

THE DIOCESE OF WINCHESTER: REFORM AND RE-ORGANISATION 1827–1927

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ABSTRACT

Reform of the Church of England in the nineteenth century has usually been explained by the spiritual revival in the parishes inspired by the Evangelical Revival and the Oxford Movement, and the institutional reforms facilitated by parliamentary legislation. However, Arthur Burns (1999) has recently added a further perspective on nineteenth century church reform and identified what he calls a 'diocesan revival' in the Church of England. He describes the revival and renewal of different diocesan institutions and then examines their impact on further church reform, such as the demand for new dioceses. This article seeks to draw together evidence for a diocesan revival in the Winchester diocese, especially during Bishop Sumner's long episcopate (1827–1869) and goes on to explain the way in which the demand for new dioceses was met in Winchester: first through the 'loss' of south London and east Surrey in 1877 and then through the creation of the Guildford and Portsmouth dioceses in 1927.

INTRODUCTION

Winchester is one of the oldest English dioceses and at the beginning of the nineteenth century it was still one of the largest. It stretched from south London and the Thames to the New Forest and the Solent; it covered the Channel Islands, the Isle of Wight, Hampshire and Surrey, although a few parishes in Surrey were in the London or Canterbury dioceses. The urban areas in the diocese were growing and the population was increasing. In 1801 the total population of Hampshire and Surrey was 484,000 and in 1831 it was 800,000. Surrey

in particular was growing very rapidly, as the county became ever more closely linked with London through improved road communications. New industrial development took place in Bermondsey and Southwark on the south bank of the Thames, and new residential areas in Surrey became increasingly popular with business people who needed convenient access to London. In Hampshire, Portsmouth had grown rapidly whilst servicing the needs of the navy during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars; Southampton's modern growth lay in the future and Bournemouth hardly existed.

The diocese had its origins in the Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Wessex and in the Middle Ages it became the richest bishopric in the country. It derived its wealth from its extensive estates which were concentrated in Hampshire but extended into Oxfordshire, Surrey and Somerset, reflecting the original extent of the see. Its bishops built and extended their castles and palaces from which their lands were administered, including Wolvesey Palace in their cathedral city of Winchester, Farnham Castle on the Hampshire-Surrey border and Winchester Palace in Southwark. Medieval bishops were primarily leading members of the government and as close advisers of the king their attendance at court took precedence over diocesan matters which were often delegated to others. The medieval bishops of Winchester were among the most important of royal advisers and included four treasurers and ten lord chancellors.

After the upheavals of the Reformation and the Civil War Bishop Morley (1662–1684) worked hard to re-establish the traditional

status and dignity of the bishop's office. This was reflected in the building work he carried out at Farnham and Wolvesey; in London, he abandoned Winchester Palace, which had fallen into disrepair during the Civil War, and bought a new London house in Chelsea, later to be replaced by a house in St James's Square. In the eighteenth century bishops of Winchester, like other bishops, were essentially political figures. Their duties in the House of Lords kept them in London for much of the year, and poor communications discouraged them from travelling round the diocese. They seldom intervened in the administration of the diocese or in the lives of the parochial clergy. They ordained new clergy, usually at their homes in London or Farnham, but thereafter there was little contact between bishop and clergy.

The state of the Winchester diocese during the eighteenth century has been the subject of lively debate (Ward 1995; Gibson 2003; Smith 2004). However, at the beginning of the nineteenth century Parliament, in the wake of the American and French Revolutions, had become increasingly worried about the Church of England's ability to perform its role as the church of the nation. In particular, it was concerned about the extent and impact of pluralism and non-residence, the provision of Anglican churches in the growing towns and the increase in dissenting congregations. During the first half of the nineteenth century Parliament required bishops to provide a constant stream of information and legislated to remove pluralism and absenteeism, and to redistribute church resources on a national scale under the Ecclesiastical Commission established in 1835. It was against this background of parliamentary reform that the revival and renewal of diocesan institutions in Winchester took place during Charles Sumner's long episcopate (1827–1869).

