

3. 1534 1700 THE REFORMATION PERIOD

Henry VIII and the beginning of the Reformation – a troubled period

We now come to that troubled period which we know as the Reformation, when England was robbed of the religion she had adhered to for nearly one thousand years. Space forbids us dealing with the events which led up to that great upheaval; we can only write of how it affected our own town and district. This change of religion did not come overnight but over a period of years and, as communications were still difficult, and more especially so in this district, there would be a time lag between what was happening in London and the south and the news reaching Chorley.

In what I believe was his last sermon at Weld Bank, the writer remembers Monsignor Crank touching on this subject and trying to place himself in the position of a priest at Chorley in the early days of the Reformation. The news and directives from his Bishop would be scanty and perhaps at times contradictory so that he would be puzzled as to what should be done. Starting perhaps with the banning of candles and other non-essential forms of worship, the Monsignor said he himself did not know what course he would have pursued.¹

The fact remains that the change of religion seems to have had a disastrous effect on the Parish of Croston and its chapels-of-ease at Chorley, Rufford, Tarleton, Beconsall and Hoole. In 1548 there were 16 priests caring for the souls of those attending these churches and chapels including 4 at Chorley. Six years later the numbers had dropped to 5 and fourteen years later to 3 including only 1 at Chorley. The names of the four priests who had to bear the brunt of the initial effects have come down to us. They attended their Bishop's visitation at Wigan in 1548. They were Sir Henry Croston, Sir Thurston Bradley, Sir William Brindley and Sir Roger Chorley. Priests without

¹ For anyone wishing to pursue this topic, see the book *The Voices of Morebath* by Eamon Duffy pubd 2001. Duffy gives a fascinating account of life for a parish priest at the beginning of the Reformation. Duffy's research is based on the notes made at the start of the Reformation by the priest, Sir Christopher Trychay, whose parish was in the village of Morebath in Devon.

a university degree were known as 'Sir' in those days and 'Master' if they had a degree. Sir Roger Chorley could have been a member of the family of Chorley Hall though there would probably be other branches of the same family in the district.

John the Piper – a call to arms in Chorley to join the fight against the King's changes to their religious practices

Henry VIII had commenced the dissolution of the monasteries in 1536 starting with the smaller ones. This action, together with Henry's repudiation of papal authority, led to what has been called the Pilgrimage of Grace but which was really a rebellion of northern nobles against the changes in religion. The rebels took for their badge the five wounds of Christ. Support for the rising was sought all over the northern shires and we know that on the night of November 2nd 1536², a minstrel named John the Piper paraded the streets of Chorley with two companions, all wearing armour and with blackened faces pleading the rebel cause and swearing in men to join and fight with the rebels.

The Earl of Derby, who was greatly enriching his family with the booty taken from the monasteries, heard of this and sent men to Chorley to seize John the Piper but he was never found. However, five Chorley men were charged with taking the oath but were released as they said it was through fear that they had done so. They were Percival Saunders, Robert Banks, William Charnock, Thurston Collins and Lawrence Whittle.

The rebellion gained much support in the north and the men began a march on London to appeal to the King and to insist on a reversal of his anti-papal policies. Henry VIII evidently had cause to fear the outcome for he sent promises that their grievances would be redressed so the marchers

² The date given by Gillett is incorrect. The Pilgrimage of Grace took place in 1536 and the date of the appearance of John Piper in Chorley is given as 2nd November, 1536 by Jim Heyes in his *A History of Chorley* pubd. 1994

dispersed to their homes. He then sent armies to punish the rebels and exacted a cruel vengeance. The leaders and most of their supporters were hunted down until it was said that corpses were to be seen hanging in every town and village in the northern counties. Included in these was the last Abbot of Whalley Abbey, Abbott Paslew.

The Reformation continues with only one priest at Chorley

Of the four Chorley priests in 1548 only one was left four years later, this being Sir Roger Chorley, who had the job of producing the church valuables and ornaments to the King's Commissioners when they came in 1552 to make an inventory, so that anything not deemed essential for the new church services could be handed over to enrich the king and his courtiers. What happened to the other three priests? We can only surmise they were unwilling to follow the new regulations and dispersed to their homes or acted as chaplains to the many families still faithful to the old order of things. Sir Roger would probably deem it his duty as a local man to continue to look after the spiritual needs of the local people, consoled perhaps by the thought that these matters were only temporary and all would come right by the passing of time.

