaluation is made of the various reforms and changes put in place as a result of the diocese coming into being using the statistical data from the diocesan archives and other available records. This section includes an examination of the baptism registers for the two new churches that were built in Wallsend and Byker to cater for the increase in population. This data is included for two reasons; firstly, to provide examples of the impact of the new churches in terms of religious participation since there is no archival evidence of any local ‘demand’ for the new churches other than the increase in population, and, secondly, to establish if the new members, if any, came from the labouring classes. The view that industrialisation and urbanisation led the working classes to becoming alienated from the churches was prevalent in the late nineteenth century and held by scholars for many years subsequently. This sample of actual participation, though small, is important since there is no evidence, published or otherwise, of any study having been undertaken previously on the Anglican churches in Newcastle.

2: Modernising the structures

‘The administrative machinery was not only out of gear, it was rusty and corroded, and sadly unfit for the new calls that were made upon it.’

---

5 The Religious Census 1851 and Horace Mann’s interpretation of the statistics gave rise to the ‘pessimist’ view held by E.R. Wickham and others. This view held sway until the ‘revisionist’ interpretations of religiosity emerged in the 1980s.

When Newcastle Diocese was formed in 1882, the wider Church of England was engaged in a period of structural reform to improve its response to the increase in population and the apparent decline in religious participation.

This Chapter will consider those structural reforms, how and when they were implemented in Newcastle, and compare them to Burns’ study on institutional revival. Where possible, a comparison will also be made with the changes made in Southwell Diocese, covering the counties of Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire, under its first bishop, George Ridding, and reviewed in an article by Jeremy Morris. Like Newcastle, the population of Southwell diocese had increased rapidly as the coal industry expanded and urbanisation took place.

As the quotation at the start of this chapter suggests, the Anglican church in the area of the new diocese was in a moribund state at the start of the 1880s and this was evident in a number of ways. Firstly, through the standard measure of religious participation – statistics for attendance. A survey conducted in 1881 by the Newcastle Daily Chronicle just months before the formation of the diocese and in time for the meeting of the National Church Congress in the city, revealed that attendance at morning worship in the city had decreased in real terms since the 1851 Religious Census and relative to the size of population:

Jeremy Morris, ‘George Ridding and the Diocese of Southwell: A Study in the National Church Ideal’. Southwell (now called the Diocese of Southwell and Nottingham) was formed out of the Diocese of Lincoln in 1884 but was itself divided when the Diocese of Derby was created in 1927.

Table 2.1 Attendances at Morning Worship in Newcastle:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Denomination</th>
<th>30 March 1851</th>
<th>Population %</th>
<th>2 Oct. 1881</th>
<th>Population %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Church of England</td>
<td>7,202</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>6,441</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholic</td>
<td>3,389</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>3,845</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesleyan Methodist</td>
<td>1,270</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3,346</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primitive Methodist</td>
<td>806</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the table illustrates, numerical decline was not the case with other denominations. Although, for example, Roman Catholic worshippers had not kept pace with the rise in population, the actual number of those attending had still increased, whilst the numbers attending the Wesleyan Methodist churches had increased in real terms and relative to the rise in population; this ‘better performance’ in those churches was despite the fact that, as the Chronicle report noted, attendance at morning worship in the Anglican churches on the morning the census was taken was likely to have been higher than usual due to the presence of high profile clergy invited to give sermons in the churches before attending the Church Congress. It is reasonable to assume therefore that the failure on the part of the Anglican church to match the attendance figures of the other denominations was not due to a decline in religious adherence per se but due to factors specific to the Church of England and its organisation and ‘reach’.

Secondly, the weak state of the Church of England in the area was evidenced in its organisational structure which had hardly changed despite the huge increase in population. A committee of the House of Lords, appointed in 1858 to inquire into the state of ‘spiritual destitution’ in the mining districts, reported that the counties of Northumberland and Durham
were worse provided with church accommodation than any other counties in England. Yet little changed immediately – and an obvious illustration of the underlying structural problem was that just five churches were erected in the south east of Northumberland, the most populous area of the county including Newcastle, between 1851 and 1882.

Ernest Wilberforce was clearly aware of the problems he would encounter as the first bishop because within months of arrival he set up a Commission, ‘To examine into the Spiritual Wants and Requirements of certain parishes in the Diocese of Newcastle on the North Side of the River Tyne’. This Commission, made of clergy and prominent lay people including the Mayor of Newcastle, focussed largely on the issues which had preoccupied Horace Mann in his report following the 1851 Religious Census - the apparent lack of church accommodation and the lack of clergy to minister to the increased population.

Following consultation with each parish and others familiar with each area, the Commission provided the bishop with a portrait of each of the parishes where accommodation and ministerial needs were identified, based largely on the size of the population and the proximity of existing churches, together with an indication of the finance likely to be available to pay a clerical stipend, possible improvements in parish boundaries and potential sites for new churches and mission halls. In all, thirty-seven recommendations for change were made, summarised as follows:

---

(1) Twelve new parishes ‘to be formed as soon as possible’ at an estimated cost of £66,000;

(2) Fourteen additional mission rooms at a cost of £8,400;

(3) Seventeen additional clergy for ‘the most populous parishes’ costing the diocese a further £2,000 a year.

The setting up of this Commission to inform the bishop illustrates an important point – that the governance and administrative structures available for making changes in the diocese did not exist and any changes rested on the bishop alone to decide. This situation was not unique to Newcastle but reflected the position in the Church of England generally that, in matters of governance and administration, within the legal constraints set by Parliament, bishops had largely been free to make decisions themselves or to consult with anyone they chose, which usually meant members of the upper classes – the traditional supporters of the Established Church.\(^\text{12}\) Since bishops were themselves accorded the status of peers of the realm, being members of the House of Lords, this was perhaps not surprising, but, by 1882, dioceses were beginning to put in place a number of reforms and Wilberforce moved quickly to adopt the changes. Burns describes these reforms as ‘sufficiently widespread, significant in results and coherent in objectives and approach that they deserve to be regarded as a ‘Diocesan Revival’\(^\text{13}\).

Despite the fact that there were no national policies in place, other than the legal matters relating to the Established Church as a whole, there was what Morris calls a ‘national church

---

\(^{12}\) Knight p.153.

\(^{13}\) Burns, p.6.
ideal’ which expressed itself in particular reforms and attitudes which found favour and prevalence amongst Anglican bishops at the time.\textsuperscript{14}

The key structural reforms were threefold: the revitalisation of Rural Deaneries, the creation of representative and organisational structures, and, the development of the role of the bishop, while the ‘attitudes’ were those of the moderate ‘Broad Church’ - not of the Evangelical or High Church traditions but liberal, open to change and reform and, to quote Morris, with a ‘willingness to affirm a faith in the progressive unfolding of human knowledge, through science and innovation’. Ridding in Southwell and Wilberforce in Newcastle were bishops of this tradition.

\textit{Revitalisation of Rural Deaneries}

Rural Deaneries were groups of parishes overseen by a Rural Dean appointed by the bishop to ‘supervise the lives and manners of clergy and laity (and) convene clerical chapters’ to provide mutual support and discuss issues of common concern. Rural Deans were also expected to exercise a supervisory role which could involve inspecting the parsonage, church or chapel and collecting statistics relating to church attendance. However, the extent to which these functions were exercised was down to what to Burns called the ‘predilections’ of bishops, but as the nineteenth century progressed, as populations and towns expanded, and pressures on the churches increased, Rural Deans became an important part of the network of advice and support among clergy as well as a source of feedback and information to bishops. How Rural Deans and their deaneries were used and developed during this time is therefore a

\textsuperscript{14} Morris, p.129.
key indicator of how well the diocese was being managed, and how in touch the bishops were
with issues encountered at the ‘front line’.  

In the northern area of Durham diocese that was to become the new diocese, despite the huge
increase in population, there had been no changes made either to rural deanery areas or the
role of Rural Dean with the consequence that reform was urgently needed as they struggled to
respond to the situation. When Joseph Lightfoot was installed as Bishop of Durham in 1879
he set about making the necessary reforms. The number of deaneries were increased from 7
to 11 and boundaries were adjusted to represent the increase in population, giving Rural
Deans more manageable areas to oversee and with greater coherence. However, in the area of
the diocese of Newcastle, Lightfoot delayed making any changes, ‘I did not meddle with the
rural deaneries of the Northern County, I thought this reform might well be left to one far
more favourably situated than myself to carry it out, the first Bishop of Newcastle’.
Although this meant a wait of four years before any changes were made, it meant changes to
Rural Deanery areas could be made based on the findings from Wilberforce’s Commission,
giving a much better understanding of the position in the Tyneside parishes and where
restructuring would mean greater coherence in respect of the planned new churches and
mission halls.  

