Much has been written about the hostility shown by a predominantly Protestant England towards its Catholic inhabitants during the early eighteenth century, but it is important to remember, as J. Anthony Williams has observed, that ‘There is, indeed, much evidence of social acceptance and friendly relations between Catholics and Protestants.’ Moreover, despite viewing anti-Catholic prejudice as ‘a greater handicap to Catholics than the penal laws’, F. C. Mather has also noted that ‘there was no want of reputable Anglican theologians willing to temper condemnation of the superstitions of the Roman Church with a recognition of its merits.’ Nevertheless, a particularly virulent strain of hostility towards Catholicism continued to flourish, and the root causes of this lay as much in patriotism and politics as in religion. During the first half of the century the country faced the prospect of invasion and the restoration of a Catholic monarch by force and there were recurrent wars with Catholic states, most notably with France. As Linda Colley has pointed out, this ensured that ‘the vision that so many

2 F. C. Mather, High Church prophet: Bishop Samuel Horsley (1733–1806) and the Caroline tradition in the later Georgian Church (Oxford, 1992), p. 90.
3 Ibid. p. 94.
Britons cherished of their own history became fused in an extraordinary way with their own experience. To many of them, it seemed that the old popish enemy was still at the gates, more threatening than ever before.  

These factors, combined with strong theological objections to Catholicism, contributed to the development of a coherent anti-Catholic ideology, expressed in popular tracts, sermons, and homilies, which served to reinforce the general opprobrium in which Catholics were held. The authors of these works tended to be members of the Anglican clergy anxious to uphold the constitution that had been established in both Church and State. In this article I shall be examining the published works of one of the most extreme exponents of anti-Catholicism, Samuel Peploe, with the aim of understanding this ideology as an intellectual phenomenon and demonstrating how it was made more virulent in Peploe's case by the social and political factors which prevailed in the North-West of England.

Samuel Peploe (1668–1752) served as vicar of Preston from 1700 until 1726 and then as bishop of Chester from 1726 until his death. Preston had a large Catholic population, estimated at 643 in 1717, and recusants were numerically strong throughout the county of Lancashire as a whole. John Bossy has estimated that there were 16,000–18,000 Lancashire Catholics in 1700, including adults and children, comprising about a tenth of the local population. However, as B. Gordon Blackwood has pointed out, the paucity of documentary evidence creates difficulties in trying to arrive at a precise figure. Nevertheless, it is certainly true that in Peploe's time 'there were more Catholics in this relatively small area than in the rest of the North put together'. Even when the number is restricted to those adult male Catholics

who refused to take the oath of allegiance to George I or who were convicted at quarter sessions, a figure of 3,000 can be arrived at. The majority of them were plebeians, the gentry accounting for only 5.6 per cent of the recusant population.9

Not surprisingly, Preston was a Jacobite stronghold during the rebellion of 1715 and Peploe became very unpopular during his time there as a result of his opposition to both Catholicism and Jacobitism and his promotion of a Whig latitudinarian ideology. In 1714 he had written to Henry Newman, secretary of the S.P.C.K., outlining the main problems faced by the Anglican clergy in trying to combat the existence of Catholicism in north Lancashire. The itinerant preachers appointed for this purpose had failed to counter the proselytizing of Catholic priests while their flocks were able attend services freely because the civil authorities had not been enforcing the penal laws. Moreover, he argued, the large size of many parishes meant that those who lived in them either would not or could not come to church but attended Catholic services instead.10

The Catholic gentry were able to exercise a strong influence over their tenants, and many towns in Lancashire with one or more wealthy Catholics had large numbers of ‘popish recusants’. The chief resident of Bailey, for example, was Sir Nicholas Shireburn of Stonyhurst and the township contained fifty-two Catholics. The influence exerted by the Catholic clergy was also an important factor, however, and Blackwood suggests that ‘The fact that there were 114 Catholics in the weaving township of Walton-le-Dale may have been due as much to the persuasion of its two resident priests as to the power and protection of its manorial lord, Edward Winckley.’11 Peploe did his best to counter such influences by supplying information to the Forfeited Estates Commission and attempting to prosecute two Catholic priests.12 He was equally zealous in promoting anti-Catholic ideas in his writings. Two of his sermons were published in 1716, the first of which had been preached in Liverpool in January of the previous year during the Jacobite rebellion.

