THE archives of King's College, Cambridge, contain a vast quantity of records of the parish and manor of Prescot, accumulated since the grant of the advowson by Henry VI in 1445 and the appropriation of the Rectory by the College in 1448. Apart from the formal leases, presentations and accounts contained in the College Ledger Books, Account Rolls and Mundum Books, and the contents of three great chests which were removed to the College from Prescot in 1912, there are numerous bundles of sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth-century papers of great interest which appear hitherto to have been neglected by students of the history of the town. One of these bundles, inscribed "Papers concerning the School of Prescot," contains original letters and memoranda which passed between the Provost of the College, the Vicar of Prescot and the Earl of Derby, between 1586 and 1592.

The first of these men, Dr. Roger Goad, had been made Provost in 1570 on the deprivation of his papist predecessor, Dr. Philip Baker. Goad was one of the scholars appointed in 1581 to hold a public disputation with Edmund Campion, the captured Jesuit, who suffered...
death in the same year. The Vicar, Thomas Mead, M.A., was a King’s College man, appointed in 1583 by Dr. Goad, and, like him, a zealous Reformer. On his arrival at Prescot, he found among his parishioners a spirit of opposition to the reformed religion even stronger than in most other parts of a county where sympathy with the old order was deep and widespread.  

His consequent vexations and difficulties, his steadfast perseverance, and the measure of success which he achieved, will be evident in the records which follow.

Henry Stanley, fourth Earl of Derby, who was to play so decisive a part in the humble drama here unfolded, was a man whose wealth and capacity enabled him to figure also in events of national importance. Like many others in those times of stress and change, when the success of the reformed English Church seemed by no means assured, he had at first adopted an attitude of caution. Eventually, however, he committed himself in no uncertain manner. In 1587 he acted as one of the judges who passed sentence of death upon the Queen of Scots, and in 1589 he presided, as Lord High Steward, at the trial and condemnation of his cousin, the papist Earl of Arundel.

1 In 1584 the Bishop of Chester urged that the commissioners should “kepe some sessyons about Preston, Wigan and Preskotte, where the people are most obstynate and contemptuous, and to deale severely and roundly with them . . . for the temporall magestrats will doe nothinge.” (State Pap. Dom., vol. 163, no. 84, published with other interesting state papers relating to Lancashire recusancy, in the Rev. T. E. Gibson’s Lydiate Hall, 1876. See also W. A. Shaw, Ecclesiastical Hist. of Lancs. from the Reformation, in Vict. Hist. of Lancs., vol. 2.)

2 Mead’s outstanding achievement was the rebuilding of the church in 1610 with the support of the leading gentry, whose coats of arms may still be seen in the church.

3 His father Edward, third Earl of Derby, who died in 1572, won the confidence successively of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Mary and Elizabeth. Henry himself had acted, in his youth, as Gentleman of the Privy Chamber to both Edward VI and King Philip (see D.N.B.). As late as 1585, the Jesuit Parsons regarded him as secretly favourable to Mary Stuart (Froude, English Seamen in the 16th Century, p. 119). As Ecclesiastical Commissioner, he seems at first to have exercised his authority with moderation.
Within Lancashire, Lord Derby \(^1\) held a commanding position, towering above all others in respect of rank, wealth and office. He stood also in a special relation to Prescot, for ever since 1453 the head of the house of Stanley had farmed the Rectory from King's College. He was thus entitled to the corn tithes throughout the extensive parish, and to the manorial profits of the town of Prescot, of which he was the nominal Steward.\(^2\)

In a letter to the Provost, dated 26 May, 1586, the Vicar gives the following account of some of his difficulties.

"Sir, we have a free schole \(^3\) in this towne of Prescote, whiche is no smale commoditie to the towne, and a greate furtherance for religion. Scholemasters and ministers ether do or shold ioyne hande in hande for instruction of youth, to teach them the trewe feare of God. Our gentlemen of this parishe wherof I am minister, perceavinge my indevor hearin, of late, within this fewe dayes, entered consultation to remove the schole ij miles from the churche, purposinge hereby to hinder my good corse, which God be thanked hathe not bene without some profite; my trust is greater will followe. I have withe some displeasure vnto my selfe stayed it for this time. I beseche you (good sir) as you tender the good procedinge in religion, be erneste with my L. of Darby, that it be not at anie time removed. The onlie reformation that we can hope for in this corrupte contrie is, that children be truly and diligently catechized,\(^4\) for I thinke that superstition is so grownded in the adged, that without the rare mercie of God deathe must parte it. I doubt not but God will blesse our labors concerninge the instruction of youthe, whiche wilbe better and withe greater ease performed