Likewise in Southwell diocese, Ridding moved quickly to make the changes in rural deanery
boundaries that he identified as necessary. In 1885, just a year into his period of office, rural

---

15 Burns, p.84.
17 These changes are set out in the London Gazette, 1 July 1884, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/25372/page/3004> [Accessed 10 July 2022].
deaneries in Nottinghamshire were increased in areas where the population had increased, like Durham and Newcastle, due to the influx caused by mining and other industries.\textsuperscript{18} The fact that changes were made in all three dioceses so soon after the arrival of their new bishops confirms that change was long overdue, a fact admitted by Lightfoot in his Presidential Address to the first Durham Diocesan Conference.\textsuperscript{19}

\textit{Representative and Organisational Structures}

One of the most important changes made in the revival of dioceses and the participation of lay people in the organisational life of the Anglican church came about as a consequence of the delegation of authority by bishops to allow committees and other entities to make decisions and agree policy for the diocese. The formation of Diocesan Conferences was of particular importance. By 1886, every diocese in England and Wales had established a Conference, made up of clergy and lay representatives from the Rural Deaneries, with a membership in the region of 150.\textsuperscript{20} As Chadwick notes, the importance of this body lay in its existence,

\begin{quote}
‘as a place where clergy and laity could meet for the first time and where laymen, especially of the little country parishes, were brought for the first time into touch with the central working if the dioceses, and forced to consider important matters of policy in a general context’.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{18} Laura Ridding, \textit{George Ridding: Schoolmaster and Bishop}, Edward Arnold London, 1908, p. 173. \\
\textsuperscript{19} DDC Minutes, 1880 p.6. \\
\textsuperscript{20} \textit{The Official Year Book of the Church of England, 1886}, (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1886), pp. 320-338. \\
\textsuperscript{21} Chadwick, p.360.
\end{flushright}
It was therefore when the Newcastle Diocesan Conference first met in September 1883 that church people from rural north Northumberland came into contact for the first time with lay people from Byker in inner Newcastle.

This change in decision making was not only structural but cultural as it involved those used to advising the Bishop – the upper echelons of Newcastle and Northumberland society – ultimately stepping back from their traditional roles in favour of elected representatives. Wilberforce managed this transition sensitively setting up a ‘Provisional Committee’ made up of both elected members and his invitees to oversee the setting of the Constitution and the programme for the first meeting. At the same time, he was clear about his intensions for the future:

‘For such a Conference as this, if viewed merely as a meeting of representatives from all parts of the diocese, for consultation and deliberation, is one which may be of almost incalculable value. But if, beyond this, the Conference be resolved into a grand working committee for a large part of the internal organisation of the diocese, it is clear how great the gain may be.’

The need by then was obvious – major changes were needed in the operation of the diocese and the ‘great gain’ could only be achieved by devolving responsibility.

The ‘democratisation’ of decision making in dioceses which these changes represented continued throughout the remainder of the century and by 1901 the membership of the Diocesan Conference under Edgar Jacob had marked an important further change – the membership was entirely elected but the Constitution provided for *ex officio* members who

22 NRO DN/B/1/1/1/1, Diocesan Conference Minutes, September 26, 1883.
were to include the Lord Lieutenant, Peers of Parliament in the Diocese, Members of Parliament in the Diocese and the Mayors and Sheriffs of Corporate Towns in the Diocese ‘being members of the Church of England’. The days of influence by social status alone had ended and membership was by election or by virtue of office only, albeit that such office holders were often members of the Established Church. Nonetheless, this change to elected membership and empowerment of ‘ordinary’ lay people in the life of the Church of England in Newcastle had taken place in the relatively short period of 20 years. In Southwell, it had taken place from 1885 on the appointment of George Ridding and in Durham from 1879 following Lightfoot’s appointment. Newcastle under Wilberforce was therefore complying with the ‘national ideal’.

Once the Diocesan Conference was in place, it meant a number of committees and other bodies could be established drawn from its membership and these included the Diocesan Society, an incorporated body based on a model used in Manchester and Chester dioceses, which could undertake activities on behalf of the diocese that had potentially significant financial and risk implications:

i) Church Extension – providing for the ‘building, enlargement, endowment and restoration of churches; the provision of temporary churches and mission buildings;

ii). Education, including the maintenance of day and Sunday Schools;

iii) Clergy Sustentation, including augmentation of stipends for curates, building of parsonages and assistance for retired clergy.

Whilst these seem to be obvious areas of activity for the diocese to be engaged in, its importance lay in the fact that this was the first time these matters had been considered by
official bodies of the diocese rather than by the bishop under his sole authority and, equally important, by clergy and lay people working together on an equal footing for the first time.

The setting up of the Diocesan Society also provides another insight into the change brought about by the creation of the new diocese, and the low ebb of church activity at the outset. Although there were no diocesan bodies engaged in its work, there were national church bodies which had representatives and local committees undertaking work at diocesan level.\textsuperscript{23} The minutes of the 1883 Diocesan Conference record that ‘the new Diocesan Society would in no way interfere with any existing society for any purpose,’ but it would ‘offer help as trustees, treasurers, auditors and otherwise,’ suggesting that, although these societies existed they operated at a very low level and needed ‘revival’ through the membership, experience and energy of new members and people willing to take on roles of responsibility.\textsuperscript{24} The fact that the Diocesan Society was in a position to offer such people and expertise suggests that people had been galvanised into action by the creation of the diocese just a year earlier.

Other important administrative bodies set up during the first three years of the new diocese included: Newcastle Diocesan Board of Finance, the Diocesan Board of Inspection of Schools and (with Durham diocese) Durham and Newcastle Diocesan Training College for Mistresses. The diocese was now moving towards a modern system of government in each area of its activity.

\textsuperscript{23} These included the Additional Curates Society founded 1837 for subsidizing assistant clergy, and the Incorporated Church Building Society, founded 1818, to assist in the provision of church accommodation.

\textsuperscript{24} NRO, DN/B/1/1/1/1, Minutes of the Newcastle Diocesan Conference, December 3,1883.
Another important area in which organisational development took place this time was the Bishop’s Visitation. Since medieval times Visitations had been a means by which Bishops (and Archdeacons) obtained information about the state of the church and other buildings in their dioceses. Visitations had taken place in Durham diocese at various points during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{25} However, in 1887, Wilberforce embarked on his ‘Primary Visitation’ of the diocese, issuing each cleric and churchwarden with a four-page questionnaire (entitled Articles of Enquiry) before summoning them to meet with him in different towns of the diocese to receive his ‘Charge’ – his instructions and advice for the work of the church in his area based on the Articles. As his biography notes, ‘he had purposely delayed the occasion until he should have had opportunity of making a thorough personal survey of the diocese.’ And the Charge sets out his instructions based on what he found:

\begin{quote}
We must take the church to the people where at present they will not come to the church. We must teach them how to worship, before they can appreciate our unrivalled Book of Common Prayer. So mission rooms, buildings, chapels, rise up and are filled; and to many of these chapels licenses for the administration of the Sacraments are granted. But generally speaking, these should be to the parish church, what of old the synagogues of Israel were to the Temple, namely feeders.\textsuperscript{26}
\end{quote}

What Wilberforce had found was that the church and its clergy needed to engage more with the communities and people it served, ‘teaching them how to worship’ before they could understand the standard liturgy of the Church of England – the Book of Common Prayer, in other words, basic functions of parish ministry. The Commission had identified the areas where church accommodation was needed, and work was now ongoing to meet those needs, but what Wilberforce was now focussed on was the essential tasks needed in the parishes to fill the churches and chapels that had been - or were to be - provided.

\textsuperscript{25} Durham Diocesan Records: DDR/EV/RET, Table of Visitations.
\textsuperscript{26} NRO, DN/V/1/1/1/5/2-21, 1887 Primary Visitation.
The 1887 Visitation focussed largely on buildings, and their condition and maintenance, and also asked for the name and qualification of any curates employed in the parishes and whether they were a graduate or not – a reminder that there was still no central administration in the diocese to monitor such things other than the Bishop’s office, and no secretarial help for the Bishop either, other than occasional help from his wife and daughters – legal work continued to be undertaken by the Diocesan Registrar based in Durham.\textsuperscript{27} In other words, despite his significant efforts to bring about change, the Bishop was still in the process of gathering basic information about what was happening in the diocese, and, in the question about the education of curates, he held a concern about standards. By 1895, and the time of his next Visitation, the questions to churchwardens about the church buildings remained the same but an additional section of questions was included on what the clergy were actually doing: \textsuperscript{28}

1) Is your Minister of Sober life and conversation?

2) Is he resident for nine months of each year?

3) Does he visit the sick regularly and diligently?

4) Are the services of the church duly and regularly performed? Have any been omitted and, if so, when and for what reason?

5) How often is the Holy Communion administered?

In view of the fact that these questions were likely to have provoked concern and possibly anger at an implied lack of trust, Wilberforce clearly judged that, after twelve years in post, his concerns about what the clergy were doing outweighed any potential breakdown in trust. That being so, he would probably have been disappointed with the responses because, of the 177 Articles of Enquiry received, only one return hints at something amiss – the

\textsuperscript{27} Atlay, p.116.
\textsuperscript{28} NRO, DN/1/V/1/1/2, 1895 Visitation.
churchwardens at Cambois stated, in response to the question about the Minister’s residence, ‘it is intention to be so’. And, aside from the three churches in the moorland area of West Northumberland where services had been missed ‘on account of the great snowstorm in January and February,’ the clergy appeared to be fulfilling their duties, at least to the satisfaction of their churchwardens.