12 Haydon, ‘Samuel Peploe’, p. 76.
In the first sermon Peploe took I Kings 18:21 as his text: ‘How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him.’ These were the words uttered by Elijah when, according to the Old Testament story referred to by Peploe, ‘Ten of the Twelve Tribes departed from the worship of God at Jerusalem; and set up the Calves of Bethel and Dan by which they pretended to worship him.’ In doing this, Peploe explains, ‘The Sin of these Men was not in disavowing the true God; but in joining the Worship of Idols with him. They would worship Baal as well as God; and resolv’d to transmit their service to God by these Calves which they had set up of their own heads.’

Peploe goes on to draw a direct comparison between the corruption of Jewish worship referred to in the story and what he sees as the corruption of the Christian faith in the practices of Roman Catholicism: ‘And this is the case of the Church of Rome, Theirs and that of the Ten tribes are parallel, Those Tribes worship’d the true God in a false manner, and so do they under our present consideration.’

The identification of Roman Catholicism with ancient pagan practices also appears in other early eighteenth-century religious polemics. One example is a sermon preached in 1717 by Walter Offley, rector of Barthomley in Cheshire and chaplain to Henry Herbert, Lord Herbert of Chirbury, in which he referred to ‘the infinite superstitious Heathen Ceremonies and Usages with which the Church of Rome hath defiled the Church of God’. Later, in 1729, Dr Conyers Middleton, the heterodox Anglican cleric, published his Letter from Rome, showing an exact conformity between popery and paganism, in which he drew parallels between the forms of worship which characterized Roman Catholicism and those practised in the worship of the gods of ancient Rome; the use of altars, incense, holy water, and elaborate ceremonial were common.

13 S. Peploe, A stedfast affection to the Protestant religion, and the happy government of His Majesty King George in opposition to the wicked designs of the present rebellion recommended in a sermon preach’d at Liverpool, in the county palatine of Lancaster, the 11th day of January, 1715 (London, 1716), pp. 3–4.
14 Ibid. p. 12.
15 W. Offley, A sermon preach’d in the cathedral-church of Chester on Tuesday the 1st of October, 1717, at the assizes held there (London, 1717), p. 12.
to both religions, he argued. Moreover, both adored images of deified men and of the Queen of Heaven and relied heavily upon what Middleton alleged were fake miracles. Nevertheless, the virulence of Peploe’s attack upon Catholicism was probably a reaction against the High Church views of some of his contemporaries and was thus more extreme than some of the polemical literature produced during this period.

Many clergymen were more tolerant in their attitudes towards Catholicism than Peploe. George Croft, for example, preached a sermon at St Mary’s, Oxford, on 5 November 1783 in which he asserted that even in the errors of Catholicism ‘we can trace the semblance of something good’. Thus, in the requirement to do penance could be seen a recognition of the need for ‘proper punishment’, in absolution and indulgences ‘consolation administered to sincere repentance’, and the belief in transubstantiation reflected ‘the very greatest reverence paid from earliest times to the Holy Eucharist’. As Mather has observed, ‘Anglican divinity of a high or central cast, taking its cue from Hooker, conducted the quarrel with Romanism within a framework of agreed postulates’, for example the need to prove historical continuity with the early Church, respect for an episcopal order of ministry, the importance of writings later than the Bible, and an admission that a form of universal primacy was warranted by tradition.

These postulates sometimes included a sacrificial understanding of the Eucharist. Bishop William Warburton viewed the Last Supper supernaturally and described it as ‘a symbolical feast on the sacrifice of Christ’s Death’. An earlier, more radical view was put forward by John Johnson in a treatise published in 1714 entitled Unbloody sacrifice and altar unveiled and supported. Johnson argued that the elements of

17 Mather, Bishop Samuel Horsley, p. 95.
18 Ibid. p. 94.
bread and wine became in Holy Communion the body and blood of Christ, not in substance, 'but in power and effect', so that the service was a 'proper' and propitiatory sacrifice, but an offering to God of the elements used rather than a transformation of them. A broader view, put forward by Prebendary George Berkeley, saw the Eucharist as a commemorative or memorial sacrifice. He argued that Christians do not merely remember Christ's death but also 'powerfully plead in the court of heaven the merits of his present sufferings'.

The contention that Peploe was motivated in part by a desire to oppose such High Church opinions is borne out by what follows later in the Liverpool sermon. Before dealing with what he regarded as the heresies being propagated by some of his colleagues, however, Peploe reiterates the view of the sixteenth-century reformers that Roman Catholics, although they acknowledge Christ as their saviour, 'decline the Merits of his Passion, and Efficacy of his Intercession, by advancing their own Merits, and by their Application to other Mediators'. Peploe goes on to describe Christ's death upon the cross as 'this All-Sufficient sacrifice of our saviour', claiming that it is 'manifestly subverted by their daily offering to him, as they expressly declare they do, for the Sins of the World. Is not this to say, they have Faith in Christ's dying for the Sins of Mankind, and to deny the Merits of that Death at the Same Time?' Peploe follows this with a condemnation of the doctrine of transubstantiation:

They pay Divine Worship to it as God: 'Tis the Doctrine of their Church, that the whole and entire Person of Christ, is under the shape of a consecrated Wafer, and the deluded People have the Confidence to believe it. By this Means especially it is, that they have incorporated Idolatry with Christianity . . . they give Divine Worship to that which in its Nature is certainly no more than a creature.