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\(^1\) The title was apparently not taken from the Lancashire manor and hundred of West Derby (see *Complete Peerage*, vol. 4, p. 206).  
\(^2\) In practice, although Lord Derby appointed a Deputy Steward, the town was left very much to its own devices.  
\(^3\) The title "Grammar School," although not used by the Vicar, does in fact occur in the Prescot court rolls of this period.  
\(^4\) In view of this statement, it is surprising to find that the Vicar was charged at the Visitation of 1592 with not catechising the youth. Mead stated that "every Sondaie and holidaie he doth interpreat upon some parcell of Scripture before and after noone. The Judge enjoined him that he shall hereafter catechize, and to certify the names of such as refuse." (Historic Soc., *Transactions*, 10, p. 189.) Evidently the opposition to the catechism had been too strong for the Vicar to withstand.
wen the minister and the scholmaster are one hand at the elbow of the other; and therfore our forefathers, seinge this, have founded ther free scholes not far from the mother churche. All our gentelmen are ether obstinate recusantes or verie cold professors, and wold gladly worke to hinder the good corse of the worde."

The Vicar then expresses his desire for assistance from the College and Lord Derby in suppressing the Sunday market at Prescot, urging the necessity "to be paynefull at the beginninge, for old custome although it be wikked will hardly be altered... and I doubt not but after the reformation of this will follow the reformation of manie other abvses." After discussing various other matters, he concludes his letter with the following revealing observations:

"This countrie as yett is verie backward in religion. They that have the sword in there handes vnder her maiestie to re-dresse abuses amonge vs, suffer it to rust in the scabarde. Ther is some smale reformation, and we hope will shortly be greater by reason of certeyne spirituall exercises in Lankeshire and Cheshire, whereof one is in Prescot towne once everie monethe, the three coldest excepted. We hope that greate reformation will follow the good and zelouse vse therof."

It is clear from the Vicar's statements that his teaching of the catechism to the boys of the Grammar School had aroused such deep resentment, that a number of the gentlemen of the parish, some of them avowed papists, had devised a plan to move the school from its site near Prescot church\(^2\) to a place where it would be more free from his interference. We can sympathise with their position, and with that of the Vicar too. It was a direct conflict between the two religious sections, each realising the vital importance for the future of controlling the

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1 i.e., painstaking; cf. the phrase "a learned and painful schoolmaster" (Memorials of Old Lancashire, p. 163).
2 A terrier made in 1592 shows that the school was situated on the north side of the churchyard, where the highway from Liverpool approached the market-place.
education of the young. The Vicar's allusion to the necessity of exercising pressure upon Lord Derby perhaps indicates the nature of the argument, or threat, by which he prevailed upon the gentlemen to relinquish their project.

The Vicar, unfortunately, does not mention his opponents by name. Among the State Papers,\textsuperscript{1} however, the following list of "recusants and suspected persons" within Prescot parish—an extraordinarily long list, in comparison with others—is preserved:

"Mr. Henry Gerrard, Robert Ball yeoman, Mr. Eltonhedd, Mathewe Travers yeoman, John Travers gent., William Travers gent., Henry Rowley yeoman, [Richard] Holland of Hall Sutton, Mr. Biram of Biram, Peter Biram gent., William Turner yeoman, Edmund Ellin yeoman, Mr. Henry Latham, Henry Tailor mercer, Edward Rowghley yeoman, Henry Rowghley yeoman [repeated], Thomas Corran [sic] gent., Brian Hayward yeoman."

This is dated 1584. Another list,\textsuperscript{2} of the same year, includes "Mr. [Richard] Bolde of Bolde halle," the only J.P. resident within the parish.

Of some of these gentlemen we shall hear more, for the project for the removal of the school was not abandoned. We have no further record, however, until after the lapse of a period of five years, 1586–91. During this period, notable events of both national and local interest occurred. One of the gentlemen mentioned above, John Travers of Ridgate in Whiston, suffered death\textsuperscript{3} on Tower Hill (Sept. 1586) for participation in the Babington Plot. The execution of Mary Stuart in 1587, and the failure of the Spanish Armada in 1588, were severe blows to the hope of a restoration of the old order of religion. Many papists now felt constrained to abandon the strict

\textsuperscript{3} He alone of the seven executed conspirators refused to acknowledge guilt. He declared: "I die a true Catholic, and do believe all that the true Catholic Church doth" (Kenyon MSS., Hist. MSS. Commission, 617).
principles on which recusancy was based,¹ and make at least some show of conformity.