The Bishop’s focus on the parish and the work of the clergy was a key concern of the Broad Church bishops. For them, the ‘national ideal’ was the parish system as the bedrock of the church’s provision for the people it served. As Morris describes, ‘through it, philanthropic, educational and religious organisations would transform diocesan society,’ so the development of parish work was required to meet the increasing social needs of the time. 29

In Newcastle the Diocesan Conference became active from the outset, holding debates to inform attendees on societal issues such as ‘The Depopulation of Rural Districts’ in 1883, to ‘The Housing of the Poor’ (1884), and ‘The Moral Aspect of the Wages Question’ (1896) as well as more obvious questions of concern to the church such as ‘The Church and Recreation, Sunday -Weekday’ (1894). 30

Examining the programmes for the Newcastle Diocesan Conference over the twenty year period of this study also reveals a shift away from a dependence solely on the clergy to increasing lay responsibility and influence as the church attempted to minister to a changing society, evidenced by several debates on the role of lay people and the overt criticism of the lack of opportunities provided in the past which, according to the vicar of Cullercoats in 1884, had led to ‘men to the ranks of dissent and, in some cases, the formation of new sects’

29 Morris, p.137.  
30 NRO, DN/B/1/1/1/1, Diocesan Conference Minutes 1883-1903.
where their gifts could be properly utilised. In 1896, the Diocesan Society was urged to ‘take vigorous action to set up strong local committees to consider how lay work can best be organised with permission to give effect to their efforts’. At the same time, lay people were reminded of their responsibility to support the clergy in other ways – in the Diocesan Conference of 1899 a debate took place on ‘The Duty of the Laity to support the Clergy,’ this being financial support towards stipends and pensions. The important place of lay people in the running and ministry of the church was now being formally recognised and acknowledged.

**Role of Bishops**

The creation of new bishoprics had a major impact on the position of the Church of England in late Victorian society, and in Newcastle it had been supported by citizens who, though members of other denominations, saw its benefits to wider society. And bishops were much more engaged with parish life than their predecessors, with greater understanding of local issues which meant a willingness to implement reforms which, in turn, resulted in a diminution of their own authority. Thus, the Diocesan Conference and committees came into being where clergy and laity could work together to solve local problems, and Wilberforce followed the same pattern as Durham and elsewhere in this respect.

Burns also notes the importance of the Bishop’s Visitation and Charge as a way of addressing local issues and of bringing a ‘diocesan consciousness’ into being with the bishop being able to instruct and advise on the issues which came to light in the Articles of Enquiry. This kind

---

31 NRO, DN/B/1/1/1/1, Newcastle Diocesan Conference Minutes, 8 June 1899.
32 The primary example of this is the Quaker, Joseph Pease, who donated his house, Benwell Towers, valued at £30,000 to become the Bishop’s residence. (Pickering, p.48.)
of approach would have been impossible within an area as large and diverse as the former Diocese of Durham even with the improvements that took place in communications as the nineteenth century progressed; the fact that Joseph Lightfoot decided not to implement changes to the rural deaneries of Northumberland and Newcastle in 1879/80 suggests that sufficient local knowledge was not available to him in the diocese regardless of his own recent arrival.

The two Bishops of Newcastle over this twenty-year period also became points of focus for the new city created in 1882 when the diocese was formed, becoming members of the Newcastle elite, attending functions including royal visits and bringing the presence of the church into arenas which the Bishop of Durham simply would not have had time to do. This is explored further in relation to the role of the cathedral in Chapter 3.

Within the diocese, bishops also helped bring a sense of joint endeavour- taking part in confirmations, clerical institutions and consecrations of new church buildings; they brought the diocese to the people and an accompanying sense of occasion. They not only supervised the clergy but took part in pastoral work themselves – as Wilberforce’s biography records, by the time of his Primary Visitation in 1887, he had ‘visited and taken part in some service, either by preaching, confirming, or instituting an incumbent, in every parish within its boundaries with one solitary exception.’ In terms of confirmations alone, in the 12 month period before the formation of the diocese just two confirmation services had been carried out by the Bishop of Durham, both in Newcastle and with a total of 1,222 individuals. In the following year, 1883, Ernest Wilberforce carried out services in every part of the diocese,

33 Atlay, p.139.
totalling 61 in all and confirming 5,184 individuals.\textsuperscript{34} Even allowing for some ‘catch up’ owing to the formation of the new diocese the difference is considerable.

One of the most important areas in which bishops had a direct influence was fundraising which Burns saw as ‘a powerful indicator of the key role of dioceses’.\textsuperscript{35} Following the receipt Commission report, Wilberforce set up ‘The Bishop of Newcastle’s Fund’ (the name giving emphasis to his personal involvement) to raise the very substantial amounts required to enable the recommendations to be put into effect, principally the building of churches and mission halls. The results of this enterprise will be considered further in Chapter 4.

It is easy to overlook the rather dry subject of church structural reform in pursuit of the history of the people who inhabited the structures with their beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, but without the changes and reforms that took place in the early days of the diocese under the leadership of its first two bishops, the story of what happened in the subsequent years would have been very different. Much of what happened in Newcastle did follow the national church ideal and the examples set by other dioceses. Therefore, it was not unique, but what was remarkable was the relative speed of the changes made from such a low start and with what appears to be considerable goodwill. Ernest Wilberforce in particular deserves much credit for establishing the relationships and trust that made that possible.

\textsuperscript{34} NRO, DN/P/1/1/1, Newcastle Diocesan Calendar 1886 pp. 137-139.
\textsuperscript{35} Burns, p.209.
3: Cathedral and City: a new identity

As a consequence of the formation of the diocese, in 1882 the parish church of St. Nicholas in Newcastle became the Cathedral for the new diocese and the town of Newcastle became a city by Royal Charter in May the same year.\textsuperscript{36}

Figure 3.1 Royal Charter 1882 giving Newcastle upon Tyne city status following the creation of the diocese \textsuperscript{37}


\textsuperscript{37} Tyne & Wear Archives (TWA), MD.NC/D/1/1/23, Royal Charter 1882. Reproduced by kind permission of Tyne & Wear Museums.
This chapter will examine the Cathedral’s role in helping to develop a sense of identity for the new city and diocese at a time of significant change in both church and civic life. It will do so by examining newspaper and other records for the period from just before the year of its foundation in 1882 to 1903, when the third Bishop of Newcastle was appointed.

The creation of the new diocese and city came at a time at the end of the nineteenth century which, as previously stated, was challenging for the church in Newcastle. As far as St. Nicholas’ church was concerned, whilst it had an important and prominent place in the centre of the town, as noted in the previous chapter, a shortfall in raising funds for its repair in 1879 revealed a general lack of support since the work could not be completed.38

In historiographic terms, this background of the church in Newcastle fits the traditional narrative of decline due to urbanisation and secularisation, but the twenty years following the creation of the diocese also provides evidence of a resurgence, certainly in terms of engagement in the civic sphere which this chapter attempts to illustrate, and strengthens the revisionist view represented by Morris and others that the end of the nineteenth century represented a peak in terms of participation not always reflected in attendance statistics.39

In terms of civic identity, as Matthew Vickers records, ‘towns and cities were involved in consciously constructing attractive images of themselves to encourage a sense of civic patriotism – a sense of identity with the city and pride in its achievements,’ and when, to

quote Asa Briggs, ‘the title ‘city’ was a coveted badge of status’.40 In the North East, Newcastle was also the focus of a cultural movement of what Robert Colls calls ‘the New Northumbrians’ – whose aim was ‘to re-affirm the modern world by re-charging it with historic meaning. Being a New Northumbrian was about living in a rapidly changing present but at the same time drawing one’s being from a rich and meaningful past’.41

The New Northumbrians therefore had a particular interest in the church in Northumberland which had a long and distinguished history, laying claim to be the cradle of Christianity in England with the Saxon diocese of Lindisfarne, and, from Norman times, focussed on Durham with its dominant cathedral and Prince Bishops. By the middle of the nineteenth century and the rise of the New Northumbrians, coupled with the rise in status of Newcastle as an important industrial and commercial centre, there was therefore a strong sense that, aside from the needs of the Church of England to connect with the urban population, Newcastle and the county of Northumberland needed to assert its own identity and the formation of the new diocese and cathedral fit well into this cultural movement, having resonance well beyond the Anglican church community. It was, for example, a Quaker, John Pease, who offered his house, Benwell Towers, as a gift for the residence of the new bishop, believing that having a diocese and cathedral had wider civic benefits.42

43 Jagger, p.47.
This pride and sense of place centred on Newcastle was therefore an important backdrop for the change that came about in 1882 and the new City Council was quick to align itself with the new see and its history. It wrote to the College of Heralds requesting that ‘the three castles of the town’s ancient device should form the principal feature of the arms of the new see’ and, on the appointment of Ernest Wilberforce as the first Bishop, it agreed that he should be presented with a formal ‘address of welcome’ to the city in the Town Hall (an honour usually reserved for Royal visitors), which stated:

On you, as first Bishop of Newcastle, devolves the singular honour of forming the channel in which the stream of Northumbrian episcopal history that was for ages merged in a deeper flood, will flow once more with a separate but newer life, a revived but nobler force. Durham restores what once belonged of old to Northumberland; and the anthems of St. Nicholas will awaken the memories of Lindisfarne.\(^43\)

The new Cathedral of St. Nicholas gave the city an important point of focus for its own identity.

As a parish church, St. Nicholas’ church had added an important physical dimension to the urban townscape, featuring often in the artistic depictions of Newcastle such as those by Turner, Grimshaw and others.\(^44\)


However, as a cathedral, it needed enhancements to reflect its new status, in common with other ‘parish church cathedrals’ created at the time such as Wakefield, so various physical changes were put in hand to prepare it for its new role, including the installation of a bishop’s throne, canons’ stalls, new pulpit, altar and reredos. This work revealed an important change as, unlike the previous difficulties in funding restoration work, this new work was

---

paid for as it provided an opportunity for wealthy citizens to demonstrate their commitment to the new Cathedral, the *Newcastle Daily Journal* pointing out that the ‘munificent gift’ of the pulpit and reredos by Percy Westmacott, ‘was the means of inducing other people to follow his example in giving handomely to enable the designs for the beautifying of the Cathedral to be carried out.’ This article also highlights that, ‘with one very little exception, the work has been carried out locally’ from the wrought ironwork to the gaslights and fine woodwork of the renowned local carver Ralph Hedley, the work was a source of considerable local pride and when a service took place to mark the re-opening it was attended by the Mayor and Corporation, complete with mace and sword bearers, Town Clerk and City Treasurer and ‘a very large congregation’ in attendance.\(^{47}\) This was as much a civic occasion as it was a religious one, the Cathedral being an important physical representation of Newcastle’s new heightened status as a city.