REFORM AND REVIVAL 1827–1877

Appointed bishop of Winchester at the age of 37, Charles Sumner was very unlike his eighteenth

century predecessors. From the beginning his leadership style promised to be very different. In his first charge to the clergy of the diocese he expressed the hope that 'mutual confidence' would characterise his relations with them and 'that they would find in me, not an indifferent and apathetic witness of their spiritual toils, but a fellow-servant and friend'. He was able to refer to his own experience of the parochial ministry as a curate for five years (1816–21) at Highclere in northwest Hampshire: 'here I learnt the alternations of hope and disappointment, of joys and fears, with which the ministrations of the parochial office are inseparably attended' (Sumner 1876, 170). At the start of his episcopate Sumner signalled his intention to provide active and visible leadership in the diocese by being enthroned in person in Winchester Cathedral, the first to do so since the Reformation. During his 42-year episcopate three developments in particular transformed the diocese: closer episcopal oversight of the clergy, a strengthened middle management provided by the archdeacons and rural deans, and the growth of diocesan societies and organisations.

Before his translation to Winchester Sumner had been briefly Bishop of Llandaff where he had astonished the diocese by requiring a detailed return from every parish before issuing his first charge and carrying out a visitation. He did the same in Winchester and repeated the process every four years during his 42 years as bishop. Like other Victorian reformers Sumner placed considerable importance on statistics and by analysing the returns he could pinpoint deficiencies and identify improvements. In his first charge, for example, he spoke out against non-residence and drew attention to the need for more churches; in recommending more frequent communion he noted, 'I observe by the returns that the communicants in this diocese very rarely exceed one-tenth part of the congregation' (Sumner 1876, 175). In his 1845 charge he was able to report that since 1829 the congregations showed a numerical increase of about a quarter and communicants had doubled (Sumner 1876, 298). Among his statistics in his quadrennial charges Sumner always included a tally of clergy surviving from

his first visitation, also noting those deceased since the last one; in his last charge in 1867 he observed that only twenty-four incumbents were still in post from the time he became bishop 40 years before. Burns (1999, 34) comments that Sumner's inclusion of this kind of diocesan data in his charges to the clergy set a trend and 'encouraged them to feel part of a collective enterprise'.

Sumner was also active in his pastoral oversight of the clergy through his frequent travels round the diocese. He met them during his quadrennial visitations at different centres, and when he visited parishes to consecrate new buildings and institute new incumbents. In 1829 he visited the Channel Islands, the first visit by the diocesan bishop for 300 years and repeated every four years. Sumner gave high priority to confirmation; each year he undertook confirmation tours and during his episcopate the number of centres increased from around 30 to nearly 140. All such visits provided opportunities for the bishop to become 'a more visible and familiar presence in the parishes' (Burns 1999, 132).

Sumner did not act alone but worked closely with the Archdeacons of Winchester and Surrey. Since medieval times archdeacons had been regarded as the 'eye of the bishop', whose main responsibility was monitoring the condition of the parishes through parochial visitations. Sumner's archdeacons undertook this duty very thoroughly, and also played a vital role in supporting diocesan societies and organising schemes for church improvement and extension. Charles Hoare, Archdeacon of Winchester from 1829 to 1847 and then of Surrey from 1847 to 1860 was Sumner's first appointment and his longest serving colleague. He shared Sumner's evangelical convictions as well as his commitment to re-invigorating the life of the diocese; he is rightly described as 'the first modern Archdeacon of Winchester' (Guille, 2003, 20). Samuel Wilberforce, Archdeacon of Surrey from 1839 to 1845 worked particularly hard in south London. He took the lead in sub-dividing parishes in Bermondsey and Southwark, and raising money to support them. In another part of the diocese Sumner

relied on Joseph Wigram, Archdeacon of Winchester from 1847 to 1860, to implement church reform in Southampton. The town was undergoing huge expansion with the opening of the railway to London in 1840 and the construction of the docks, the first of which was opened in 1843. Sumner installed Wigram as Rector of St Mary's in 1850, and immediately the parish was divided and the revenues re-allocated for the benefit of new and existing churches. Sumner's archdeacons lived up to Burns' description of them as key players in the diocesan revival, 'transforming the schemes of bishops and the Ecclesiastical Commission into concrete achievement' (Burns 1999, 74).