The action of Sir Thomas Gerard of Bryn, who had been committed to the Tower in 1586, and who gained his release in 1589 by giving evidence against the Earl of Arundel,² illustrates the tendency of the time. Sir Thomas held property within the town of Prescot, and was the highest in rank among the suitors to the Court Leet. He was lord of the manor of Windle within the parish. After his death in 1601, his son and heir Thomas (who was created a Baronet by James I in 1611, free of charge, on the first day of the institution of the order, in recognition of his father's services to Mary Stuart) was accused of detaining "stocks" belonging to Prescot Grammar School,³ so we may fairly assume that the father had a hand in the earlier trouble.

Another leading papist malcontent of the parish, Henry Latham of Mossborough, was imprisoned at Lancaster in or before 1590, and removed in 1592 to London.⁴ He possessed considerable property and influence in the town of Prescot, where he served as foreman of the Court Leet jury in 1573, 1575, 1576, 1582 and 1587. There can be little doubt that he had been one of the agitators for the removal of the school. He might well, indeed, have taken a special interest in the school, for his kinsman, Gilbert Latham, Archdeacon of Man, had in 1544 bequeathed a fund for its foundation.⁵

In the case of one person named in the list of 1584, a connection with the school can be definitely proved. This is Matthew Travers, mentioned as a Schoolwarden in

¹ The Tridentine Fathers, to whom the Council of Trent referred an appeal for guidance sent by English papists, declared that occasional conformity was unlawful, 1562 (Gibson, op. cit., p. 185).
³ From an undated letter of the Vicar, of which a copy is in the St. Helens Public Library.
⁵ Will at Somerset House, 18 Powell, P.C.C. See also p. 14.
the court rolls of 1564 and 1566 (see pp. 16–17). According to recently-discovered Churchwardens' Accounts,¹ he travelled to Chester, c. 1563, to petition the Bishop (without success) against the demolition of the rood loft in the Parish Church. Thereafter he became one of the most determined recusants in the county.²

From the State Papers ³ we learn interesting particulars of the religious attitude of the gentry c. 1590. Henry Latham of Mossborough, Peter Wetherby of Halsnead, Henry Travers of Hardshaw, Edward Eccleston of Rainhill and James Travers of Windle are "recusants and thereof indicted"; Richard Bold of Bold "maketh shew of good conformitie, but not gretely forwarde in publik actions for religion"; Henry Eccleston of Eccleston, Thomas Lancaster of Rainhill, John Byrom of Parr, John Ogle of Whiston and Thomas Foxe of Sutton are "comers to churche but not communicants, and theire wives many little better then recusants."

A letter from the Vicar to the Provost, dated 6 June, 1591, contains the following:

"Our schole is greatly hindered by a gentelman in ourparishe, Mr. Eccleston, and it had bene clene overthrowne but that my L. made some stay therof, and yett is it greatly shaken, and it is like clene to decay except some good order be taken withe spede: and in my minde this wold further it marvolusly, if you wold direct a thankefull letter vnto my Lord for that he hathe done, withe a request to continew his honorable favor and furtherance vnto the schole."

Henry Eccleston of Eccleston, to whom the Vicar here alludes, does not appear in the list of papists of 1584, but is included in that of 1590 as an occasional conformist. In 1597, after the project for the removal of Prescot school had been abandoned, his son Edward, who succeeded in that year, offered an acre of land in Eccleston

¹ To be published by the Record Society (see p. 13, note 2).
² See the references in Gibson, op. cit., pp. 199, 238, etc.
for the erection of a new school, and ultimately a school, used mainly by Roman Catholic children, was built there.\(^1\) This land lay by the highway on Eccleston Hill, about midway between Prescot and St. Helen’s Chapel, a little over two miles from the former. There can be little doubt that this was the spot to which the disaffected parishioners had desired to move the school in 1586.

A further letter from the Vicar to the Provost, dated 18 January, 1591/2, begins as follows:

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Sir, as I remember, both by letter and privat speche, I made you acquaynted withe our schole in Prescot towne, howe our gentlemen in the parishe, not well affected in religion, sought to remove it from the churche above ij miles, of purpose that they myght not have ther children instructed in the principles of christian religion: once I prevented ther purpose: another time I was a meanes to my Lord of Darbie to stay it in the towne. As yett ther is suche cuninge meanes wrought that, excepte you direct a letter to my lord to continew his honorable favorable favor,\(^2\) it is like clene to be lost: and I knowe that at your request he will stand ernest in the cause. In regard of religion, it is very meete that it shold have continewance by the churche: and the rather because this country is backward in religion: in regard of the towne, it is very necessary: there is belonginge vnto the towne of Prescot but xxx acres of grownd, after the measure of our acre,\(^3\) every acre being almost ij of yours, and there livethe vpon thses xxx acres at the lest iiij hundred soules, three parts of them not able to live of them selves except they be releved by neghtbours,\(^4\) and of this iiij hundred sixe score vnder the adge of xvj years. I thinke this a sufficient reason in conscience to keepe the schole in Prescot towne. I beseche you therefore that
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1. Part of the building still stands, being known to-day as Seddon’s Cottage, from the circumstance that Richard Seddon, Prime Minister of New Zealand 1893–1906, was born there in 1845.
2. The passages in italics are underlined in the original.
3. The Vicar alludes apparently to the “Cheshire acre,” which was used in S. Lancashire, and which was in fact slightly more than double the statute acre. Even so, the Vicar’s estimate of the area of the town (even excluding demesne land) is too low by at least 10 large acres.
4. This circumstance is partly explained by the fact that most of the leading tenants were non-resident, the property being in the occupation of under-tenants.
you wold direct your letters vnto my lord givinge him thanks for that, that alreadie he hathe done, with a farther request fully to settell bothe schole and stocke: otherwise it will decay.''

Apparently at about this time, the Vicar addressed the following document to Lord Derby. Since the document is now preserved at King's College, we may suppose that the Earl caused it to be sent on to the College, presumably because he desired the co-operation of the College in whatever action was taken. The document is undated, but may be ascribed to the early part of 1592.

"ARGUMENTES TO PERSUADE THE CONTINEWANCE OF THE SCHOLE IN THE TOWNE OF PRESCOT.

Firste, by advise and generall consente it was setteled where now it is in the towne of Prescot, as then adiudged the fittest place, as in truthe it is, since whiche time it [hath] continewed by the space of forty years and vpwardes: therefore an harde matter now to seke the removinge therof.

Agayne, since the erection of the schole, divers have given liberally towards the mayntenance therof in the towne of Prescot, whiche giftes stand in hasarde to be taken away if the schole sholde be removed, because they are imployed to the vse of a schole in that place vnto the which they weare given.

Agayne, when the gentelmen had a like intent before, a good while since, it was then generallie concluded, that the schole shold remayne wher it is for the benefite of the poore towne vppon this condition, if the towne of Prescot wolde maynteyne [it] for the whole parishe of ther owne charges the space of five yeares, that the common stockes might increase, for the greater benefite of the sayd schole in the end and expiration of the sayde years, whiche condition the poore towne of Prescot to ther greate charges have performed: therefore it sholde now be agaynst all equitie, right and conscience [to] have it taken from them.

Agayne, your Honour is the Stewarde of our poore towne, where it is now setteled, and from whych they seake to remove it, therefore your honor in right and conscience sholde loke into it and have the gretest stroke in this action, remembringe that it is bothe profit and countenance to have a schole in the towne, bothe whiche are taken away in the removinge therof.

Agayne, the fitteste place for a schole is wher ther is greateste nomber of youthe and poore children to be taught and instructed:
Prescot Grammar School in Elizabethan Times:

more poore children knit together in the poore towne of Prescot then ij miles aboute the place where the newe schole is intended to be.

Agayne, the fittest place for a schole is where if anie childrene shold fall sicke, as often times it falleth out, they may find the spedyst and best relefe: a towne fittest for this.

Agayne, the fittest place for a schole is wher children in time of winter may warme themselves: a towne most convenient for this.

Agayne, ther be manie, especially suche as be able, sende there children from far vnto scholes, and in that respecte are constreynd to table 1 them: a towne fitt for this.

Agayne, in respecte of religion and conscience, it is very meet and convenient that the schole shold remayne there wher now it is, because the churche is there settele. For scholemasters and ministers ought to yoine hande in hand, for the education of youthe and bringinge up of childrene, as in good nurture and learninge, so in trew religion and the feare of God: for the scholmaster dothe prepare substance for the minister to worke vpon, to make therof a spirituall building vnto God. And therfore our forefathers from all adges vntill this time in all places have founded scholes by churches, that the scholmaster and schollers, at all times when it sholde seme to the minister expedient, shold be as it were at his elbow. And as the duty of catechisinge, bothe by Godes law and mans law, of necessitie is layde vpon the minister, so it is necessary and expedient that he shold have them nere him, whome he sholde instructe in the principles of Christian religion.

Agayne, in respect of the said religion and conscience, the place where the new schole is intended to be [is] of all places in the parishe the worste, for there is not in the whole parishe agayne so many discontented and disobedient subiectes, so many obstinat and wilfull recusantes as is about that one place, all vnwillinge to bring there children nere to the churche, lest happly they shold be alluered to love the churche and to have a likinge of trew religion, and therefore some of them have kept in ther howses privat scholmasters corrupt in religion, whoe have taught there childrene the principles of papistry.