It is obvious from the inventory that has come down to us that most of the valuable silver and other riches of Chorley church given over the years by the local landowners were removed before the Commissioners arrived because the list is very small, totally unworthy of a church supporting four priests. It is: 3 great bells, 2 small bells called sacring bells, 3 vestments, 3 albs, one chalice of silver gilt, 1 candlestick of brass, 2 altar cloths, 2 corporasses³, one altar sheet, two cruets of pewter, one pair of broken censers, two flaxen towels, and one Bible.

³ This should probably read 'corporals' – ie. a linen cloth used on the altar

The reign of the Catholic Queen, Mary Tudor 1553 – 1558 and the Marian persecution

During the brief reign of Mary, when England once again returned to the old faith, Sir Roger seems to have had an assistant priest, William Whitehead, who was buried in the church in 1558. Later Sir Roger appears to have come to terms with his conscience, for in October of 1563 he was appointed vicar of Preston but he died three years later and was buried at Chorley.

Much of Chorley in those days was owned by that great Catholic family, the Shireburnes of Stonyhurst and, in a list of their tenants, it is stated that Sir Roger Chorley paid for one chamber in the town, called the priest's chamber, adjoining Roger Allenson's house. This house is believed to have stood across the site of the present Gillibrand Street, being approached from Parson's Brow.

Let us not forget that during Queen Mary's short reign there was persecution of those who adhered to the reformed religion and we can but admire the heroic deaths at the stake of such as Latimer and Ridley. We know of but one Protestant martyr in our district. This was George Marsh of Bolton, ordained a priest, but who, during Mary's reign, continued to preach the new religion. It is said he addressed gatherings on Winter Hill near where the television masts are now situated. He was caught by the Earl of Derby of that time, tried at Knowsley, and burnt at the stake for heresy in Chester market place. But Mary hardly deserved the title of "Bloody Mary", with which she is often credited, when one considers the name of "Good Queen Bess" which her half sister was given though she carried out a much longer, intensive and bloodier persecution.

The reign of Elizabeth I and the start of the 'Penal Days'

With the accession of Elizabeth there began the almost three centuries-long period of Catholic persecution which we now call the Penal Days. The savage laws against Catholics enforced by the "good" Queen and her

courtiers were such that most of the country gradually succumbed to the new forms of worship. However, in Lancashire, the gentry were much more stubborn and for many years it would be true to say that most of the big land-owning families remained true to the old faith and with them many of their retainers and tenants. This was especially so in our own area where the Chorleys of Chorley Hall, the Crosses of Crosse Hall, the Charnocks of Astley Hall, the Rigbys of Burgh Hall, the Gillibrands of Lower Chorley Hall, the Andertons of Euxton Hall, the Hoghtons of Park Hall and Hoghton Tower, the Worthingtons of Blainscough Hall and many others all seemed to have refused to accept the new ideas.

The struggles and difficulties these families had to endure in order to hold on to their estates - and to their faith - in the face of huge fines and other forms of persecution must have been tremendous and it seems incredible that, when at last the penal laws were eased, many of these families were still in possession of their houses and lands. Few were in the fortunate position of the Shireburnes of Stonyhurst who, with the Rigbys of Burgh, held half of the Manor of Chorley at about this time. The Sir Richard Shireburne of Queen Elizabeth's day was fortunate to be exempt from the fines and allowed to worship unmolested because he had command of a small naval force which defeated some Dutch ships in the Thames estuary, thus earning the gratitude of the Queen.

In 1597, the Earl of Derby sold his half of Chorley Manor to Roger and Alexander Rigby of Burgh Hall for the sum of £900 and this Catholic family held on to the hall for many years until a later Alexander Rigby seems to have got into some trouble by reason of one of his ships' captains being accused of piracy on the high seas (it appears the family were engaged in the lucrative shipping trade).

The survival of Catholicism by means of itinerant priests – They held on to the faith

There is little doubt that at most of the country houses around Chorley there was much coming and going of priests, although for most of the period their capture meant death. We have little knowledge as to who these priests were, one reason being they did not stay at one place long and usually travelled under a variety of names to make detection more difficult. But one of them, at least, is well known; Saint Edmund Arrowsmith spent some years in the Brindle and Hoghton district and said mass in many houses in the area, sometimes going farther afield and no doubt Chorley would be included occasionally.