It is important to note that St. Nicholas’ was not the city’s only cathedral and the Anglican Diocese its only diocese. In 1850, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Hexham and Newcastle was formed with its Cathedral of St. Mary in the centre of Newcastle.\(^{48}\) However, an examination of the minutes of the Town and City Council for the period 1882 to 1903 reveals no mention of that cathedral nor its bishop, and no mention either of any denomination other than the Church of England.\(^{49}\) This is surprising given the strength in Newcastle particularly of the Dissenting churches at the time, as Asa Briggs points out, (nonconformists) ‘were far more important than even their numbers suggested leading the local politics of cities.’\(^{50}\) And

---

\(^{49}\) TWA, MD NC/3/15-2, Town & City Council Minutes, 1 Jan. 1882 – 31 Dec. 1903.  
\(^{50}\) Briggs, p.69.
in Newcastle the Nonconformists were a powerful presence, as the biography of Ernest Wilberforce records, ‘nonconformity had obtained so strong a grasp upon the middle classes in Newcastle that open and renewed activity among Churchmen was resented as an intrusion.’\textsuperscript{51} However, it was the Established Church with Queen Victoria as Supreme Governor that clearly held sway in the civic sphere despite any personal associations, and the new Cathedral, representing as it did the Established Church, was an important element in the identity of the new city. A poem published by the Newcastle Daily Journal on the occasion of consecration of Ernest Wilberforce as the city’s first bishop recognises this close association:

Dear City and Metropolis of the North  
Ring out a peal at this historic hour  
A solemn peal from thy Cathedral tower.  
Be thou a consecrated place henceforth  
A city glorious for her honest worth.  
Among old England’s cities be a power  
This sacred moment be thy second birth! \textsuperscript{52}

The final twenty year period of the nineteenth century was important for cities like Newcastle in terms of their identity, and newspapers played an important role in creating an atmosphere of community solidarity, as Andrew Jackson notes, ‘newspapers were essential agents in promoting long-standing and new civic institutions and organisations’, and ‘sought to champion the success and future potential of their own city’.\textsuperscript{53} This desire on the part of the newspapers was helpful to both city and diocese in Newcastle as they worked to create identities for themselves and work harmoniously together, reflected through the physical and symbolic presence of the Cathedral, as the poem above illustrates.

\textsuperscript{51} Atlay, p.108.  
Pride in the city was also represented in its architecture and, like other towns and cities, Newcastle invested in impressive public buildings such as a new library and the Town Hall which was sited in a prominent location opposite the Cathedral, giving it an added status and creating a focus for the city. As Borsay notes, ‘such structures were of critical importance in establishing the overall image of the town…(and) were seen to symbolize the prosperity, humanity and prestige of the whole community.’ In the case of Newcastle, the physical closeness of the Town Hall and Cathedral was particularly important as they symbolised church and city working in close harmony, strengthening the identity of each other, and this was reflected on occasions such the presentation of a pastoral staff by the Corporation to Bishop Wilberforce in the Town Hall with this dedication:

If our Queen has her sceptre: if civil magistrates, such as the worshipful mayor of this city, have their maces as the ensign of their authority; surely it is fitting that our chief spiritual and ecclesiastical ruler should not be without some corresponding symbol of his office and jurisdiction.

The language and symbolism could hardly be clearer – church and Corporation were as one in unity and respect. This relationship was reflected again when the pews in the Cathedral were to be changed following the re-ordering, a letter from the Cathedral to the Council declared that the position of the pews offered to the Mayor and Corporation would in future ‘be more suitable and honourable than the present one for the head of the laity and the most distinguished members of the congregation.’

---

55 ‘Bishop of Newcastle’, Newcastle Courant, 27 July 1883, p.3.
56 TWA, MD.NC/3/18, Letter from Cathedral Secretary recorded in City Council minutes, 7 March 1888.
Another such occasion was when, following the death of Queen Victoria, it was decided to erect a statue in her honour and the location chosen was outside the Cathedral and opposite the Town Hall in what was to become known as St. Nicholas Square. In his speech the Deputy Mayor said:

The statue was beautiful for situation. It was just where it ought to be, in the centre of the city. It would remind them of duty. On one side they had their beloved Cathedral, reminding them of duty in the highest sphere – that of religion. On the other side, they had the Town Hall, reminding them of their civic obligation and of their duty to that vast community, and in the centre they had the statue of their late sovereign, reminding them of their duty to the throne and State.  

The creation of this image of church and civic authorities working in harmony was important for the sense of local patriotism and for the sense of identity which the Council and the new diocese wished to create - as Michael Johnson observes, with the statue ‘the streetscape formed a symbolic axis which was used both consciously and unconsciously to construct a coherent identity for Newcastle, one that defined it as a city and located it within the nation and the Empire.  

When the date for the erection of the statue of Queen Victoria was announced, the Newcastle Daily Post proposed that other statues be erected:

Though it can hardly be hoped that the Cathedral Square will ever rival an open space like George’s square in Glasgow (…) it may nevertheless one day hold a group of statues that will remind the people of the great ones who have gone before them.  

This evocation of the past and ‘the great ones who had gone before’ was not the first time such a concept had been voiced in connection with the Cathedral as the repository of civic

---

59 ‘Queen Victoria Statue’, Newcastle Daily Post, 3 April 1903, p.5.
memories and pride. In 1895, the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* proposed that ‘St Nicholas Cathedral become for the North of England what Westminster Abbey has become for the nation,’ and posed the question, ‘why should Northumberland and Durham not do for their local heroes, their men of science, art, literature and industry what is done for the great men of the nation,’ even suggesting that for this ‘local Valhalla’ there would be ‘many more than a thousand people who would contribute 2 shillings a year for the purpose.’ Clearly this sense of the Cathedral being more a place of worship and something deeply symbolic of its place and people was very strong and already part of the identity of the new city, even of the area served by Durham Cathedral.

There are other indicators of the importance of the Cathedral in the life of the city represented in local newspapers and elsewhere. Matthew Vickers notes in his study of Liverpool that royal visits and events ‘were significant occasions for the projection of civic image (…) and the grandeur of these occasions was as much a reflection of the city as of the monarch.’ In Newcastle, there was no bigger event than the exhibition to mark Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in 1887 - so important that, as the City Council minutes record, a request was made by the Cathedral, ‘it being anticipated that you will desire to ring the bells much more often than usual, the present time would be a good opportunity to obtain a peal of bells worthy of the city.’ This being opportunistic on the part of the Cathedral or not, the Council paid the sum of £250 toward the cost. The bells were duly rung, not least at a thanksgiving service attended by the Mayor and Corporation to mark the Jubilee, the exhibition gained national attention.

60 *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*, 1 June 1895, p.4.
61 Vickers, p.16.
62 TWA, MD NC/3/15-2, City Council Minutes, December 30 1887.
for the city and the special supplement issued by the Newcastle Courant carried a striking image of the Cathedral on its first page above that of the Duke of Cambridge who opened the exhibition – the Cathedral was emblematic of the city and its achievements. 63

The Cathedral played an important part in the life of the city in other ways following its foundation. In 1883, it set up the Newcastle Cathedral Nurse and Loan Society to employ nurses to visit ‘the sick poor’. At its Annual Meeting in the Town Hall, it was reported that its four nurses had made 3,000 visits to people ‘without religious distinction’.64 The status of the Cathedral was an important element in attracting the funding for the work which was undertaken on behalf of the whole community and evidently held in high esteem because when the British Medical Association held its annual conference in Newcastle in 1893 it held a special service in the Cathedral.65

The new Cathedral was, of course, also the major church of the diocese and the centre of its religious life. The clergy had initially expressed sadness at the loss of connection with the ‘old cathedral’ but the enhanced status of St. Nicholas Cathedral and its place in the life of the city, with the bishop as spiritual leader and member of the civic elite did much to change opinions. As it was, Wilberforce’s presence at events where he was the sole representative of the churches was significant. Of the 239 reports in the Newcastle Courant referencing him during his period of office, there were just 12 relating to services in the Cathedral but 46 relating to his attendance at other events, mostly of a charitable nature in the city, but four

63 ‘Newcastle Royal Jubilee Exhibition’, Newcastle Weekly Courant (Special Supplement), 13 May 1887, p.1.
64 ‘Newcastle Cathedral Nurse & Loan Society’, Newcastle Courant, 20 June 1884.
relating to royal visits where he was among the principal dignitaries, including the opening of Durham College (now Newcastle University) staying overnight with the Royal party. A similar pattern is observed with Edgar Jacob and of the 468 newspaper reports referencing him, just 36 relate to events of a religious nature and he too was a principal guest on two royal visits, clearly maintaining a significant presence in community affairs beyond the life of the church.