Agayne, there is not one house theraboutes that hathe not one or ij or more recusantes, and in them divers recusant childrene: so to settell a schole amonge them is nothinge but an increse of papistry, and so an increse of vndutifull subiectes,

1 i.e., to provide with meals.
the number whereof alredie is to manie: agayne it were to be ferede lest it shold be a verie nurse of seminarie pristes.

Agayne, the gentelmen them selves that are the chefe doers in this action are very vnmeete men for the appoyntinge ether a good place or a good scholmaster or good lawes for a schole. The action is merly spirituall, and therefore requereth the men of true religion, of sound conversation and good conscience: they that are busiest in this matter, howsoever they beare an outwarde face for feare of lawe vnto the churche, yet ther other actions do signifie that they have hartes otherwise affected. This in a christian wisdome ought to be considered and provided for; and therefore none so meete as your honor, being now an highe commissioner in causes ecclesiastical, to ordeyne a place, to provide a scholmaster and to make lawes for a schole; whiche your good Lordship most honorably have provided for, when the gentelmen of our parishe layed asid the care therof, appoyntinge that the schole shold remayne in the same place, and have provided for the towne scholmasters. Agayne, the gentelmen that seake the removinge of the schole, men of abilitie, men of welthe; the people from whome they offer to take it, very [poore], havinge many poore children, and therefore lesse hurtfull vnto the gentelmen to erect a schole of theire owne charges wher they will, then vnto the inhabitantes of the towne of Prescot, if that they shold have that taken from them which is now setteled amonге them: the want of it wilbe ther decay and the vttre overthrowe of ther posteritie: for they are not able to maynteyne a schole of them selves, so poore are they: therfore restinge vnder the succor of your honorable frendshipe, ther trust is that it shall still continew withe them.

And now (my good lorde) concerninge myne ownc opinion thes reasons have fully satisfied me. And I protest vnto God, if I weare not absolutly persuaded that the settelinge of a schole by a churche weare not ioyned withe christianitie and withe the increse of true religion, I cold the better hold my tongue: nay if I weare not persuaded that they whiche seke the removinge of the schole have not a secret intent to hinder the good course of true religion, I cold the more esely beare it. But beinge fully persuaded of the one and of the other, for the mayntenence of the one and for the preventinge of the other, I cold not but do that I have done, wherein I dischardge my conscience before God and man: and in Christes name I beseche your honor that you wold have a godly and christian care in this behalfe, wherof I doubt not, desieringe the Lord to blesse your honor. Your honors
Prescot Grammar School in Elizabethan Times:

poore chaplayne alwayes to commande in the Lorde, [signed] THOMAS MEADE."

The third argument given above affords an important clue to the explanation of the trouble. There were belonging to the school certain endowments or funds known as "the common stocks," yielding a regular income out of which the schoolmaster's wages, and other charges, could be paid. These funds were in the care of Schoolwardens (see p. 16). When the teaching of the catechism aroused a storm of indignation in the parish, the Schoolwardens were in a position to retaliate, not perhaps by withholding the funds (for this they could not lawfully do), but by employing them to hold the school in another place. The schoolmaster, in all likelihood, fell in with the scheme, for the Vicar mentions that one new master at least was appointed by Lord Derby. On the plea that the school existed for the benefit of the whole parish, they might urge that it ought to occupy a more central position, for Prescot itself, curiously enough, is situated at the edge of the extensive parish.

As to the nature of the "common stocks," interesting revelations are made in the following résumé of the history of the school, unsigned and undated, which is preserved with the other papers.

"ARTICLES CONCERNINGE THE SCOOLE OF PRESCOTT, THE ERECTION AND CONTINUANCE THEROF.

1. That divers stockes or sommes of money within this parishe of Prescot in tyme of superstitione, given and allotted to superstitious vses, as anniversaries, obits, trentalles,1 mayntenance of a prist and alter in such a chappell and suche like: and by the kinge of famous memorie Edw. 6. (whoe placinge in this realme sincere religione and abolishinge all superstitione) seysed into his handes amonghts others, the said stockes and sommes of money. Afterwardes by the then Chanceler of the Duchie of

1 Anniversaries, obits and trentals were requiem masses to be performed on certain days.
A Sidelight on the Reformation in Lancashire.

Lanc., by his letters missive, converted for the mayntenance of a scoolmaster to be resident within the towne of Prescott.

2. That accordinglie the said sommes weare imployed and a scoolmaister in Prescott mayntened by manie yeares past.

3. That seence the furst gratious dispositione of our late soueraigne lord kinge Edw. 6., dyvers well devoted have givene great sommes to the like vse of mayntenance of a scoolmaister and scoole in Prescott.