It is at this point that Peploe widens the scope of his attack to include those in the Church of England whom he accuses of propagating 'Romish Tenets' such as

20 Mather, *Bishop Samuel Horsley*, p. 5.
21 Ibid. p. 7.
a real Sacrifice in the Sacrament of Our Lord’s Supper, Secret Confession of Sins to a Priest, the Necessity of particular or personal Absolution; making the Enclosure of the Church of Christ so strait, that no Protestant Churches Abroad, nor the most peaceable and serious of the Dissenters among ourselves, can be members of that Society.\textsuperscript{23}

Given the vehemence of the Protestant views he expresses here, it is likely that Peploe himself shared Benjamin Hoadley’s view that the Eucharist was a simple memorial. His anti-Catholic ideology is thus used as a vehicle to attack theological opponents whose stance on Eucharistic doctrine and other issues threatened to make the Church of England unacceptable to those outside it. The sermon must also be seen as part of his campaign to counter the growth and influence of Catholicism in Lancashire and as a call to limit the freedom of its adherents.

This is made clearer in the concluding pages when Peploe warns the government against being too lenient in its treatment of Catholics who took part in the recent rebellion. And will Such Men come to a better Temper by a pitiful Treatment of them? No! their very religion is such that it must be superior to all bonds of gratitude . . . The Papists have gone openly to Mass, as we have done to our Churches. And what has the Fruit of this connivance been, but their insulting the Government, and all true Friends to it . . . The truth is, the Liberty they have had has been dangerous to us, and is like to prove fatal to themselves.\textsuperscript{24}

As we have seen, Peploe had already complained about the lenience shown towards Catholics by the civil authorities in his letter to Henry Newman, and he obviously regarded the support given by the Catholic community in Lancashire to the Jacobite rebellion as a consequence of this. In total, 688 rebels were captured at Preston in 1715 and 366 of them were native to the county. Paul Kléber Monod has analysed the religious affiliations of four fifths of the Lancastrians and found that, of this number, 76 per cent were Catholics.\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that Catholics were often treated compassionately by the authorities, especially before the rebellion of 1715. To give one example, the two Catholic priests and seven laymen indicted by Peploe as ‘seducers and

\textsuperscript{23} Ibid. p. 13.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. p. 18.
\textsuperscript{25} Blackwood, ‘Lancashire Catholics’, p. 41.
recusants' were discharged by sympathetic Tory magistrates before the Lancashire bench was drastically remodelled in the aftermath of the first Jacobite uprising.26

There were other incidents of this kind in the county. Nicholas Blundell, a prominent Catholic squire, went to Ormskirk Sessions where Mr Molineux of Bold, Mr Trafford, Mr Harrington, I &c: compounded to prevent conviction, we Appear'd in Court before Sir Thomas Standley, Dr Norris & Mr Case all Justices of the Peace, We Catholicks that got off[...] our Convictions dined altogether at Richard Woodses, after dinner we went to the New-Club-hous & thence came back to Richard Woodses and drunk Punch with Sr Thomas Standley.27

By this composition at the sessions court, Blundell and his co-defendants were freed from appearing at a higher court which might have imposed a harsher penalty. It is noteworthy that the presiding magistrates were on friendly terms with the defendants and that one of them joined in the celebrations at a local inn after the proceedings. Blundell was able to mix freely with Anglican clergy and laity who frequently joined him in a social club which also included Jesuit priests and the members of Catholic gentry families. They each paid a subscription of 6d. and met at the bowling greens at Ince Blundell, Great Crosby, and Sefton, or at local inns to play bowls and cards, drink, and enjoy conversation.28

Peploe's words were intended to serve as a warning against the dangers of such easy tolerance, a pattern that was repeated in other parts of the country, as J. Anthony Williams has pointed out. Henry Neville, a member of a Leicestershire recusant family, was on friendly terms with the local parson, the Tory M.P., and Lord Rockingham, while in Sussex the Carylls, despite their strong Jacobite links, enjoyed a warm relationship with the second duke of Richmond.29 Nevertheless, the fear that Catholics posed a threat to the constitution and the security of the realm remained widespread. As Mather has asserted, 'the unrelenting allegiance of James II and the Old Pretender to the Church of Rome, and the encouragement given to Jacobite