Sumner not only had the help of his two archdeacons but in 1829 he revived the ancient office of rural dean. They were commissioned to visit and inspect their deanery parishes once a year and inform the bishop of any vacant benefices; from time to time he called them together for a three-day conference at Farnham Castle. In 1843 Sumner sanctioned the restoration of ruridecanal chapters, which gave clergy new opportunities to participate in the collective life of the diocese. Archdeacon Wilberforce was instrumental in reviving them in Surrey and used them as a means of getting to know the clergy. They gave clergy the opportunity to discuss topics of common interest; these included issues debated in the Convocation of Canterbury after it was revived in 1854. In some instances chapters were able to take action, as when the Southwark chapter took responsibility for co-ordinating church extension. The deaneries were essential to Sumner's management of the diocese, and to improve their effectiveness their number was increased in Surrey from three in 1827 to 13 by 1869 and in Hampshire from ten to 24.

Sumner's episcopate also saw the development of numerous diocesan societies and organisations. They usually started as local branches of national societies and in later years were to become part of the diocesan system of government. Membership included not just the clergy but also the laity, which provided one of the chief ways of involving them in the work of the diocese. Perhaps the most

important initiative was the establishment of the Diocesan Board of Education in association with the National Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in the Principles of the Established Church, which had its first meeting under Sumner's chairmanship in December 1838. He gave his full support to its work of training teachers, promoting new schools and providing inspection; for example, his provision of Wolvesey for free use as the training school for teachers from 1847 to 1862 saved the Board £100 a year. Another initiative was the formation of a diocesan branch of the Church Building Society to raise money for new churches; Sumner attended 24 inaugural meetings across the diocese during its first year in 1837. Later on he promoted a number of schemes to provide new churches, schools and parsonage houses in south London. Attendance at meetings of diocesan societies and subscribers became easier with the coming of the railways after 1840, and helped to create a sense of diocesan community. In 1863 Winchester published its first annual diocesan calendar or directory, which also encouraged diocesan awareness and loyalty with information and news about both parishes and organisations.

Overall, the reforms that took place during Sumner's episcopate were remarkable. New parishes and churches were established and built, with the number of benefices increasing from just over 400 in 1827 to nearly 630 in 1869. Over 100 decaying churches were restored, new schools were opened and almost every parish had a parsonage and a resident incumbent. But Sumner realised that these reforms alone were not enough to bring the growing urban masses into the church, and he increasingly realised that the population of the diocese was now too large for one bishop. In 1868 he suffered a stroke and resigned in 1869; he died five years later in 1874. His former archdeacon, Samuel Wilberforce, who had been Bishop of Oxford for the last 24 years, succeeded him.

Wilberforce had been a diocesan reformer in Oxford as Sumner had been in Winchester, but he had also become a national figure in a way that Sumner had never been. He often took the lead amongst the bishops in the House

of Lords and as a speaker he had few clerical rivals. Wilberforce transferred to Winchester in his 65th year, conscious that his new diocese was considerably larger than Oxford and that south London presented particular challenges. However at the time of his appointment he made it clear to Prime Minister Gladstone that he did not want the diocese to be divided. He threw himself into the new work with great energy travelling round the diocese by coach, horseback and rail, and spent much of his time organizing new parishes and buildings in south London. He strengthened diocesan middle management by establishing a new archdeaconry for the Isle of Wight in 1871. He streamlined the various diocesan societies and organisations by creating two county-wide associations which dealt with buildings, education, provision for curates and endowments of small benefices. But Wilberforce was bishop for less than four years. He had two heart attacks in 1870 and a third in 1871; although he recovered and continued to drive himself ceaselessly he increasingly suffered from tiredness and depression. In July 1873 he fell from his horse and died instantly.