4. That the inhabitants of the town of Prescott, by the space of manie yeares, payed of their owne charges, schollmaster wages, to thend to encrease the stockes of the said scoolle, as also the perpetuall continuance of the said scoole within the said towne.

THE BEST MEANES FOR REFORMATION.

5. Whearas dyvers of the sommes of money apperteyninge vnto the schoole bee now in the handes of divers tenants of divers lands which vnwillinglie paie the same sommes, my lords letters in this behalf vnto the landlords by name maye ether drawe the stockes or sommes of money forthe of their handes, and then to be deliverede to the well affected towards the schoolle: or otherwisse to bynd them with such severties as shall be thought meete (by Mr. Sutten and Mr. Lankaster, interpolated) vnto suche as indevor the good of the said scoole."

If this statement, made over forty years after the event, can be credited, the school "stocks" consisted in part of the old chantry "stocks" granted to the school during the reign of Edward VI (1547–53). Fortunately, independent proof is available from the rolls of the Court Leet. One instance will suffice, though there are others. In 1546, mention is made of a cottage yielding an annual rent of 12d. to the church, namely, 4d. each to the Rood Stock, Our Lady Stock, and St. Catherine Stock respectively. In a terrier and rental of 1592, the same property is recorded as yielding 12d. yearly to the school.

At this point we must make a brief digression, and examine the problem of the origin of the school. The

1 Edward Sutton, Deputy Steward of Prescot, 1578–96.
2 The rolls of Prescot Court Leet, up to 1600, will be published in a volume of the Record Soc. of Lancs. and Cheshire, entitled Prescot Court Leet and Other Records, 1447–1600 (in the press).
Prescot Grammar School in Elizabethan Times:

above document does not explicitly state, though it certainly seems to imply, that the school was founded in the reign of Edward VI. To those familiar with modern views, which discredit the old belief that Edward VI was a founder of new schools, asserting that he was a "spoiler of schools" in whose reign many older foundations perished while others were merely re-established,¹ this may well seem hard to believe. Despite the generous intentions professed by the legislators who abolished the chantries, in practice, we are told, grants of chantry funds were made, with very few exceptions, only to such schools as were already being maintained by means of these funds. Nevertheless, the certificates and warrants of the Chantry Commissioners, published (in so far as they relate to schools) by A. F. Leach, contain no allusion to any school at Prescot.

The Vicar's statement (p. 9), made apparently in 1592, that the school had then been established in Prescot for "forty years and upwards," certainly suggests that he regarded the school as having been founded in the reign of Edward VI. There is other evidence, however, that the Grammar School did in fact exist before the disendowment of the chantries. The court roll of 10 June, 1547, contains an incidental reference to "the schole houste" as being then standing. The Chantries Act of Edward VI, though passed in 1547, did not come into effect until 1548.

As already stated (p. 6), a bequest was made in 1544 by Gilbert Latham to enable "a free gramer scole to be foundyt at Preskott, the master to have yerely for his stipend viji." Latham's will was not proved, however, until 21 June, 1552, i.e. five years after the reference noted above. Furthermore, Latham's provision for the foundation of a "free grammar school"

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(i.e. a school which taught Latin free of charge) cannot be regarded as evidence that a grammar school, limited to fee-paying pupils, did not already exist. On the whole, therefore, the evidence respecting the foundation of the school is very inconclusive.

A somewhat curious situation, which arose in consequence of Gilbert Latham’s bequest, must be noted. Latham nominated as executors Richard Risley, “parson” of Stretham in the Isle of Ely, and Dr. Richard Smith, an Oxford professor and a leading opponent of the Reformers in the English Church.¹ When Latham’s will was proved, 21 June, 1552, a grant of administration was made to Edmund Latham, as next of kin, on the grounds that Mr. Risley had renounced his obligation, and that Dr. Smith had left the realm. Dr. Smith, who had fled to escape persecution under Edward VI, returned on the accession of Mary in 1553, and apparently he and Risley undertook the execution of the will. Several years later, a petition ² was addressed to Sir Robert Rochester, Chancellor of the Duchy, by John Tarbocke, Richard Denton, James Watmowe and Thomas Garnett, Churchwardens of Prescot, complaining that, although Latham left goods worth 1,000 marks, his bequest “for the keeping and maynteynaunce of one skole master to teache and kepe a free gramer skole in the said parishe churche [sic] of Prescott” was being withheld. The complainants state that the executors, “myndinge to perfourme the said legacye and bequeste,” delivered £60 to Thomas Eccleston Esq., “to thuse of the said parishioners,” in part payment of £140 as a fund for providing the annual stipend of £7; and that although, as Churchwardens,