As the ‘seat’ of the Bishop, the Cathedral played host to services and events with a diocesan purpose such as meetings of the Diocesan Conference, the ordination of priests and the dedication of a ‘mission van’ to work in the parishes, but it also held services on behalf of the city to mark national events such the thanksgiving service for the Queen’s Jubilee in 1887 and the death of the Duke of Clarence in 1892, which the Mayor and Corporation attended, giving a strong sense of local religious and civic institutions working together to reflect patriotic sentiment and shared values, thereby creating a stronger identity for both as a result.

It is evident that with the creation of the new diocese and cathedral, the Church of England achieved its aim of becoming a stronger presence in Newcastle. As a parish church, St. Nicholas’ had been a place of worship with an important architectural presence in the town, but as a Cathedral it became a representation of the ancient Saxon diocese of Lindisfarne with

---

66 Newcastle Courant, 1 January 1882 – 31 December 1896.
68 Newcastle Courant, 1 January 1896 – 31 December 1903, p.4.
its claim to be the cradle of Christianity in the whole country, and, as the physical representation of the Established Church, it brought royal connections and, together with its bishop, a close link with the Town Hall and civic community, serving the city as a whole, developing values of civic patriotism and, ultimately, helping to create a strong identity for both the new city and diocese in so doing.
4: Evaluating the change

This chapter will evaluate the work undertaken by Bishops Wilberforce and Jacob and their colleagues in the new diocese to see what tangible differences their efforts made, both quantitatively, through examination of statistical evidence available in the diocesan archives and elsewhere, and qualitatively, from diocesan and other records, making comparisons with other dioceses where possible.

When in 1883 Ernest Wilberforce set up his Commission ‘To examine into the Spiritual Wants and Requirements of certain parishes in the Diocese of Newcastle on the North Side of the River Tyne’, it was to provide him with an assessment of what changes were needed to meet, as the title states, ‘the spiritual wants’ of his new diocese.69 The Commission report and recommendations therefore provide a useful starting point, or baseline, from which to evaluate what was achieved subsequently.

First, it should be noted that the Commission had a particular focus for its inquiry, referenced already in Chapter 1 - the provision of church accommodation, or ‘church extension’ as it was termed. In adopting this focus, Wilberforce and his contemporaries were following two important schools of thought. Firstly, that of Horace Mann, and his highly influential report following the 1851 Religious Census, which identified the lack of church accommodation, or ‘sittings’, as one of the reasons for the (apparently) low attendance by the working classes in the urban areas and, therefore, the need for more sittings which, it was hoped, would lead to

69 Northumberland Record Office (NRO), DN/1/1/1/3, Report of the Bishop of Newcastle’s Commission.
an increase in attendance.\textsuperscript{70} Secondly, the belief held by Broad Church bishops of the Church of England during the 1880s and 90s, that the church building was the physical and spiritual centre of parish life from which transformation could occur.\textsuperscript{71} As late as 1899, Edgar Jacob was advocating the need for yet more church buildings, or ‘plant’, as he termed it, for this reason,

‘The church is the spiritual centre. There must be the parochial building to be the workshop of the clergy and lay workers, without which the work will be stunted and dwarfed, classes and clubs cannot be maintained, or other needful work done.’\textsuperscript{72}

The provision of buildings was therefore considered as only the starting point for the work of the church in the parish and not the result of any local demand for more accommodation. When, in 1899, Jacob commented on the need for more buildings he also recognised the issue of non-attendance and lack of demand:

‘No-one can go through Newcastle on a Sunday and seriously maintain that the majority of the hard-headed artisans on Tyneside are connected with any church or chapel at all. I should exaggerate if I said they were not actuated by any religious principle. I know that as a rule they have had some Christian teaching in earlier life, and wish to lead upright lives as citizens, and are glad for their families to have a Christian bringing up, (but) to them, the Church is no home.’\textsuperscript{73}

This rather stark assessment of the church’s position, not unlike Mann’s commentary almost fifty years earlier, does fit with the responses from the Bishop’s Visitation returns in 1887 when Ernest Wilberforce had asked the question ‘is additional accommodation required in your parish?’ of the 175 returns, only two answered yes - Tynemouth and St Philip’s,

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Edgar Jacob, \textit{A Charge Delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Newcastle at his Primary Visitation 1899}, p.16. 
\item \textsuperscript{73} Edgar Jacob, Charge, p.66.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
Newcastle, both of which had already been identified as requiring more accommodation by the Bishop’s Commission (see table 1, below).  

The ‘push’ for more buildings therefore seems at odds with the lived reality. Green describes the approach as ‘an essentially artificial product of a peculiar theory of church growth’ - which held that church extension should be primarily institutional, and ‘instead of recruiting into the church and then providing (accommodation), the churches should build in order to provide a general religious and moral influence…and hope that large scale recruitment would follow.’  

This being the case, the Bishop’s Commission therefore recommended that new churches be built, and staffed, and the following table sets out the parishes affected and, if and when, the new buildings came into being.

---

74 NRO DN/V/1/1/5/2-21. Bishop’s Visitation Returns, 1887.
Table 4.1: Parishes where additional church accommodation was recommended and the dates of construction.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Parish</th>
<th>New Church Built (or Extended)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Benwell</td>
<td>1894 - (Benwell, St. James)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Byker St. Anthony</td>
<td>1906 – Byker, St Mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Byker St. Michael</td>
<td>1886 – Byker, St. Silas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Earsdon and Blyth</td>
<td>1884 – Blyth, St. Cuthbert &amp; 1886 – Earsdon, St. Alban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Gosforth</td>
<td>1887 - Gosforth, All Saints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Horton</td>
<td>1898 - Cambois St Andrew Mission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Howden</td>
<td>1902– Willington Quay, St. Paul</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Jesmond</td>
<td>1888 – Jesmond, St. George</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Killingworth</td>
<td>1885 – Dudley Mission church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Newburn</td>
<td>1887 – Newburn, St. Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Newcastle, St. Andrew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Newcastle, Christ Church</td>
<td>1891- Shieldfield, St. Jude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Newcastle, St. Cuthbert</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Newcastle, St. John</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Newcastle, St. Philip</td>
<td>1891 - Shieldfield, St. Jude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Newcastle, St. Stephen</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Percy Main</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Tynemouth, Christ Church (North Shields)</td>
<td>1884 - North Shields, St. Augustin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Walker</td>
<td>1902 – (Christ Church Walker)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Wallsend</td>
<td>1885 – St Luke, Wallsend</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As this table illustrates, there was a considerable degree of success in responding to the recommendations made by the Commission in the period up to 1903. Added to which, substantial building of new churches and chapels also took place in areas of the diocese not covered by the Bishop’s Commission report. In rural Northumberland during the same period a further twenty three churches were built and a further six churches enlarged or restored.  

---

For the record of when churches were built:

77 1) Prins (as above), and 2) Newcastle Diocesan Calendar 1883 -1911.
Overall, therefore, a very large increase in the number of church buildings and accommodation took place and, as the Rev. James Henderson reported to the meeting of the National Church Congress in Newcastle in 1900, this was all the more remarkable because whilst there had been an increase of 300%, or around 200 buildings, erected since the beginning of the nineteenth century, this was, at 303%, almost exactly the same percentage increase as the size of population, from 168,078 in 1800 to 510,000 in 1899, but a considerable proportion of the new buildings had only come into existence since the formation of the new diocese.\footnote{Church Congress Report, p.58.}

Clearly, this huge building programme and the staffing of new posts required significant financial investment which largely came about as a result of a major fundraising effort. Some of the funding required came from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in London (and the Bishop’s Commissioners had estimated the likely grant support for each of the recommendations contained in their report), but a larger amount had to be raised locally through a fund entitled the Bishop of Newcastle’s Fund set up in December 1883 following two public meetings held in Newcastle to decide how best to take forward the recommendations made in the Commission report.\footnote{Newcastle Diocesan Calendar, 1885, p.140.} This Fund was responsible for raising the sums required not just for the building programme (which, in addition to the funding for new churches, also included clergy housing and church halls) but also the stipends of the clergy to minister in the new churches and parishes. In all, as Edgar Jacob reported to the Church Congress in 1900, over £100,000 was raised for the Fund during the ten years of its existence up to 1893, over £64,000 from local fundraising in the parishes.\footnote{Rt. Rev. Edgar Jacob, ‘Inaugural Address’, Church Congress Report 1900, p.31.}

\footnote{Church Congress Report, p.58.}
\footnote{Newcastle Diocesan Calendar, 1885, p.140.}
\footnote{Rt. Rev. Edgar Jacob, ‘Inaugural Address’, Church Congress Report 1900, p.31.}
significance of this achievement can be made by comparing the amounts raised in other dioceses over this period. The 1886 edition of the Church of England Year Book contains a summary of activities for each diocese under the heading ‘church extension’ and it reveals that of the 34 dioceses at the time, expenditure on church buildings in the Diocese of Newcastle in 1884 alone was £64,039, a sum exceeded only by London, Manchester and Ripon (Ripon included Leeds and the whole of West Yorkshire where £67,816 was spent). Just £12,630 was spent in the neighbouring diocese of Durham and £53,711 in the new diocese of Southwell under Bishop Ridding.\textsuperscript{81} Relative to the size of population, this was therefore an impressive outcome for the diocese and a sign of the revitalisation of the Anglican church which had taken place in the area since 1882, a change reflected frequently in reports in local newspapers on the progress of the Bishop’s Fund and the building of new churches then underway.\textsuperscript{82}

As far as increasing clergy and other posts was concerned, this too was a considerable achievement. In 1882, there were 223 clergy in the area which became the diocese of Newcastle and, by 1900, Bishop Jacob reported that the number had grown by 101 to 324, many of whom had been ordained from candidates in the new diocese.\textsuperscript{83} By way of comparison, the number of clergy in the larger and more highly populated Diocese of Durham had increased by almost the same number, from 425 to 529 over the same period.\textsuperscript{84}

\textsuperscript{82} For instance, ‘The Bishop of Newcastle’s Fund’, The Newcastle Courant, Feb 1, 1884, p.5, and ‘Church Work in the Diocese of Newcastle’, The Newcastle Courant, Jan 16, 1885, p.2.
\textsuperscript{83} ‘Ordinations in the Diocese’, Newcastle Diocesan Calendar, 1890 p.168.
\textsuperscript{84} Edgar Jacob, Church Congress report, p.33.
Equally important to the number of clergy ministering in the new diocese, the eighteen years since its formation had also witnessed a major change in the way lay people were used. This was reported to the Church Congress in 1900:

‘In 1882, the only lay workers were the churchwardens, parish clerks, a certain number of schoolmasters holding the Bishop's licence to teach, and some Sunday School teachers in the towns. Now we have a large body of general church workers, 10,082 in number, whom the Bishop is organizing into a Diocesan Association; sixty-two lay readers (licensed), eight sisters, two deaconesses, six Scripture readers, one police court missionary and two itinerating Church Army vans.’