Sumner and Wilberforce had been dominant personalities within the diocese but their successors were more prepared to seek advice from clergy and laity. Harold Browne (1873-1891) succeeded Wilberforce; he had been Bishop of Ely since 1864 and had been one of the first bishops to introduce annual diocesan conferences. Browne saw these as a revival of 'the most ancient organizations of the church' and at the first Winchester Diocesan Conference held at Farnham in November 1876 argued that synods and conferences of the diocese promoted unity within the church. They helped to reduce the isolation of the clergy who 'have been too much like little potentates in their own parishes'; the true principle of unity made 'the diocese and not the parish the unit of the Church'. He went on to argue that it was no longer possible for the bishop to act as 'an episcopal autocrat' as he needed 'to look for the advice and co-operation of the clergy and laity' (Diocesan Calendar 1877, 93). Browne recognised that a bishop had to carry people with him and the

diocesan conference became a major instrument for doing this. Two clergy and two laymen from each deanery attended the first conference, and debates were held on education and on 'how best to bring religious influence to bear on the working classes'. The following year the conference adopted a formal constitution, which established a body of over 300 members with equal representation from both clergy and laity. The annual conference quickly became an important diocesan institution and at his last conference in 1890 Browne identified it as a development for which he was particularly grateful. He reflected that 'I introduced the conference with some difficulty because my eminent predecessor, Bishop Wilberforce, had not introduced it and felt considerable doubts about it, not as to its constitution but as to its limiting the power of the bishop' (*Diocesan Calendar* 1891, 166).

The fifty years since Sumner became bishop in 1827 had seen a transformation of the diocese. It had developed an effective leadership and management structure provided by the bishop, archdeacons and rural deans, supported by a growing number of diocesan societies and organisations. The diocesan revival in Winchester had also given clergy and laity new opportunities to participate in the collective life of the diocese, which allowed for further development once the diocesan conference had been established in 1876. In addition, by the end of the period the cathedral was expected to play a larger part in the life of the diocese. When a new Dean was installed in 1872 Wilberforce urged the vice-dean to invite as many diocesan clergy as possible, saying that he saw it as an occasion 'to knit together the Chapter and Diocese' (Barrett 1993, 258). In 1878 Browne undertook a formal visitation and in his charge to the cathedral shared his vision of the chapter as an active body gathered round the bishop intent on the advance of the Christian faith (Kitchin 1895, 444). In this way the cathedral was beginning to be seen as a focus for the diocese itself, now invigorated as a result of stronger leadership and improved management during the previous 50 years.

RE-ORGANISATION AND SUB-DIVISION 1877–1927

By the time Browne became bishop in 1873 Winchester was the largest diocese in the country in respect of size, and the third most populous after London and Manchester with over 1.5 million inhabitants, 700,000 of whom lived in south London. With the growing importance attached to the role of the diocese Browne quickly recognised that he needed more help. In 1870 the office of suffragan bishop had been revived because of the increasing demands made on bishops. The position had existed in the medieval church, usually as a short-term measure to cover the absence or illness of a bishop. At the time of the Reformation the Bishops Act of 1534 permitted the appointment of suffragans and 26 towns were named as suffragan sees, but the practice fell into disuse after the sixteenth century. When Browne came to Winchester he was keen to develop the ministry of suffragan bishops and in 1874 nominated John Utterton, Archdeacon of Surrey since 1865, as the Suffragan Bishop of Guildford, one of the towns named in the 1534 Act. In addition Browne appointed Francis McDougall, who had been Bishop in Borneo, as an assistant bishop in the diocese with a canonry in the cathedral. These appointments enabled Browne to carry out his episcopal ministry more effectively; in particular they helped with confirmations and provided sources of advice and support.