26 Haydon, 'Samuel Peploe', p. 76.
28 Ibid. I, p. 171.
29 Williams, 'Change or decay?', pp. 52–3.
plots and invasion projects by Catholic powers created the impression of a treasonable association between Catholicism and the Stuart cause.³⁰

Consequently, after the defeat of the 1715 rebellion at Preston, the Catholic participants were dealt with most severely. Between December 1715 and October 1716 forty-one Jacobite rebels were executed in various Lancashire towns and sixteen of them were Catholics native to the county. A further twenty Lancashire Catholics were outlawed, compared with only four who were Protestants. Catholics held 35 per cent of the county’s landed property and twenty-four of them had their estates confiscated and sold, a fate suffered by only one Protestant.³¹ Peploe was no doubt pleased to see his call for firm action against the Catholic rebels heeded by the civil authorities.

Peploe’s attacks upon the recusant community continued to be highly vitriolic. The numerical strength of Catholicism in Lancashire, the involvement of Catholics in the recent rebellion and the tolerance which had previously been shown towards them by his political opponents were all factors which encouraged him to adopt a particularly vehement tone in his anti-Catholic rhetoric. Even at the height of the rebellion, however, there were Whig clergymen elsewhere in the North-West who were more temperate in the remarks they made. Christopher Sudall was the rector of Holy Trinity church in Chester at that time and was later to become a prebendary at Chester cathedral during Peploe’s episcopate. He preached a sermon in which he referred to ‘the hasty March and near Approach of our Enemies, I mean those Rebels against God and our Excellent constitution in both Church and State’, and although he described the fight against them as ‘the defence of everything that is sacred and dear to us’ in his call for action he merely urged the clergy to ‘encourage our people’.³² There were no demands for a stricter enforcement of the penal laws, detailed condemnations of Catholic theology, or lurid accounts of the nation’s history.

³⁰ Mather, Bishop Samuel Horsley, p. 91.
³² C. Sudall, The people and soldiers duty in this present time of war and rebellion: a sermon preach’d at the church of Trinity, within the city of Chester, upon Sunday the 13th of November, 1715 (London, 1716), p. 1.
Peploe went much further in a sermon preached at the Lancaster assizes on 24 March 1716 outlining the manner in which he believed God had protected the Protestant cause ‘between the time of our happy Reformation from Popery, to the memorable Deliverance we had from the imminent Dangers of it at the Revolution’. He regards the centuries between the synod of Whitby and the Reformation as a dark age of tyranny and superstition during which the country languished under the dominion of the see of Rome.

By this means, we were not only brought under a great Obscurity of Religion, but were very much hamper’d in our Civil Rights. Indeed some of our Princes did justly resent the Usurpations of Rome upon their Crown and Dignity; and sometimes the Lords and Commons of England complain’d of its Encroachments on their just Rights.

Fortunately, God rescued the nation ‘from that spiritual bondage’ during the reign of Henry VIII so that ‘We retain’d those Principles which the Gospel teaches and rejected those which came from the Papacy.’

Peploe continues to use British history in order to portray Catholics as a persistent threat to peace, stability, and freedom from the time of the Reformation onwards. During the reign of Elizabeth I, for example, which ‘brought our Holy Religion to a legal Establishment, there were many Enterprizes to pull down what she had set up . . . All the Arts, and all the Power of the Papists, both at home and Abroad, are well known to have been employ’d to that purpose.’ Walter Offley, in his sermon of 1717, echoed these sentiments with an attack upon the Jesuits, accusing them of trying to persuade the Catholic monarchs of Continental countries to engage in wars against England. He describes the various plots against Elizabeth I, culminating in the Spanish Armada, as efforts ‘to wound the whole Reformation mortally and make England a Province of Spain, or a Fee to the Papacy’.

Peploe goes even further in his accusations, claiming that

33 S. Peploe, God’s peculiar care in the preservation of our religion and liberties: a sermon preach’d at Lancaster assizes, the 24th day of March, 1716, before Judge Dormer, one of the justices of the King’s Bench at Westminster (London, 1716), pp. 9–10.
34 Ibid. p. 11.
Catholics fomented the English Civil War in order to bring down the government and achieve their own ends. He also suggests that they approved of the execution of Charles I in the belief that it would ‘bring the greatest blemish on that Religion which they mortally hated; and in all probability, open some Door or other, for their successful entering in upon us’. This hatred of Catholics is taken to further extremes with the accusation that during the Restoration period they prevented Charles II from ‘having any legal issue’. At the time it was rumoured that the earl of Clarendon had arranged his master’s marriage in the knowledge that his bride, Catherine of Braganza, was infertile. Since his daughter Anne was married to the duke of York and bore him their first child in October 1660 this would have suited Clarendon very well. Peploe obviously thought that somewhere in the background the Catholic Church must have wielded its influence in order to secure the succession of the king’s Catholic brother. He also hints darkly at the possibility that the king’s death was the result of similar intrigues: ‘and how he was remov’d, perhaps the Papists know best’.