This substantial growth in both lay and clergy workers was probably very unusual at the time for the simple reason that it was reported in such detail to the Church Congress in the presence of the Archbishop of Canterbury and bishops from every other diocese in the Church of England. As Canon James Henderson reported, ‘more has been done for the church in the diocese in the eighteen years since the division, than in the eighty-two years that preceded it.’ Newcastle Diocese was setting out its stall to the hierarchy of the Anglican church, confident of what it had achieved.

The work and activities which took place within these new and existing churches is, of course, of major importance in evaluating the success, or otherwise, of the new diocese in its efforts to bring Christianity to the local population. Here, it is important to note the difficulty of measuring religious participation other than through statistical evidence of attendance and other data. Unfortunately, whereas Williams, was able to derive considerable insights into the religious beliefs and practice of the people in Southwark through oral history accounts, unfortunately there is no such opportunity available here. The oral history recordings and

---

85 James Henderson, Church Congress report, p.58.
86 Henderson, Congress report, p.60.
87 Williams, pp.303–17.
transcriptions for the North East of England available at Beamish Museum contain only scattered references to religious participation across the region, whilst even the statistical record for the diocese in the official archives contain no centralised attendance records, no records of attendees at Easter and Christmas communion services, and no central record of baptisms, marriages or funerals.\textsuperscript{88} This lack of data is surprising given the particular focus on, and importance of, church extension in the new diocese but this was not unusual in the Church of England at the time since there was no requirement for dioceses to collect such statistics until the twentieth century.\textsuperscript{89} What follows therefore is the result of examination of such other records as do exist from local newspapers, minutes and records of diocesan committees, Bishops Visitation Returns, the annual Diocesan Calendar and parochial records.

**Confirmations**

Confirmation is a mark of full membership of the church, giving the person right to participate in services of holy communion and, unlike infant baptism, requiring some level of consent and, as a prerequisite, candidates who had reached what the Prayer Book termed ‘an age of intelligent responsibility’.\textsuperscript{90} In practice, this meant candidates who were between the ages of fourteen and nineteen.\textsuperscript{91} However, it was not usual for adults to be confirmed, for example, the newspaper report on the confirmation service held at St. John’s church, Newcastle in May 1885, states that ‘a very noticeable feature was the large proportion of adults in the congregation.’\textsuperscript{92} Candidates were required to undergo a period of instruction -in

\textsuperscript{88} Beamish Museum Audio Collections \(<\text{http://collections.beamish.org.uk/>}[\text{Accessed 23 February 2022}].\
\textsuperscript{89} The Parochial Church Councils (Powers) Measure, 1921 abolished Parish Vestry meetings and set up governance structures in dioceses based on registration on the electoral roll of a parish when numbers could then be counted.\
\textsuperscript{90} NRO, DN/P/1/1/10, Diocesan Calendar 1899, p.174.\
\textsuperscript{91} Frances Knight, *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995) p.92.\
\textsuperscript{92} ‘Confirmation in Newcastle’, *The Newcastle Courant*, 1 May 1885, p.5.
Newcastle diocese for up to three months - followed by questioning on the basic tenets of Christianity. Bishop Jacob advised his clergy that, ‘if the preparation were undertaken well, (confirmation) could not infrequently be the turning point of a life.’ 93

Confirmation statistics are therefore an important measure of religious participation and the progress of the diocese in reaching the local population. This Table sets out the total numbers of confirmations over the period.

93 Edgar Jacob, 1899 Visitation Charge, p.6.
Table 4.2: Number of Confirmations held in the Diocese of Newcastle 1882 -1911.  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1882 *</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>952</td>
<td>1,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1883</td>
<td>2,087</td>
<td>3,097</td>
<td>5,184</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1884</td>
<td>854</td>
<td>1,286</td>
<td>2,140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1885</td>
<td>1,118</td>
<td>1,762</td>
<td>2,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1886</td>
<td>1,230</td>
<td>1,927</td>
<td>3,157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1887</td>
<td>1,105</td>
<td>1,906</td>
<td>3,011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1888</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>1,755</td>
<td>2,988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1889</td>
<td>1,344</td>
<td>2,149</td>
<td>3,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>1,504</td>
<td>2,407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1891</td>
<td>1,185</td>
<td>1,890</td>
<td>3,075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>1,096</td>
<td>1,654</td>
<td>2,750</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1893</td>
<td>1,060</td>
<td>1,805</td>
<td>2,865</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1894</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>1,506</td>
<td>2,584</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>1,197</td>
<td>1,782</td>
<td>2,979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1896</td>
<td>1,382</td>
<td>1,907</td>
<td>3,289</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td>1,226</td>
<td>1,993</td>
<td>3,219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td>1,253</td>
<td>1,657</td>
<td>2,910</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>1,495</td>
<td>2,194</td>
<td>3,689</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1911</td>
<td>1,346</td>
<td>2,020</td>
<td>3,366</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* By the Bishop of Durham

Unfortunately, confirmation figures for the years from 1898 to 1903 do not exist, but they are available for the years 1910 and 1911 which are provided for comparison.

---

94 NRO, DN/P/1/1 Newcastle Diocesan Calendar, 1883 – 1911.
These figures provide some important evidence. Firstly, that there is a large increase in the total number of confirmations over the period. Pickering calculated that the population of the diocese increased between 1882 and 1901 by 38% (from 438,000 to 606,000). This was almost exactly the same percentage increase in the number of confirmations between 1884 and 1898 (the first year after the initial ‘catch up’ following the formation of the diocese, and the nearest year to 1901 for which the figures are available), meaning that numbers of confirmations during the period kept pace with the percentage increase in population.

Secondly, there is a substantially higher number of females confirmed than males, providing support to Brown’s argument that it was ‘female piety’ which was a key factor in determining religious adherence in British society (and its later decline as attitudes changed). Finally, there is, based on these figures, no evidence of decline in participation, giving support to the revisionist view that numerical decline did not take place until much later than the end of the nineteenth century, a view supported by other statistics available from the diocesan records.

The table below illustrates how, after an initial surge following the formation of the diocese, the confirmations of males (in blue) and females (in orange) stabilised and followed a similar pattern throughout the period before rising again at the beginning of the twentieth century.

---

Table 4.3: Male and Female Confirmations- Newcastle Diocese 1882 -1910

Blue = Number of Females Confirmed
Red = Number of Males Confirmed

Baptisms

Another measurable ‘test’ of the level of religious participation was the number of baptisms performed. These records available in the records of each parish rather than held centrally by the diocese. Whilst confirmation is a strong test of religious commitment, baptism was – and is - an important religious ‘rite of passage’ establishing membership of the Christian church. But, during the Victorian period, it was also an equally important social convention, as Knight points out, ‘for most parents it was a question of giving the child a name and thus an identity in the local community and, more importantly, in heaven’ should he or she die prematurely.\(^{98}\) Notwithstanding that qualification, baptism statistics still provide an important marker for participation in the new diocese.

---

\(^{98}\) Knight, p.86.
For this research, the parishes of Byker and Wallsend were selected since both are located on the north side of the River Tyne and therefore the subject of recommendations by the Bishop’s Commission. The population of both parishes had increased following industrialisation during the course of the nineteenth century with shipbuilding and mining being the predominant industries, and, importantly for the purpose of this study, both parishes have records in the diocesan archives that are reasonably complete. In 1883, Byker had a population estimated at 22,000 with just one church, St Michael’s, opened in 1862.  

Table 4.4: Baptisms, Byker St Michael 1880 -1905  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>386</td>
<td>588</td>
<td>527</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>635</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>915</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is clearly a considerable increase in the number of baptisms from 1880, (two years before the new diocese was formed), until 1905, and greater than the 38% increase in population mentioned earlier. The reduction in numbers in 1886 and 1890 can be explained by the opening of the new church of St. Silas, Byker, opened in 1886, when the existing parish was divided following the recommendation of the Bishop’s Commission.

The figures for the new church of St. Silas are shown in this table and, again, show a very large increase over the course of the period.

Table 4.5: Baptisms, Byker St Silas - 1886 -1905  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1887</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1897</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>405</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

99 Bishop’s Commission report, p.44.  
100 NRO EP29/3- 14, St Michael, Byker Baptism Registers 1880-1905.  
101 NRO EP122/1 -6, St Silas, Byker Baptism Registers, 1886-1905.
A sample of the baptisms in St. Silas church - from May 1887 - was taken to establish the occupation of the father of each child baptised.