¹ He refused to conform under Elizabeth, and died at Douay in 1563. See *D.N.B.*
² Duchy of Lanc. Pleadings, 40, vol. viii, T. 18. The plea is undated, but belongs to the period 1554-7, since Rochester held the office of Chancellor for those years only. This is not included in the selection of Duchy Pleas published by the Record Soc. of Lancs. and Cheshire, vols. 32, 35, 40.
they had repeatedly applied to Mr. Eccleston for the £60, and to Dr. Smith for the residue of £80, both "utterly denied and refused." In the absence of further information, we hardly dare venture to speculate upon the significance of this case; nevertheless, we cannot help wondering whether the attitude of Risley and Eccleston may have been influenced by the fact that the chantry funds had been granted to the school.

A draft or copy of an order of the reign of Philip and Mary, preserved at King’s College,¹ undated, and addressed to Dr. Brassey, Provost and Vicar,² and to Thomas Eccleston and Thomas Parr Esqrs., speaks of "certen stocks of kyen and other things . . . geven to the vse and maynteynance of certen priests . . . in our said parisse churche of Prescotte . . . to doe divine servyce and administracion of sacraments and sacramentalls . . . by certen personns conceiled and wrongfullie deteyned," and directs an enquiry to determine in whose hands the "stocks" are retained, and to cause the revenues to be devoted to their original use.

This order reveals that the chantry funds consisted principally of cattle. The court rolls of the first half of the sixteenth century occasionally record actions brought by wardens of chantry "stocks" for payments due in respect of cattle. The cows were apparently hired out to sundry people, who paid a stipend (stipendium) of 12d. a year for the use of each beast. Later on, the rolls record similar actions brought by the Schoolwardens. The Schoolwardens named in such actions are: 1557, Peter Stockley and Hamlet Ratchdale; 1564, George Deane, Edward Holland, Matthew Travers, Henry Coney, Thomas Ashton and Richard Parr; 1566, Henry Coney

¹ King’s College Muniments, i.V.11.
² Dr. Robert Brassey was Vicar of Prescot, 1541–58, and also Provost of King’s College, 1556–8. The above order therefore cannot have been earlier than 1556, hence, even if it were executed, the school was not deprived of these "stocks" for long.
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and Matthew Travers; 1567, Henry Coney et aliis; 1575, Henry Coney and Edward Holland; 1577, Nicholas Tildesley; 1578, Thomas Potter.

We are now in a better position to understand the contest at Prescot between the Vicar and his disaffected parishioners respecting the school. On its material side, it was a struggle for the control of the endowments. With the cattle and other property which provided the income of the school in the hands of persons in sympathy with their aims, the Schoolwardens were in a position to establish a school in Eccleston, claiming it to be a transfer of the old school, and to collect the revenues on its behalf. They actually proposed to do this in 1586, but the Vicar succeeded in prevailing upon them to defer their action. The Vicar then wrote to Dr. Goad and urged him to appeal for aid to Lord Derby (p. 3). Apparently the Provost did so, for we are told (pp. 7, 8, 11) that the Earl came to the Vicar's assistance. From another source,1 we learn that Lord Derby paid a special visit to Prescot on 23 May, 1587. This was probably the occasion on which the town agreed to maintain the school "of its own charges" for five years (p. 9), ostensibly to allow the "common stocks" to increase, really perhaps because the bulk of the funds was withheld by the Vicar's opponents. If this date is correct, the five years were due to elapse in May 1592. Anticipating a revival of his difficulties, the Vicar appealed both to the Provost (p. 8), and to Lord Derby (p. 9), with the result that he was able to secure their united support.

The climax therefore came in 1592, when the Provost decided to come himself to Prescot to inquire into this and many other complaints which had long been agitating him. He presided at a stormy Court Leet on 26 May, where, according to his own memoranda still preserved

at King's College,\(^1\) it was agreed, amongst other things, that the school should "be settled at Prescott." Nearly a fortnight later, he was present at a meeting convened by Lord Derby, at which, as appears from the following report, the matters in dispute were finally settled.