But before Arrowsmith came on the scene, there was another Saint Edmund, perhaps the best known of our English martyrs, Saint Edmund Campion. We know he celebrated mass at Hoghton tower and from there journeyed to Blainscough Hall at Coppull and no doubt on that journey he would pay a visit to the Rigbys at Burgh Hall. Whilst at Blainscough Hall, he preached in the open air on Coppull Moor at the mercy of anyone who should decide to act as informer. After this he stayed for a while with the Hoghtons at Park Hall, Charnock Richard, then began his journey south which resulted in his capture and death. There must be many still living who will remember Fr. Tom Clarkson, of Coppull, during one of the Coppull Catholic walking days, preaching at a street corner on Coppull Moor and stating that he was proud to be the first Catholic priest since Edmund Campion to have that privilege.

But even before Edmund Campion was preaching in these parts, at the very start of Henry VIII's revolt against the papacy, we have Fr. Henry Standish, second son of Sir Alexander Standish of Standish, who became a Franciscan priest, became provincial of his order and in 1518 was enthroned as Bishop of Saint Asaph in North Wales. He took Catherine of Aragon's part in the controversy with Henry VIII over the divorce and is stated to have even gone down on his knees to that great monarch, imploring him not to reject her. He died at a great age in 1535.

Then we have Fr. John Gerard, of Bryn, near Wigan, with relatives in the Chorley area, who, after being cruelly tortured in the Tower of London, managed, with the aid of Jesuit lay brothers, to escape by a rope across the moat - the only man known to have successfully escaped from the Tower. He crossed to France and in 1627 became Principal of the English College in Rome where he helped to train more priests for the English mission.

The Worthingtons of Blainscough Hall, Coppull – many died for the faith

The adventures of the four young Worthington boys of Blainscough Hall, Coppull, who, despite persecution, floggings, prison, separation and other forms of inducement, remained steadfast to their religion, could fill a volume in themselves. Their father, Richard Worthington, died in prison for the faith. Their uncle, Fr. Thomas Worthington, became president of Douai College in France, where many English priests were trained, and was also a noted writer. The eldest boy, Thomas, escaped to the continent where he married Mary Allen, niece of Cardinal Allen of Rossall Grange near Blackpool. This man who, along with Thomas Houghton, of Houghton Tower, founded Douai college did much to preserve the faith in England. Of the younger brothers, two did not survive their sufferings for long. Robert died at 17 in 1585 and Richard four years later when only 16, a year before his father. Two other brothers became Jesuit priests.

The Houghtons of Houghton Tower - They went into exile

Thomas Houghton built Houghton Tower in 1562 but, rather than conform went into voluntary exile, and helped Cardinal Allen to found his college and died at Liège in 1580. He was buried at the church of Saint Gervase. The inscription on his monument reads

“On this spot lies buried the illustrious man, Thomas Houghton, Englishman, who after ten years of voluntary exile, despoiled of his patrimony and all his goods for his confession of the Catholic faith, died June 2nd 1580 aged 63.”

His son Thomas, exiled with him, became a missionary priest and died a martyr in Salford gaol in 1584.

Accompanying Thomas Houghton in his self-imposed exile was his faithful manservant, Roger Anderson, who refused to leave his master and it was only after Thomas's death that Roger returned to Hoghton where he eked out a frugal livelihood as a handloom weaver with his two brothers at Hoghton Bottoms, working in the basement of an old manor house.

The succeeding Hoghton had been sent as a page boy to Elizabeth's court and brought up a Protestant. He was created Sir Richard in 1611 and six years later had the doubtful honour of entertaining King James I at Hoghton Tower at such a huge cost that, some years later, he spent a period in the Fleet prison for debt. It was on this occasion of the King's visit to Hoghton Tower that James I knighted the loin of beef which we now call sirloin.

Subsequently the family had varying fortunes and in the 18th century the tower had fallen into decay, was registered as a non-conformist chapel and John Wesley is said to have preached there. In the last century, Charles Dickens paid it a visit. Later, the house was restored and earlier this century the last baronet, Sir Cuthbert de Hoghton, returned to the old faith of his forefathers. The wheel had turned full circle.

The Houghtons of Park Hall – they harboured a priest

Another branch of the Hoghton family resided at Park Hall, Charnock Richard, and here for some years, Fr. Lawrence Johnson, a native of Crosby, under the guise of a schoolmaster, conducted his priestly duties and regularly visited many Catholic houses in this neighbourhood. He was caught in London where he had gone to do business for a relative, the aged Blundell of Crosby, and was hanged drawn and quartered at Tyburn in 1582.