The reign of James II is viewed as a period when the constitution came under attack and ‘open Assaults were made upon our Religion, Laws and Liberties’. However, Peploe sees William of Orange as an agent of divine intervention, sent to free the nation from papist tyranny and establish the Protestant succession. George I is regarded as a guardian of civil and religious liberty and there are harsh words for those who sought to prevent his accession after the death of Queen Anne:

no longer could we have expected the security of our Church and our Religion, no longer could we have been a free people; France would have drawn an insolvent Bill upon us, and we must have been chain’d down to perpetual Slavery and Idolatry, for our Ingratitude both to God and Man.

Such partisan recollections of the nation’s history were often used in anti-Catholic polemics of the period. Walter Offley referred to ‘that traiterous, bloody and inhuman

36 Peploe, God’s peculiar care, pp. 11–12.
38 Ibid. p. 17.
39 Ibid. pp. 20–1.
Gun-Powder Plot’ and attacked the Catholic monarch James II as a bigot who surrendered ‘his Reason and Conscience entirely to the conduct of the Jesuits’. Thomas Bradbury, preaching in London on 5 November 1716, claimed that God had directly intervened in the life of Princess Elizabeth, daughter of James I, in order to save her ‘first from Popish fury, and then from Popish influence: she was to be neither their Sacrifice nor their Tool, as many of her relations were’. Peploe’s sermon, however, is distinguished by the wild nature of some of his accusations and, once again, the local factors noted earlier encouraged him to be particularly vindictive in his attacks upon the Catholic community.

Nevertheless, although strongly influenced by bigotry, the Protestant version of history articulated by Peploe and his contemporaries should not be dismissed as mere ignorance and intolerance; it was also shaped by fears that were grounded in reality. France and Spain continued to persecute Protestants in their own countries throughout the century and also gave support to the Jacobite cause. While the country faced the threat of a Stuart restoration backed by a foreign Catholic army of occupation, the sufferings of the wretched Palatines and Salzburgers appeared to be far too close for comfort and it is easy to see how, for many, Catholicism remained the great demon from whose clutches God had continually rescued the people of England.

Peploe may also have been motivated by a desire for preferment. William Moore, Master of the References to the Forfeited Estates Commissioners, was one influential figure impressed by his anti-Catholic activities and in 1716 he observed that ‘as this worthy divine’s having yet met with no public favour for his services and sufferings . . . must be a matter of great pleasure to the Papists and Jacobites, so it must be no less a cause of discouragement to the friends of the

41 T. Bradbury, The establishment of the kingdom in the hand of Solomon, applied to the Revolution and the reign of King George in a sermon preach’d November 5 1716 (3rd edn, London, 1716), p. 4.
42 Colley, Britons, p. 24.
Government’. The following year Peploe was presented by the Crown to the vacant wardenship of Manchester college.

In order to be eligible for the post, Peploe required either a B.D. or an LL.D. but possessed only an M.A. Consequently he obtained a B.D. from the archbishop of Canterbury, who had, and still has, the power to confer what are called ‘Lambeth degrees’. The visitor of the college was the bishop of Chester, the High Church Tory Francis Gastrell, and he refused to institute Peploe on the grounds that only university degrees could be regarded as qualifications for ecclesiastical preferment. Gastrell defended his action in a statement entitled *The bishop of Chester’s case with relation to the wardenship of Manchester; in which it is shewn that no other degrees but such as are taken in the university can be deemed legal qualifications for any ecclesiastical preferment in England*. The statement argued that the required qualifications were only recognized if taken by examination after a course of study, otherwise they were not possessed as proper academic qualifications. After an eight-year controversy the court of King’s Bench ruled in Peploe’s favour, but Gastrell’s position was supported by Oxford University which gave him a vote of thanks in full convocation in 1721. It is unlikely, however, that the bishop’s only concern was to uphold the status of the universities, which would be damaged if other institutions like the Church were able to bestow recognized qualifications. Gastrell had been a forceful opponent of the Whig government and upon his death in 1725 Edmund Gibson, bishop of London, told Lord Townshend that ‘The diocese of Chester is full of Papists and the late bishop has given great strength to the tories’ interest there, especially among the clergy.’ It is probable, therefore, that Gastrell used Peploe’s lack of a university B.D. as a means of preventing the advancement of a man whose opinions he found reprehensible. The following year Peploe was appointed as his successor and was assured by the duke of Newcastle that this was a reward for his loyalty to the government and ‘so must be exceedingly acceptable to all those who wish well to our present happy establishment’.