"**The Copie of a Decree Touchinge Prescott Schole.**

At Knowseley, the vijth daye of June, Anno Regni Regine Elizabethe &c xxxiiij° 1592. Vppon which daye and yeare Henrie, Earle of Derbie etc, Mr Doctor Goade, Provoste of the Kings Colledge in Cambridge, Richard Bolde, Henrie Eccleston, and Thomas Lancaster, esquires, Edward Sutton, James Pemberton, William Standisshe, Thomas Foxe, Philippe Layton, Francis Watmough, gentlemen, Mr Meade, vicar of Prescott, and others the parishioners of Prescott, meetinge and conferringe of purpose touchinge the free Schole of Prescott, have assented and resolved as followethe, viz:

Firste, it is agreed vppon with the mutuall consente of thaffore named persons, and thought to be moste convenient and meete, that from henceforthe the Grammer Schole shalbe, and be contynued, kepte and taughte at and within the towne of Prescott, vntill suche tyme as the saide Erie or his heires, with a lyke consente of the gentlemen and parishioners, shall see and conceyve speciall cause to remove it.

Item, it is agreed that the Scholewardens shall yelde and make a true and perfect accompte in wrytinge to Edward Button gent. and Thomas Potter mercer at the towne of Prescott the thride of August next, in thaffore noone, what stockes and howe many belonget to the saide Schole, in whose hands and howe long they have remayned, what securitie hathe bene and is at this instante taken for the safetie and due reansweeringe of them and the profitts, as also what arrearage of the profitts are behynd and vnpaid, and by whom.

Item, it is agreed that the said Scholewardens within theire seuerall lymitts and circuits shall bringe to the saide towne of Prescott, the saide thride of August nexte, by neyne of the clocke in thaffore noone, all suche persons whatsoeuer as have, or are answeerable for, any of the saide stockes, and that then the saide Scholewardens (theire accompts being trulie made) with the privities and assents of thafforenamed persons to whom they

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\(^1\) King's College Muniments, i.V.14.
haue made theire accompts, shall take newe bounds, billes and sureties of euery one which shall haue any of the saide stockes, for the safetie and true repayment thereof and of the profits as they shall growe due hereafter, and at daies and tymes usuall, whereof the said Scholewardens are immedyatlie to gyve those which haue any stockes provarnginge and knowledge, to thende they maye furnishe them selues with sureties accordinglie, and haue them at Prescott the daie afforesaide.

Item, it is agreed, that for tharrerage behynd and due for thvse of any stocke or stockes hethervnto, the parties by whom the same are due shalbe warned and charged, that they shall make satisfaccion and payment thereof, to the Scholewardens in Prescott church at and vppon the feaste daye of St Michaell tharchaugngell nowe nexte cominge, as they will answere the contrarie at theire perills, and as they will avoyd the demaundinge of the saide arrearage by ordre of lawe, which course is resolved to be helde immedyatlie agaynste them.

Item, it is agreed that if there be a suspiccion or conceipte that any of the stockes maye (by any meanes) decaye in any of those persons hands in whose they nowe remayne, that then those persons and theire sureties shalbe prewarned to make payment of them on Michaelmas daye nexte as affore, vppon the penaltie afforesaide.

Item, it is agreed that a Sholemaster shall immedyatlie be provided and begyn to teache Schole at Prescott at the feaste of St Michaell tharchaugngell nowe nexte cominge, and haue thallowaunce and exhibicion due for thexercysinge of that place.

Item, it is agreed that the Scholewardens which nowe are, havinge made theire accompts and payments, and done as afforesaide, shalbe discharged, and others chosen to supplie theire steeds in suche sorte as heretofore they haue bene, and that noe Scholewardens shalbe contynued longer then for one whole yeare.


On his return to Cambridge, Dr. Goad took the precaution of leaving with the Earl a written statement of matters to be attended to in connection with the parish; this included a request "that it would please his L. from tyme to tyme to continue his honorable
favor to the schoole of Prescott, as hetherto he hath voutsafed."

In a recently-discovered Schoolwardens' Account of 1685, reference is made to certain revenues which had formerly been allowed to the school, but had been for many years discontinued; they include the communion offertories made at the Parish Church, and the amerce­ments imposed at the Court Leet. The school was also allowed the use of the rents of buildings newly erected on the waste land of the manor. Possibly these allow­ances were agreed upon in 1592 at the meeting noted above.

The Vicar's determined efforts to prevent the diver­sion of the funds of Prescot Grammar School had been rewarded with success, but only in consequence of his being able to summon the aid of powerful external forces. The causes of dissatisfaction among the Romanist element, however, remained as before, with the result that, while the older school remained in possession of the original endowments, the project of establishing an independent school was soon renewed, and eventually carried out (see p. 8). The story of the old Roman Catholic Grammar School of Eccleston, however, is worthy of separate treatment.

Our thanks are due to the Provost and Fellows of King's College, Cambridge, especially to Mr. John Salt­marsh, for facilities to transcribe, and permission to publish, the manuscripts which have provided the principal material for this paper.

1 i.e., in effect, as Roman Catholic schools did not become legal in England until 1771.