The hall has been extensively altered but a few years ago a priest's hiding place was discovered there.

The Charnocks of Astley Hall – one tried to free the Catholic, Mary, Queen of Scots and another tried to restore the pro-Catholic, James II to the throne

The mother of the Worthington boys was Dorothy Charnock of Astley Hall, Chorley, daughter of Thomas Charnock. She was one of his eleven children - five daughters and six sons. She lived to see her husband, Richard Worthington of Coppull, die in prison for the faith, two of her sons die in their teens as a result of their cruel treatment and her youngest brother, John Charnock, executed for taking part in the Babington Plot to release Mary, Queen of Scots from captivity. Incidentally, her eldest brother, Robert Charnock, who succeeded to Astley on the death of his father outlived four wives but the fifth died 25 years after his death. A later Robert Charnock, son of a younger brother, was vice-president of Magdalen College, Oxford, in 1688, but was executed at Tyburn on March 18th, 1695 for allegedly taking part in an attempt to kidnap King William and restore James II to the throne. The male line of the family died out, the hall later being taken by the Brookes and later still by the Townley-Parkers.

For centuries Astley Hall, with its beautiful woodland setting, was the property of the Charnocks of Charnock Richard having been purchased by them from that great order, the Knights Hospitallers of Saint John of Jerusalem. The family remained Catholic well into the penal days, one of them building the present hall from his own plans.

Chorley's martyr – the weaver, Roger Wrennall (or Wrenno)

It was in the year 1613 that Saint Edmund Arrowsmith began his missionary labours in the Brindle, Clayton green, Hoghton and Withnell districts which ended on the scaffold at Lancaster in 1628. But for some time before this a young Chorley man would often be seen trudging the muddy field paths and cart tracks around Chorley avoiding other travellers if possible and calling in

at the rear entrances of the various halls: Burgh, Blainscough, Park, Euxton, Gillibrand, Crosse and Chorley. His name was Roger Wrennall (sometimes spelt Wrenno in old manuscripts).

Young, tall and of athletic build, dressed in the rough homespun of the period, complete with stout walking stick, it is unlikely he would be waylaid or asked his business if called upon and more unlikely that he would have stated it. But in truth it was a dangerous business on which he was engaged - no less a one than the passing on of information about the comings and goings of Catholic priests, escorting them to the various great houses in the area, arranging times when mass would be celebrated and seeing that the faithful were kept informed. It is a great pity that we know so little of this man, one of a great band of laymen engaged on similar business in our country, to whom so much is owed for making possible the work of the priesthood. Had we known more, perhaps the name of Roger Wrennall would have been numbered with the 40 martyrs who were canonised recently.

What we do know is that he was described at his trial as a "Chorley weaver" and tradition says that he resided at a farm cottage just off what we now call Market Street, between Anderton Street and Cunliffe Street - Alfred's Court is its present name, though in those days it was a few scattered farms among fields. His weaving would be of a most primitive kind, being of rough worsted material woven from a combination of wool and flax, perhaps from sheep kept on the farm and flax grown on the land. This was half a century before cotton was introduced into Chorley in 1660.

Of his family we have no knowledge but it is certain that he was unmarried. Less than 10 years after his death there was a Thurstan Wrennall paying a tithe of one haddock of oats as his contribution to the upkeep of the curate of Chorley Parish Church. This was very likely the father or brother of Roger and indicates that the family's status in society at that time was that of yeoman farmer, a little above that of labourer. Thurstan is also mentioned as having

a seat in the parish church at that time, though whether or not he used it is problematical, for many families had seats which were usually vacant and others like the Crosse of Crosse Hall at this time had seats “which he occasionally made use of but would not take the sacrament”.

But in the year 1616, Roger Wrennall was arrested in Chorley by men working for the Earl of Derby and conveyed to Lancaster Castle along with a priest, Fr. John Thules. It appears that it was his help for Fr. Thules that caused his arrest. Little is known of this priest who was born in 1568. We do know, however, that he went to Douai while still a boy and when he was 22 proceeded to the English College, Rome, and was ordained in 1592. Along with seven other priests, he was sent to England later that year but was captured on landing. He was sent, in chains, to Wisbech Castle, where he spent many years of suffering. At length, he succeeded in escaping from this castle, making his way into Lancashire where he met up with Roger Wrennall who helped him with his ministrations around this district.