44 Ibid. p. 84.
45 Ibid.
However, as Stephen Baskerville has observed, his appointment ‘had a very limited impact on the partisan complexion of the Cheshire clergy’. Peploe found that Tory incumbents remained in possession of six of the thirteen parishes to which he had the right to collate. In a further fifty-seven parishes the advowson belonged to one or more lay patrons and the majority of these were local squires who actively supported the Tories. Peploe also found that all six prebendaries in 1727 were Tories, though between then and 1747 he was able to fill eight vacancies in the chapter with his own appointees. It is not surprising, therefore, that William Stratford, archdeacon of Richmond, described Peploe’s appointment as being ‘disagreeable to all sorts of men in that diocese’. Throughout his episcopate, Peploe continued to be a controversial figure and was involved in many squabbles with his Tory colleagues. By 1739 he had managed to secure a Whig majority among the prebendaries and in the same year he deprived the Tory non-resident minor canons of the right to let out the houses provided for them in Chester without first securing the consent of the chapter. In 1744 one of the lay clerks was suspended from his duties and then expelled for damning the fortunes of the British navy. Two years later, John Prescott, a staunch Tory, was deprived of his prebend after an episcopal visitation found him guilty of sexual and financial impropriety. Then, in 1747, he prosecuted Peregrine Gastrell, the Tory chancellor of the diocese and nephew of the late bishop, in the court of York on the grounds that he had illegally appropriated and abused the power of admitting commutation for penance. Gastrell retaliated by publishing three letters, in the third of which he defended himself against the charges and claimed that the acting rural dean, his agents, and his actuary were the guilty parties. The controversy

46 Baskerville, ‘Political behaviour of Cheshire clergy’, p. 84.
47 Ibid. p. 81.
48 Ibid. p. 88.
49 Ibid. p. 84.
caused by his appointment to the wardenship of Manchester college and his battles as a bishop against the influential Tories in his own diocese may well have encouraged Peploe in the propagation of extreme Whig views.

The proselytizing activities of Catholics were also an important factor. There were 25,139 Catholics recorded in the diocese in 1767,⁵² and Peploe felt anxious about the existence of ‘schools, taught by Papists, both Men and Women in several places’. In his primary visitation of 1728 he delivered a charge to the diocesan clergy in which he described this as ‘so bare-fac’d an Affront to our laws, and to all authority, as well as of the most dangerous Consequence to the Public, that I hope it will not be suffer’d to pass in any Parish, without the Endeavour of the Minister, and Parish Officers, to suppress it’. When describing ‘the true Spirit of Popery’, he asks his listeners, ‘Does not that consist of Deceit and Lying, of Wrath and Cruelty, and breathing nothing less than destruction to all Opposers; and never yet fail’d to execute its barbarous Intentions, but when Power, and a reasonable Juncture were to effect them?’ Peploe then warns of ‘direful calamities’ should a Catholic ever ascend the throne and claims that those responsible for such an occurrence would regret their folly ‘if any love for the Reformation, or for the Lives and Liberty of Mankind, remain’d in them’.⁵³

It was not merely the numerical strength and boldness of the Catholic community in his own diocese which alarmed Peploe. The reputation of the Anglican clergy was very low in the public mind during this period, and the contrasting images he drew between Catholicism as a threat to the liberty of the subject and Protestantism as a champion of freedom may have been intended as a means of combating this. The Church of England’s critics in parliament and the press, G. F. A. Best has argued, viewed it as ‘a danger and a menace, a potential tyranny, and they blamed the clergy for “not caring to be

53 The charge of the Right Reverend Samuel Peploe Lord Bishop of Chester to the clergy of his diocese in his primary visitation begun at Chester, June the 19th, 1728 (London, 1728), pp. 11, 15.
subordinate to the laity”. Their endeavours were entirely to clip its wings and limit its ambitions.\textsuperscript{54}

There was certainly a distrust of ‘priestcraft’, a phenomenon described by W. A. Speck in his analysis of the clergy’s image in books and periodicals. Thomas Gordon’s \textit{Character of an independent Whig} and his newspaper, \textit{The Independent Whig}, which appeared between January 1720 and January 1721, fiercely attacked influential ‘high church Jacobite priests’.\textsuperscript{55} Anti-clericalism also surfaced in \textit{The Old Whig}, a periodical published between 1735 and 1738 which also contributed to anti-Catholic prejudice with its ludicrous claim that there were 10,000 Catholic priests in London alone and 600,000 Catholics throughout the country as a whole.\textsuperscript{56}