However, many churchmen regarded the appointment of suffragan bishops as an expedient; the real solution to the problem of episcopal workload was the creation of new dioceses. Traditionally English dioceses were large. At the end of the Middle Ages there were just 17 but five new ones were created at the time of the Reformation, which reduced the size of some dioceses but not Winchester. Between 1830 and 1870 various schemes for the creation of new dioceses had been proposed to make adequate provision for the growing population, but they were slow in coming. Only two new dioceses were created, Ripon and Manchester, although some diocesan bounda-

ries were re-drawn; in the southeast the small diocese of Rochester was given responsibility in 1846 for the counties of Hertford and Essex, which provided some relief to the large diocese of London. However, this never looked like a permanent arrangement and a new diocese of St Albans was proposed as early as 1848 to cover these two counties north of the Thames. Winchester remained largely unaltered, although churchmen in Surrey were beginning to call for a new diocese; in 1865 Sumner had presented a petition to the Canterbury Convocation from '335 noblemen, gentlemen and clergy in the county of Surrey' calling for a diocese of their own, covering the whole county including south London.

Nothing came of these proposals, mainly for lack of funds. However, in the autumn of 1874 Browne took the initiative when he suggested selling Winchester House in St James's Square, worth at least £70,000, to endow a new bishopric for south London. He gained the support of both Archbishop Tait and Disraeli's Home Secretary, Richard Cross, and a scheme was quickly hammered out. This would create a new St Albans diocese north of the Thames with an initial endowment provided from the sale of Winchester House, and Rochester would take over the parliamentary divisions of East and Mid Surrey from Winchester; in this way Rochester would be responsible for south London but would also take in the rural part of east Surrey, leaving Winchester with west Surrey and Hampshire. The bill to implement these changes was passed in June 1875 with very little opposition and the new arrangements came into effect in 1877. Speaking in the House of Lords Browne said that although his original wish had been for a bishopric of south London, the scheme 'was the best that could be devised'. He acknowledged the argument against dividing Surrey between two different dioceses but pointed out that Surrey was already divided among different dioceses. He claimed that the scheme would 'constitute manageable but still large dioceses' (Parliamentary Debates (Lords) 1875, vol 3, col 1886). Although the re-organisation of the diocese in 1877 resulted in the loss of nearly

150 parishes, Winchester still had over 500 parishes and over 900 clergy.

Initially Browne thought his reduced diocese had become more manageable. He did not appoint another suffragan bishop when Bishop Utterson of Guildford died suddenly in 1879 as he hoped he could cope alone with the help of Bishop McDougall. However, after McDougall's death in 1886, Browne revived the office of suffragan bishop with the appointment of George Sumner, as Bishop of Guildford in 1888. Well-known in the diocese as Bishop Sumner's son and already Archdeacon of Winchester, he provided much needed assistance to Browne and his successor, Anthony Thorold (1891-1895). A second suffragan see of Southampton was created in 1895. The first two Bishops of Southampton did not stay long enough to leave their mark but the third, Arthur Lyttelton (1898-1903), proved to be a particularly energetic and effective colleague for Bishop Randall Davidson (1895-1903). However, he died unexpectedly in post, aged only 51, shortly before Davidson was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. The appointment of suffragan bishops now became a permanent arrangement, although income for the posts was not assured; usually it came from holding another post such as an incumbency, residential canonry or more usually an archdeaconry, with the diocesan bishop also making a contribution from his own income. However, bishops increasingly relied on them and in 1909 Bishop Ryle (1903-11) claimed that 'both in the north and in the south the Suffragan Bishop is my *alter ego*' (Fitzgerald 1928, 209).

From 1890 onwards the Diocesan Conference played an increasingly significant role in diocesan affairs. In that year it agreed to establish a monthly diocesan magazine, which was published for the first time as the *Winchester Chronicle* in January 1893. In 1890 the conference also approved proposals to extend the legal powers of the two Diocesan Societies, originally set up by Wilberforce to raise money for various aspects of diocesan work. At Bishop Thorold's first conference in 1892 a far-reaching re-organisation was agreed. The Hampshire and West Surrey Diocesan Societies were combined

into the Winchester Diocesan Society for Promoting Church Work, renamed the Bishop of Winchester's Fund in 1903. Diocesan finance still depended on voluntary collections and subscriptions and it was not until 1913 that funding was put on a more secure basis when the Diocesan Conference established the Winchester Diocesan Fund; this had the declared purpose of promoting 'the greater efficiency of church work by bringing together under central diocesan control various diocesan organisations' (Diocesan Calendar 1916, 170). The Fund was subject to the resolutions of the Diocesan Conference and was managed by a council, a Board of Finance and fifteen committees ranging from education and mission to temperance work and the Diocesan Deaconess House. The Board of Finance was required to prepare a budget each year, with the sum to be raised divided among the rural deaneries; the constitution noted that 'the sum asked for is to be regarded not in the nature of a debt which is demanded, but of a voluntary offering which is expected' (Diocesan Calendar 1916, 175). In this way a coherent system of finance was put in place with the Diocesan Conference taking overall responsibility for funding aspects of diocesan work.