Fr. Thules' work soon attracted the attentions of the Earl of Derby who issued a warrant for his arrest. He was taken when in the company of Roger, presumably at the latter's cottage in Chorley, for the charge against Roger was that of “harbouring a priest”. We can only surmise that our martyr had not time to get Fr. Thules to one of the large houses in the neighbourhood where there was more chance of the priest hiding and where the residents were familiar with searches and had hiding places in readiness.

The two men were taken to Lancaster Castle and imprisoned. It seems that there they found sympathetic gaolers as, one night, they were able to make their escape and the two men tried to reach our district where they could have been hidden. Instead of taking the main road from Lancaster to Preston (now the A6) which would have been well watched, they chose the more tortuous way through the Trough of Bowland, hoping to ford the Ribble at about Samlesbury. However in the darkness they turned westwards too soon

and by daylight found themselves just this side of Lancaster, having gone more or less in a circle. They decided to give themselves up and were brought to trial and condemned to the usual death of hanging, drawing and quartering.

Public opinion at this time was against the taking of life for the sake of religion and strenuous efforts were made to get them to take the Oath of Allegiance but they steadfastly refused. The sentence was duly carried out on March 18th, 1616. Fr. Thules was the first to die and our martyr had to witness the awful hanging, disembowelling and quartering of his friend. When Roger's turn came to be turned off the ladder with the noose around his neck, the weight of his body proved too much for the rope which broke, leaving our martyr lying on the ground, momentarily stunned. Another rope was secured and to the amazement of the onlookers, Roger stood up and hurried up the ladder unaided. This time the rope held and Roger Wrennall, the Chorley weaver, went to his eternal reward. The heads of the two martyrs were fixed to the walls of Lancaster Castle and parts of the bodies were exhibited at Preston (on the parish church steeple) and at Wigan and Warrington.

Roger is depicted in one of the martyrs' windows in Saint Mary's church holding the palm of martyrdom with a handloom in one corner. Roger Wrennall is the only Chorley-born martyr of whom we have knowledge but persecution in the way of fines and imprisonment continued for another 100 years or more. This would have been much worse if all the acts against Catholic recusants had been operated to their fullest extent. There must have been much reluctance on the part of the local magistrates to fully enforce the law. Of the local gentry who had changed their religion, some no doubt helped their Catholic friends by looking after their estates whilst they were in prison, or helped with the fines, in addition to keeping quiet about the movement of priests, of which they must have known.

Other local priests who suffered for their faith

Another from this district who suffered for the faith was Fr. Lawrence Vaux, born at Blackrod, near Chorley and educated at Queens and Corpus Christi Colleges, Oxford being ordained in 1540. After a period as chaplain to the Bishop of Gloucester, he was made warden of the collegiate Church of Manchester, now Manchester Cathedral. On the accession of Elizabeth he was deprived of this office and after many adventures was imprisoned and died in the gatehouse prison in London in 1585. He was the author of “Vaux’s Catechism” which had a large circulation at the time and did much to bring many back to the fold.

Still nearer home, we have Robert Anderton, believed to be the son of Hugh Anderton of Euxton Hall whose mother was Alice, daughter of Alexander Standish of Standish. He was at Brasenose College, Oxford, in 1578 where he was noted for his oratory, so much so that he was often called ‘silver tongued Anderton’. He crossed to France in 1580, was ordained priest four years later in Rheims Cathedral by Cardinal Guise and was selected to deliver a narration there in the presence of the chief authorities of the district.

With another Lancashire priest, William Marsden, he sailed for England but both were caught in the Isle of Wight, sent to Winchester, tried and found guilty of the priesthood and sentenced to death. They were offered liberty if they would promise not to try to persuade others to resist the new religion which they refused to do. An appeal was made to the Queen who replied that she could only allow the law to take its course. They were sent back to the Isle of Wight and hanged, drawn and quartered on April 25th, 1586, both men being still in their twenties.

A priest who reconciled Charles II, the ‘Merry Monarch’ to the faith

Another local priest who has a place in history was Fr. John Dionysius Huddleston, OSB, born at Farington Hall, near Leyland, on April 15th, 1608

and who served for some time as chaplain to Sir Thomas Preston at his Manor house at Dalton-in-Furness. Later he was chaplain to the Queen Dowager, widow of the murdered King Charles I, at Somerset House, London. He it was who was called to the bedside of King Charles II when he was “an unconscionable time in dying” and reconciled him to the Church just before he passed away on February 5th, 1683. Fr. Huddleston was under the protection of the royal household and lived to be 90 years of age.