The bishops had made the Church very unpopular with radical Whigs by opposing legislation which fitted in with the latter’s conception of civil and religious liberty. Walpole was unable to support repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, for example, because he knew that the bishops, led by Edmund Gibson of London, were opposed to the granting of further concessions to the Dissenters. It was Gibson who was responsible for marshalling episcopal opposition to the Quaker Tithe Bill of 1736 which would have freed Quakers from prosecution in the ecclesiastical courts but not from their obligation to pay tithes. He also protested against the proposed election of Thomas Rundle to the see of Gloucester on doctrinal grounds and was successful in preventing his appointment.

Gibson and others of like mind were concerned about the threat posed to conventional belief by deism and Dissent. They saw the legal bulwarks of the Establishment and the privileged position enjoyed by the Church of England as essential weapons in the battle against these forces. It was inevitable that this should arouse the antipathy of politicians and others whose concern was not to defend orthodoxy but to extend toleration and influence to those who supported the

\textsuperscript{54} G. F. A. Best, \textit{Temporal pillars: Queen Anne’s Bounty, the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, and the Church of England} (Cambridge, 1964), p. 95.
\textsuperscript{55} W. A. Speck, \textit{Society and literature in England, 1700–60} (Dublin, 1983), p. 73.
political establishment. It may well be, therefore, that Peploe and his contemporaries had an ulterior motive in attacking Catholicism because by doing so they were able to contrast its image of unpatriotic tyranny with what they regarded as the staunchly loyal, liberal spirit of the Church of England. Thus the dissemination of anti-Catholic propaganda can be seen partly as a means through which the clergy defended themselves against the radical Whig charge of being illiberal in spiritual matters and insufficiently loyal to the state.

An example of this is an anti-Catholic tract written in 1727 by Henry Felton, principal of Edmund Hall in Oxford, chaplain to the duke of Rutland, and rector of Whitwell in Derbyshire. It took the form of a dialogue between a ‘popish priest’ and a ‘plain countryman’, and Felton uses this device to contrast the appeal to reason and liberty of conscience in the Protestant faith exemplified by the Church of England with the emphasis placed upon conformity and obedience in Roman Catholicism, regardless of the private judgements of its adherents. At one point in the dialogue the countryman asks the priest: ‘Will you bring Scripture for a proof of any thing to me, and not suffer me to judge whether it proves or no? Or must I blindly submit to what you say without examining?’ The priest replies ‘Yes, ’tis your Duty to submit. You must hear the Church and when I speak the sense of the Church, as I declare I do you must believe me.’

The priest argues that the use of reason has caused divisions within Protestantism, contrasting this with the uniformity of Roman Catholicism. The countryman, however, asserts that divisions only occur when reason is abused ‘and these Abuses cannot be remedied as long as Men are influenced by Passion and Prejudice: We must bear with the Evil as well as we can’ and seek to change the minds of obstinate heretics through persuasion, instructing them ‘with Patience and in Meekness’. The countryman then draws an unfavourable comparison between this attitude towards Dissent and the authoritarian methods employed by the Catholic Church: ‘you have no other way to maintain your

57 H. Felton, The common people taught to defend their communion with the Church of England against the attempts and insinuations of popish emissarys in a dialogue between a popish priest and a plain countryman (Oxford, 1727), p. 7.
infallible Doctrine, I mean your Errors, but by Blood and Fire, and Vapor of Smoke'.

The priest insists that the burning of heretics has always been a last resort, but the countryman refuses to accept that this approach can ever be justified: ‘It is better, as I have heard it discoursed, to suffer the worst Consequences of Heresys and Schisms, than to extinguish them, as you do.’\(^\text{58}\)

The Catholic Church is thus portrayed as an agent of cruelty, intolerance, and repression so that, by contrast, the Church of England appears to be a bastion of reason and freedom of conscience. David Hempton has pointed to ‘chauvinistic notions of liberty’ as an important factor in anti-Catholicism,\(^\text{59}\) and this is certainly true both of Felton’s tract and of the other sermons that have been examined.