In spite of the hard work of Bishop Ryle and his two suffragans the task of promoting a diocesan identity remained a difficult one. The population of the diocese continued to rise. It was 1,124,500 in 1901, an increase of nearly 25% since 1881; Portsmouth's population had grown from 72,000 in 1851 to 190,000, Southampton from 14,000 in 1829 to 78,000 and Bournemouth from less than 1,000 in 1851 to 50,000. As Ryle's chaplain and biographer pointed out the diocese stretched from East Molesey, opposite Hampton Court, to Bournemouth with about 570 parishes and 1,000 clergy. 'It was not homogeneous with no close bonds of unity between its component parts; for example, it was not easy to persuade people living in west Surrey, whose interests were mainly in London, of their responsibilities to the diocese' (Fitzgerald 1928, 206). It was therefore not surprising that demands for a division of the diocese were increasingly made. As early as 1903 Canon

Firth, rector of Houghton, near Stockbridge, started a campaign for division and in 1904 his local rural deanery of Romsey resolved that 'the division of the unwieldy diocese of Winchester is absolutely necessary to its pastoral efficiency and spiritual welfare' (Firth, HRO 44M68/F1/5). He became Secretary of the Additional Bishopricks Committee, which ran an effective national campaign for new dioceses. Following the creation of the St Albans Diocese in 1877 other new dioceses had been established; for example, the Diocese of Southwark was created out of the division of the Rochester Diocese in 1905. But Firth and the Committee argued that more were needed if the Church of England was to maintain a presence throughout the country.

However, Ryle showed little enthusiasm for change and when addressing the Diocesan Conference in 1909 maintained that the organisation of the diocese, although not ideal, was 'for the present the most practical and the most efficient in the supervision of the diocese. The separation of our six Surrey rural deaneries would not really help and there was no sound statesmanlike reason for the sub-division of Hampshire' (Diocesan Calendar 1910, 156). His successor, Edward Talbot (1911–23) realised that the issue would have to be faced not least because of the uncertain funding for his two suffragan bishops. But he had no strong feelings in favour of division and in a letter to his son shortly after accepting the Winchester bishopric admitted 'I don't think I am the man to destroy Farnham or divide the diocese' (Stephenson 1936, 263). However, one leading layman in the diocese, Lord Selborne, was quite clear that significant change was required in the management of the diocese. A son-in-law of the former Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, and himself a former First Lord of the Admiralty and Governor-General of South Africa, he was part of a family network that dominated the lay leadership of the Church of England during the first half of the 20th century. He chaired the Archbishops' Committee on Church-State relations from 1913 to 1917 that led to the 1919 Enabling Act; this established the Church Assembly, a new national body with legislative

powers delegated by Parliament. It was Lord Selborne, with the assistance of his son Lord Wolmer and Canon Firth, who patiently steered the diocese towards sub-division over a period of twelve years.

In October 1912 Selborne proposed a motion at the Diocesan Conference to set up a committee to look at the current administration of the diocese and the possibility of division. He argued that the diocesan bishop should know all his clergy and be known at least by sight in the whole diocese; a suffragan could 'not be the Bishop any more than one of the most respected members of our Royal Family could take the place of the King or Queen in the eyes of the people' (*Diocesan Chronicle* Nov. 1912). His motion was approved and the bishop appointed a committee under the chairmanship of Lord Tennyson. The committee's report, issued in March 1914, recommended 'that the principle should be accepted that the present Diocese of Winchester be reduced in size'. The authors noted that 'local feeling in England to a large extent attaches itself to counties, except in the case of large cities, which have a local life of their own', and were therefore attracted to the idea of county bishoprics. The report also recommended that the diocese should co-operate with the dioceses of Southwark and Canterbury to form a new Surrey diocese (HRO 44M68/F1/5). The proposals received little support from the other dioceses, which were reluctant to give up their parishes, and the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 postponed any further discussion.