A local man who wrote a ‘Catholic History of England’ and who, as a Royalist and supporter of the Anglican church, fought for King Charles I against the puritanical Parliamentarians in the Civil War

Chisnall Hall, Coppull, now a farmhouse, has had a long history. It was occupied by the Chisnalls from the 13th to the 17th centuries. One of the family, Edward Chisnall, fought for King Charles during the Civil War. He was made a Colonel of Foot by Prince Rupert and afterwards a Colonel of Horse by Charles II. He took part in the defence of Latham House for Lady Stanley. He was something of a scholar and wrote a “Catholic History of England”⁴ dying in 1653 when only 35 years of age. For his part in the war, he was fined £800 and his estates were confiscated but they were bought back. The last of the line was Sir Edward Chisnall who died in the 1700s.

Myles Standish (circa 1584 – 1656) Was he a Catholic?

It might be appropriate here to mention that controversial figure in our local history, Myles Standish, the military hero of the Pilgrim Fathers. There has been much conjecture as to his origin with many writers being of the opinion that he was of the family of the Standishes of Duxbury, in which case he would have spent his boyhood in the district which is now part of our Weld Bank parish. If this were so, he would have been baptised at Chorley Parish Church, of which the Standishes of Duxbury were great benefactors and he

⁴ This work is not what it seems. In fact, it was a defence of the Reformed Church of England and was a condemnation of Papist doctrines such as papal supremacy, transubstantiation, communion under one kind etc. Of course, the word ‘Catholic’, meaning ‘universal’ has often been applied to the Anglican Church as well as to the Church of Rome. For further information see: <https://www.hslc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/126-2-Blackwood.pdf> page 9

would have been brought up a Protestant for, unlike the original family of the Standishes of Standish who retained the ancient faith throughout the penal days, the Duxbury branch early on succumbed to the new learning.

Myles died in 1662⁵ and in his will he stated definitely that he was of the House of Standish of Standish, which would mean that he was brought up a Catholic. As most professions would be barred to him on this account, he became a professional soldier and was granted a commission by Elizabeth I who was not averse to Catholics fighting in her armies. He served in the Netherlands in the war against Spain. After a truce had been declared, Myles remained at Leyden as his English estates had been forfeited, probably on account of his religion and he became friendly with members of the Puritan sect who afterwards formed the Pilgrim Fathers. He sailed with them on the “Mayflower” in 1620 to make their home in the New World.

The Fathers appointed him military commander of the New England colony and for some years he was also assistant governor and treasurer and was held in the highest esteem by the colonists. But it is generally acknowledged that he never formally joined the Puritan sect.⁶

Although he founded a town and named it Duxbury, there is no evidence to support that he was from our township of that name and all attempts to prove this have failed. It could be that he had happy memories of his childhood while visiting his relatives at Duxbury for, although now of different faiths, they were still good friends. It must not be forgotten also that the Standishes of Standish, of which family he claimed to be a member, also held some lands in Duxbury, in addition to the Duxbury Standishes. This also

⁵ Gillett has given the date of death as 1662 but it now seems certain that it was 1656.

⁶ In the pamphlet by JSC Abbott pubd 1872 he states of Captain Standish: “Captain Standish was not a church member...” (Chapter 11) and again “Not originally, and perhaps never, a member of the Pilgrim church,...” (Chapter 16) See: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/57067/57067-h/57067-h.htm>

could have influenced him in the choice of a name for his American Township.

The well-known story that the record of his baptism had been erased from the Chorley Parish Church registers has never been proved and as recently as 1969-70 the page from which it was alleged to have been erased was subjected to modern forensic techniques such as infrared and X-rays but nothing was found.

A pamphlet published by the late Edward McKnight, Chorley's first librarian, in 1901, a copy of which is in my possession, states definitely that Myles Standish was not a Catholic but he gave no reasons for his assertion. Indeed, eleven years later, in 1912, a book on Myles Standish, published in America, stated that the Pilgrims' hero was strongly suspected of being a Catholic and every Eastertide he asked for and was given permission to visit the French Catholic settlements across the Saint Lawrence River which were under the care of the Jesuit fathers, to make his Easter communion-a fact which has been neglected by local historians.⁷ In his will he stated that he was the heir to large estates in Lancashire by lawful descent "but which have been surreptitiously detained from me". He did not give the reason for his loss, probably not wishing to offend his Puritan friends by proclaiming his religion.

⁷ I have not been able to trace this reference so far.