The theme of English liberty is emphasized once again in a sermon Peploe preached in Chester cathedral on 13 October 1745 during the second Jacobite rebellion. The bishop launched a blistering attack upon ‘Popish Idolatry’ and then warned grimly of the threat Catholicism posed to the lives of all Protestants: ‘What Blood have the Papists not spilt? What Country, where they have had a Power, has escaped their bloody Hands?’ He then describes the massacres and persecutions suffered by Protestants in France and Italy, ‘driving Multitudes from Home and Harbour to seek their Bread in strange Lands’, before referring to the cruelties of the Inquisition which, Peploe claims, exceeded ‘all the Cruelties which Barbarians ever executed on their fellow Creatures’. This latest polemic becomes a clarion call to oppose the ‘rebellious Insurrection in this Kingdom; with which all true Protestants are justly alarmed . . . nothing but Popery and Slavery is at the bottom of it’.\(^\text{60}\)

Peploe’s sentiments were echoed by William Smith, rector of Holy Trinity parish in Chester and chaplain to the earl of


\(^{60}\) S. Peploe, *Popish idolatry a strong reason why all Protestants should zealously oppose the present rebellion: a sermon preach’d in the cathedral church of Chester on Sunday the 13th of October, 1745, the mayor and corporation being present* (London, 1745), pp. 13–14.
Derby. In a sermon preached at Lancaster on 31 July 1746 he reiterated the view that the nation had won civil and religious liberty at the time of the Reformation, before which 'the whole European world was blinded in ignorance, infatuated by religious sorceries, and fettered with the double chains of spiritual and temporal bondage'. Germany had been saved from the autocratic rule of Charles V and Holland from 'Spanish slavery and its burning inquisition', although in England Catholics had continued to be 'the foes of liberty and true religion', especially at the accession of James II, a monarch who had 'aimed his blows thick and fast at all our civil and religious rights'.

While Peploe and Smith were calling for blood and vengeance, however, the dean of Chester cathedral was urging Protestants to act with moderation. Thomas Brooke had held his post since 1732 and from that time onwards he identified himself unequivocally with the Whig interest. In 1722 he had voted Tory, then split his votes in 1727, and his apparent conversion may have been due to pragmatic considerations. The sermon he preached in 1746 made it quite clear that he had not adopted a partisan Whig ideology. Brooke argued that truth was rarely the monopoly of any single faction and that 'Disputes about Religion, Politics and the like' were often conducted 'with so much Heat and Fury, and extravagant zeal, that a cool serious Man is apt to believe, they don’t always arise from those specious Motives of Piety and Public Spirit which they commonly carry before them.' Brooke goes on to suggest that religious prejudices are often acquired by one’s early education and later confirmed ‘with Books, company and a partial Application’. Once again, Peploe’s bigotry is partly explained by the circumstances in which he found himself: a staunch Whig in a diocese where Catholics

61 W. Smith, The Gospel an actual friend to the liberties of mankind: an assize sermon preach’d at Lancaster before the Honourable Sir Thomas Dennison Knt., one of the justices of the King’s-Bench, and the Honourable Charles Clarke Esq., one of the Barons of the Exchequer, on Thursday the 31st day of July, 1746 (London, 1746), p. 15.
62 Ibid. p. 18.
63 Baskerville, ‘Political behaviour of Cheshire clergy’, p. 86.
64 Ibid. p. 87.
were numerous and the Tory interest strongly represented among clergy in positions of power and influence who regarded the bishop's attitude to Catholicism as crude and unreasonable. Thus, even when the perceived threat to liberty had passed, Peploe was still trying to convince the diocesan clergy in his charge of 1747 that 'Popish Power, and Policy, have been and still are at work to root out the Protestant Religion; and with that, all Civil Liberty.'

Over a period of more than thirty years Samuel Peploe articulated the widely held view of Catholicism as theologically abhorrent and politically unacceptable. Paradoxically, however, the extreme bigotry of his views was partly a reaction against the greater tolerance and understanding with which Catholics were being treated, particularly in the North-West of England. The large number of Catholics in Lancashire and the compassion shown to them by Peploe's Tory opponents were factors which encouraged him to become even more concerned about 'popery' than might otherwise have been the case. Anti-Catholicism should not therefore be seen as static but as an ideology which could be flexible and influenced by its local environment.

By the time of Peploe's death in 1752 the Jacobite threat was receding and the tide of anti-Catholic prejudice began to ebb further away. A great deal of prejudice still existed and continued to have implications for Catholics themselves but by the second half of the eighteenth century it had already passed its peak. Furthermore, as the Church of England emerged from a period during which it suffered great unpopularity, the need to portray itself as the guardian of Protestant liberty also became less urgent.

65 S. Peploe, *A charge of the Lord Bishop of Chester: not spoken but given to the clergy on their being call'd at the visitation begun at Chester on the 17th day of June 1747* (Chester, 1747), p. 15.