The Diocesan Conference returned to the issue in October 1920. This time Lord Selborne proposed a resolution, seconded by Canon Firth, calling for division into two or more dioceses and establishing a committee to draw up a detailed scheme. He reiterated his argument of eight years before that it would be 'impossible to get the full strength and advantage of the episcopal system ... unless the size of the diocese was such that the bishop could know intimately all his clergy, and also be at least fairly well known in every village of the diocese' (*Diocesan Chronicle* Nov. 1920). But unlike eight years before Bishop Talbot had

now become a firm supporter of division. He said that he was less concerned 'by arguments of episcopal supervision' but more by his 'intense desire to see the corporate life and fellowship of the Church everywhere quickened'. He argued that 'our present body corporate is, both by its size and the unhappy difficulties and awkwardness of its transport system, too big for real effectiveness of common counsel and administration and united life' (Stephenson 1936, 263). Selborne's motion was passed without dissent and a new committee under the chairmanship of the bishop was appointed.

The committee divided into four groups: the Hampshire sub-committee chaired by Lord Wolmer, the Surrey sub-committee chaired by the Bishop of Guildford, and two further groups on finance and the future of Farnham Castle. The Hampshire group decided that the county with over a million inhabitants was now too large for one diocese and recommended the creation of a Portsmouth diocese to include the Isle of Wight and the rural deaneries of Portsmouth, Alverstoke, Havant, Petersfield and part of Bishops Waltham. If a second Hampshire diocese were to be created, then one based on Portsmouth was arguably the obvious choice, although Southampton or Bournemouth had also been suggested. Portsmouth was the largest town in the south of England and had experienced a revival of Anglican fortunes during the second part of the nineteenth century. The Surrey group noted that the eastern part of the county outside London belonged either to the Southwark Diocese (the part ceded by Winchester to Rochester in 1877) or the Canterbury Diocese (the Croydon archdeaconry), which made it impossible to take advantage of the county spirit. Although some people were in favour of a stand-alone west Surrey diocese it was generally agreed that a new diocese would be greatly strengthened by the addition of Hampshire parishes; as the Surrey-Hampshire border cut through the military area of Aldershot it was proposed to add the six parishes in Aldershot, Farnborough, Ash and Cove to the new diocese (HRO 44M68/F1/5).

These proposals to divide the diocese into three with two new dioceses centred on

Guildford and Portsmouth were considered by the Diocesan Conference in May 1921. Lord Wolmer in proposing the scheme argued that the new dioceses covered 'not merely an area that could be adequately and effectively supervised by one Bishop but an area in which it was possible for the Diocesan Conference to play a real part'. The main opposition to the proposal came from some Isle of Wight representatives who argued that they had no money to pay the debts of Portsmouth and that they had always looked to Winchester as their cathedral and county town. However, the Conference with only five dissentients voted in favour, with the recommendation that the scheme should be discussed in rural deaneries and parishes (*Diocesan Chronicle* July 1921). In June 1922 the scheme again received overwhelming support from the Conference when it voted in favour of asking the Church Assembly to frame a Measure to implement the proposals; an Isle of Wight amendment to refer the whole question back to the committee was heavily defeated.