Table 4.6: Baptisms: St Silas, Byker, May 1887: Occupation of Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rivetter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engine Driver</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carter</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bricklayer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grocer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plater</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Wallsend, east of Byker along the River Tyne, the same pattern of increasing numbers of baptisms was found where St. Luke’s church was opened in 1885 following the recommendation of the Bishop’s Commission. The existing church of St Peter, built in 1809, served a parish with a population of 8,135 in 1883, so a lower population than Byker but still meriting the construction of an additional church.

Table 4.7: Baptisms St Peter, Wallsend, 1880-1905

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1880</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1886</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

102 NRO, EP122/1, St Silas, Byker Baptism Register, 1887.
103 Report of the Bishop’s Commission, p.44.
104 NRO, EP44/12 – 13, St. Peter Wallsend, Baptism Registers 1880 -1905.
As in Byker, there was an increase in the number of baptisms following the formation of the diocese, a reduction following the opening of the new church, but a large increase in numbers thereafter.

The number of baptisms at the new church are shown here:

Table 4.8: Baptisms St Luke, Wallsend, 1885-1905

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>1885</th>
<th>1890</th>
<th>1895</th>
<th>1900</th>
<th>1905</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>191</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>401</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A sample of the baptisms conducted at St Luke’s church, this time in May 1895, revealed the father’s occupation as follows:

Table 4.9: Baptisms: St Luke’s Wallsend, May 1895: Occupation of Father

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labourer</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plater</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpenter</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Riveter</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipwright</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blacksmith</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boilersmith</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fitter</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Butcher</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caulker</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joiner</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miner</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brickmaker</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairdresser</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Painter</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

106 As above.
These samples taken from the new churches in Byker and Wallsend show very clearly that, whatever the motivation for taking their children for baptism, the churches still had a very strong connection with the labouring classes and that, from the point of view of the diocese, the high investment in new buildings and staff was justified.

Although up to 1905, there was no obvious decline in religious participation revealed by either the confirmation or baptism statistics, and there was in fact an increase as the figures indicate, this was, however, a time when social conditions improved as a result of industrialisation and better working conditions, improved diet and medicine, so, to quote McLeod, ‘the majority of people no longer needed to seek supernatural aid during their working lives.’ At the same time, popular entertainments such as football, music halls, cinema and family outings provided competition for church-based activities and attendance at religious services which meant the churches had a much harder task. However, whilst a disengagement from organised religion might have been underway in the adult population as a result of these social changes, there was still a willingness for the children of such families to be involved.

**Sunday School**

The reasons for the continued affiliation to the Sunday Schools are several, but crucially their social reach went far beyond the teaching of Scripture, as Snell describes:

‘The schools were major social and recreational centres. Their libraries, teachers' meetings and conferences, Whitsun outings, 'treats' and prizes, processions, galas, music, singing

---

classes, Bands of Hope, anniversary festivities, football clubs, mutual improvement societies, needlework classes, sick, clothing, benefit and burial clubs, funerals and other activities played an exceptionally important role in many districts. \(^{108}\)

In Newcastle, from St Michael’s church, Byker, there is a record of just how successful the Sunday School was in attracting children. The Sunday School Minute Book is the only record in the diocesan archives providing the average weekly number of children in attendance (until 1914) but there is nothing in the record to suggest it was in any way unrepresentative of the wider diocese. Snell states that in 1911 there were over 6 million children attending Sunday Schools in England in 1911, and the figures for Byker support the view that the churches, at least through their Sunday Schools, were continuing to attract very strong levels of support. \(^{109}\)

Table 4.10: Byker St Michael: Average Sunday School Attendance \(^{110}\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1897</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1898</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1899</td>
<td>192</td>
<td>212</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1902</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1906</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>477</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1907</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>577</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1912</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1913</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1914</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>451</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


\(^{109}\) Snell, p.126.


St. Michael Byker, Sunday School Annual Report 1913.
The number of attenders remains high until the outbreak of the First World War and whilst, like the confirmation figures stated earlier, the number of girls is higher in 1899 (the only year when a breakdown is given), there is nevertheless a large number of boys and the overall number of children is very high for one church. In 1913, the minute book records the difficulty of finding sufficient teachers for the number of children, but that following an ‘initiative by the vicar’ there were a total of 56 teachers for the Sunday School and Bible classes – a very high number by any standard.\(^\text{111}\)

**Newcastle upon Tyne Church Institute**

A different measure of participation, and one likely to reflect a middle-class religious commitment (due to the payment of a ten shillings annual subscription), was the Newcastle Church Institute, which provided recreational facilities for its members from 1894 by means of a property in Hood Street in the centre of Newcastle. There, members could read newspapers and magazines such as *Punch, Gentlewoman* and the *Church Times*, use a gymnasium and (from 1894 to 1910) a cafeteria, play billiards and chess and join a debating society.\(^\text{112}\) The purpose of the Institute was explained by Bishop Jacob at his Primary Charge to clergy and churchwardens in 1899, ‘We want not merely to teach religion and minister the Sacraments, but to build up a Society. The work must be done parish by parish but in a city like Newcastle it can be greatly aided by a Church Institute.’\(^\text{113}\)

The hope was that, through membership of the Institute and its social activities and ‘fellowship’, church affiliation and commitment would increase - the Institute was therefore a

\(^{112}\) NRO DN/S/8/3, Newcastle Church Institute Annual Reports 1895 -1927.  
\(^{113}\) Edgar Jacob, Visitation Charge, p.17.
vehicle for outreach in all but name. Unfortunately, membership numbers are only recorded in two of the Institute’s annual reports, but they too support the view that participation in church related activities remained high and remained so well into the twentieth century – in 1902 the membership was 812 and in 1927 it was 927.

Social Engagement

As further evidence of Jacob’s view that the aim of the church was ‘to build up Society’ and thereby, to quote Green, ‘hope that large scale recruitment would follow,’ the new diocese was engaged on a number of fronts to change and ‘improve’ society, providing organisations in particular locations to provide a service to the diocese and area as a whole. The Church Institute might be counted among these organisations, as Jacob said, to work alongside the parishes. But there were other organisations founded by the diocese with the specific purpose of alleviating social need.\textsuperscript{114} These included the Diocesan Society for the Protection of Women and Children, with a ‘Home for Friendless Girls’ in Ravensworth Terrace, Newcastle, and a ‘Home for Waifs and Strays’ in Cullercoats. The new Cathedral had its ‘Nurse and Loan Society for the Sick Poor of the City’.\textsuperscript{115}

In addition to the philanthropic organisations set up by the diocese, the bishops acted as Patron to several local charities, such as the prominent Dicky Bird Society (children’s charity) in Newcastle and the fund to build what was to become the Royal Victoria Infirmary in Newcastle, thereby extending the influence of the diocese beyond its boundaries and normal sphere of influence. As described earlier, the Diocesan Conference too spent a good deal of its time discussing social problems with the purpose of informing its members on the

\textsuperscript{114} Diocesan Calendar 1884, p.205.
\textsuperscript{115}
social issues of the time. Many of these debates were reported at length in the local press, raising the profile of both the diocese in its concern for social issues, and the topics themselves in the mind of the local population.\footnote{For example: ‘Newcastle Diocesan Conference’, \textit{Newcastle Courant}, 1 November 1890, p.3.}

It is difficult to evaluate the impact of such activities on the church and its members and still less on wider society, other than for example the number of patients visited by the Cathedral Nurse and Loan Society, but a very clear example of the influence of the churches (which includes the other denominations operating in the area) is found in the survey of Tyneside conducted by Henry Mess in 1928 who stated that ‘the great majority of social workers are members of Christian Churches and derive their impetus to service from their religion’.\footnote{Henry A. Mess, \textit{Industrial Tyneside: A Social Survey} (London: Ernest Benn, 1928) p.142.} Assuming this to be correct, it is reasonable to consider that at least some of this ‘impetus’ was the result of the work undertaken twenty or thirty years earlier in the Diocese of Newcastle. A more specific example of local engagement can be found in the work of Canon Bernard East, a prominent member of the Diocesan Conference and vicar of St. Ann’s church Shieldfield, the parish neighbouring St. Silas, Byker, from 1892 until 1928 who set up a number of social enterprises to help the poor of his parish including a soup kitchen and loan scheme and, although there is no record of what the diocesan bishops thought of this use of church buildings, the fact that it went on for so long and was so closely aligned to the aim described by Jacob as the ‘spiritual centre’ from which societal change could occur suggests it was exactly the kind of work envisaged.\footnote{L029.3 Newcastle City Libraries Local Studies Collection: Diaries of Canon W. Bernard East, Vicar of Saint Ann’s, Newcastle.}

There can be no doubt that the renewed energy, focus and commitment brought to bear with the new diocese brought about a change in the fortunes of the Church of England in Newcastle and Northumberland. The confirmation and baptism statistics all indicate a church that was at the very least keeping its membership and influence in line with the increasing population while the establishment of so many new churches and clergy and lay posts ensured a physical presence for the first time in the urban areas developing rapidly at the time such as Byker and Wallsend.
5: Conclusion

This study has shown that, on a broad range of fronts, the formation of the Diocese of Newcastle and the actions of its first two bishops and their colleagues over the following twenty-one years had a significant impact. When Edgar Jacob declared to the Church Congress in 1900 that there had been a ‘revival’ he did so without specifying precisely what he meant by that term but which, for the purpose of this study, might be interpreted in respect of the institutional life of the church, its spiritual life, or both.

As far as the institution is concerned, it is indisputable that a revival had taken place. The two most obvious physical representations of any diocese are its bishop and cathedral, and in the case of the Diocese of Newcastle, an extraordinary transformation had taken place as both had achieved a prominence in the area far greater than that achieved previously by either the Bishop of Durham or the parish church of St. Nicholas. The creation of the diocese had given Newcastle a new legal status as a city and an important historic and spiritual context to its identity dating back to what is now termed the ‘Golden Age of Northumbria’. Its bishops were active in church life as never before, taking services, preaching, visiting parishes and becoming much more aware of their clergy, their local situations and the problems they encountered, as well as far more involved in managing the affairs of the diocese which was especially important when the new organisational structures were being put in place and an understanding of their impact was required. Bishops were also members of the civic elite, present at Royal visits and the opening of important institutions, as well as present at countless charitable and other events as the local newspapers reported. The Cathedral had become the centre of religious life of the diocese, developed architecturally to fulfil its new role, it also became a focus of civic life in the city, closely aligned to its governing body, the
Corporation, and an emblem of the city to the nation at large, its influence also extending into the poorer communities of the city through its Nurse and Loan Society. Having a bishop and cathedral in Newcastle with their connections to the national church and monarch had given a greater sense of pride and identity to its citizens who wished to be associated with the new diocese and its cathedral even beyond denominational church boundaries.

As a religious institution, the Diocese itself had ‘come of age’ through its structures and organisation. Its Diocesan Conference and committees had become representative of the communities they served with people chosen through merit rather than social status. Conference members were informed on matters of social justice as well as purely religious issues. Lay people had obtained full voting rights with the clergy. Matters of governance and finance would in future be considered by official committees of the diocese rather than by bishops and their personal appointees, while Visitation returns and Articles of Inquiry provided statistical and other information to guide the Bishop and other decision makers. Rural Deans worked in areas that were more closely aligned to the communities they served, while church building took place in areas of the city and along the North side of the River Tyne at an unprecedented scale, giving an inescapable physical presence to the Church of England in the urban landscape and a base for its outreach and social engagement in some of the poorest communities. Clergy and lay workers now numbered far more than when the diocese was created and formed part of an organisational and management structure through Rural Deaneries, Diocesan Conference and Bishops’ Visitations which made them more accountable to the bishop and their parishes than ever before. Organisations had been set up to assist women and girls with aims that were purely philanthropic while the Church Institute provided recreational facilities for its large membership. In some of these structural changes,
Newcastle was following the path set by other dioceses and ‘the National Church ideal’ but it was not slow to do so and when it came to fundraising to pay for the changes, its success was greater than might have been expected or achieved elsewhere.

It is impossible to say what the institutional position of the Church of England north of the Tyne might have been had the diocese not come into being and had the area remained part of the Diocese of Durham, but the very low level of participation before 1882 and the concerns that existed about the administration of so large an area with a vastly increasing population and considerable financial and other demands, which had contributed to the move to separate the diocese in the first place, suggest a stand-still position rather than any increase or significant change. It is also highly unlikely that the fundraising needed to build the new churches, church halls, vicarages and other ‘plant’ as well as to make the adaptations to the cathedral would have been anything like as successful without the personal efforts of the two Bishops of Newcastle using the local knowledge and social and other contacts they had gained through their involvement in the city and county to do so.

In terms of spiritual revival, the statistics for confirmation show that the diocese was at least keeping pace with the rise in population, while in Byker and Wallsend the labouring classes showed no lack of religiosity when it came to having their children baptised, nor – in Byker’s case - sending them to Sunday School in large numbers, at least until the beginning of the First World War. As far as the wider historiographical debate is concerned, therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that there was no decline in religiosity in this part of England until after that time. However, it is also reasonable to conclude that the ‘revival’ of the religious life of the church did not yield the kind of response in attendance and membership that might
have been hoped for in view of the vast expenditure of financial and human resources that had taken place, though how realistic it was to expect what Jacob called the ‘artisans of Tyneside’ to attend church in very large numbers is unclear when there were so many other diversions available for people to spend their leisure time. This was, as suggested earlier, a failing perhaps more to do with the underlying philosophy in the Church of England at the time than any failure in local initiative, though for the Established Church not to have made any additional provision for church attendance in the rapidly expanding poorer areas of the country would have (rightly) drawn criticism of a different kind from those opposed to its activities, and it is not that these new buildings were unused, based on the statistics from Byker and Wallsend, the opposite was clearly the case, though further study of the other churches built elsewhere in the diocese would undoubtedly be helpful to provide a more comprehensive picture.

When the Mayor of Newcastle, Sir Riley Lord, welcomed the Church Congress to the city in 1900, he said, ‘The future of the Church of England here in the north probably was never brighter or better than it was at the present time’ and, based on the changes made during the previous eighteen years, and what is now known of the institutional decline that has taken place in the Anglican church since that time, it is hard to disagree with that assessment.\footnote{Church Congress Report, 1900, p.2.} Almost certainly, then, this was the best of times for the Diocese of Newcastle, and the changes that had taken place as a result of the creation of the new diocese had laid strong foundations for the challenges that lay ahead.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

Newcastle City Library: Local Studies Collection


Official Report of the Church Congress held at Newcastle upon Tyne, held on September 25th, 26th, 27th 28th 1900 (London: Bemrose and Sons, 1900)

L029.3 Diaries of Canon William Bernard East, Vicar of Saint Ann’s, Newcastle

Northumberland Record Office: Diocese of Newcastle Archive

DN/V/2/1/3/1, Report of Bishop of Newcastle’s Commission, 1883
DN/P/1/1, Newcastle Diocesan Calendar, 1883 – 1911
DN/V/1/1/1/5 2-21, Bishop’s Primary Visitation Returns, 1887
DN/V/1/1/1/3, Bishop’s Visitation Returns, 1895
DN/S/8/3, Newcastle Church Institute – Annual Reports and papers
DN/B/1/1/1/1, Newcastle Diocesan Conference Minutes, 1883- 1903
EP29/61, St. Michael, Byker Sunday School Minute Book, 1898-1929
EP29/3-14, St Michael, Byker Baptism Registers, 1880-1905
EP122/1-6, St. Silas, Byker Baptism Registers, 1886-1905
EP44/12-13, St. Peter Wallsend Baptism Registers, 1880 -1905
EP60/1-3, St Luke Wallsend Baptism Registers, 1887-1907

Tyne and Wear Archives

MD.NC/3/15-23, Newcastle Town and City Council Minutes 1880 -1903

MD.NC/D/1/1/23, Royal Charter giving Newcastle the status of city, 1882
**Durham Records Office: Diocese of Durham Archive**

DDR/EV/RET, Durham Diocesan Records: Table of Visitations

**House of Commons Parliamentary Papers**


**Hansard**

https://hansard.parliament.uk/

**Other**

Minutes, Durham Diocesan Conference, September 21st 1880

*Programme of the 1881 Church Congress, Newcastle upon Tyne,*

*The Official Report of the Church Congress held at Newcastle on Tyne, 1881*

*A Charge Delivered to the Clergy and Churchwardens of the Diocese of Newcastle at his Primary Visitation, 1899, by Edgar Jacob DD, Bishop of Newcastle,*
<https://www.forgottenbooks.com/en/readbook/AChargeDeliveredtotheClergyandChurchwardenoftheDioceseofNewcastleatHisPrimaryVi_10776390#0> [Accessed 14 May 2022]

*The Official Year Book of the Church of England, 1886,* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1886)

*The History of the Dicky Bird Society, 1891 by ‘Uncle Toby’ (Newcastle Weekly Chronicle)*
<http://dbooks.bodleian.ac.uk/books/PDFs/590004997.pdf> [Accessed 22 August 2022]

*Bishoprics Act, 1878*
Newspapers and Journals

*The London Gazette*
from <https://www.thegazette.co.uk> [Accessed 10 July 2022].

*The Times*
from <https://go-gale-com> [Accessed 27 November 2021]

*The Daily Telegraph*
from <https://go-gale-.com> [Accessed 23 November 2021]

*Newcastle Courant*
from <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 1-10 December 2021]

*Newcastle Daily Chronicle*
from <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 1-10 December 2010]

*Newcastle Daily Journal*
from <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 1-10 December 2010]

*Newcastle Weekly Chronicle*
from <www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> [Accessed 1-10 December 2010]

Secondary Sources

Books


Charleton, R.J., *A History of Newcastle upon Tyne: From the Earliest Records to its Formation as a City in 1882* (Newcastle upon Tyne: William H. Robinson 1929)

Colls, Robert and Bill Lancaster, eds., *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co., 2001)
Colls, Robert, ed., *Northumbria: History and Identity* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 2007)


Knight, Frances, *The Nineteenth Century Church and English Society* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995)


Richardson, William, *History of the Parish of Wallsend* (Newcastle upon Tyne: The Northumberland Press, 1923)


**A825 Course Material**


Williams, Chris A., *Urban History*, in Block 8 A825 MA History Part 1, (Milton Keynes: The Open University, 2010)
Articles


**Theses**


**Websites**

Art UK website

Beamish Museum Audio Collections

Benwell Churches website

British History Online website
St Nicholas Church, Newcastle: history and architecture

Diocese of Hexham & Newcastle website

**Other**

**Book Reviews**