The debate now moved to Westminster – to the Church Assembly and to Parliament. A Measure for dividing Winchester and creating the dioceses of Guildford and Portsmouth was considered by the Church Assembly at its spring and summer sessions of 1923. It defined the area of the two new dioceses and made the foundation of the new bishoprics dependent on the provision of adequate funds for their endowment. Two main arguments emerged against the Measure. First, Dr Headlam, Bishop of Gloucester argued for the retention of county bishoprics and therefore saw merit in adding west Surrey to the Diocese of Southwark to create a Surrey bishopric, and in keeping Hampshire as a single diocese. Secondly, Dr Ryle, the former Bishop of Winchester and now Dean of Westminster, argued that although Winchester needed dividing this was the wrong scheme and it would be better to wait and plan for a more comprehensive re-organisation across southern England. Lord Selborne dealt courteously and patiently with both arguments when introducing the Measure in the final debate in July. But he was clearly exasperated with some leading Hampshire laymen, many of them his personal

friends, who petitioned against the division of Hampshire at the last moment; he complained that 'hardly any of them had ever taken part in the government of the diocese, nor considered the problem of diocesan administration'. Powerful support for the proposals came from Bishop Talbot who said that he had come to realise that 'the Diocese of Winchester as an organic body was too large and unwieldy to have a real organic life' (*Diocesan Chronicle*, Aug. 1923). The Assembly rejected Dr Ryle's motion to delay by 239 votes to 125, and then went on to approve the Measure.

At this point Talbot, now aged 80, retired. The popular and energetic Bishop of Peterborough, Theodore Woods, succeeded him. In his letter offering Woods the post Prime Minister Baldwin pointed out that the division of the diocese could not take effect until a very considerable sum of money had been raised. In addition, it still had to be approved by Parliament. The Winchester Measure came before the Commons at the end of May 1924 and was proposed by Lord Wolmer, MP for Aldershot. General Seely, MP for the Isle of Wight, moved an amendment requesting deferral until 'the poorer clergy of the diocese have received an adequate stipend and until the wishes of the inhabitants of the diocese have been more clearly ascertained'. After a full debate the motion approving the Measure was passed by 97 votes to 43 (*Parliamentary Debates (Commons)*, vol 174, col 368–82). It came before the Lords in July 1924. The new Bishop of Winchester argued that the division of the diocese would greatly increase the Church's spiritual efficiency and that rejection of the Measure, which had behind it the authority of the Diocesan Conference and the Church Assembly, was a step too extreme to contemplate. However, Lord Northbrook, the long serving Chairman of Hampshire County Council, introduced an amendment not to proceed. He referred to the widespread objections to the scheme particularly from the Isle of Wight, and to the undesirability of dismembering an ancient and historic diocese, arguments strongly refuted by Lord Selborne. Dr Henson, Bishop of Durham, also spoke per-

suasively against the Measure, arguing for the retention of large historic dioceses like Winchester and claiming ‘that the only thing for which a bishop needs assistance is confirmations’, which could be provided by suffragans. At this point Archbishop Davidson, fearing defeat, successfully moved the adjournment (Parliamentary Debates (Lords), vol LVIII, col 111–49). When the debate was resumed a fortnight later the Archbishop patiently rehearsed the case for approving the scheme, and when the vote was finally taken the Measure was carried by 70 votes to 60.

The division of the diocese into three could now take place, but the money to fund the re-organisation, estimated at £110,000, had to be found. At the Diocesan Conference in November 1924, Woods successfully moved a resolution calling on ‘all churchmen in the diocese, including those who have hitherto been opposed to the scheme, to unite in carrying it to completion without delay’; he asked that the money should be raised in five years (Woods & Macnutt 1933, 214). In notes for clergy, speakers and PCCs the case for the division and the creation of two new dioceses was clearly argued. It particularly emphasised the ‘shepherding’ role of the bishop and the need for ‘manageable’ dioceses, and included testimonies from new dioceses as to the value of division, which ‘unanimously bear witness to the growth of church life in all directions’ (HRO 44M68/F1/5). By December 1925, £73,000 was raised, which increased to £93,000 by October 1926. In February 1927 Woods was able to announce that ‘our endeavour is completed, not in five years but in three. All the money needed for the incomes and the houses of the new bishoprics is forthcoming or will be by the end of April’ (Woods & Macnutt 1933, 256). On 1st May 1927 the creation of the dioceses of Portsmouth and Guildford became an accomplished legal fact.

CONCLUSION

At a stroke the population of the Winchester Diocese was cut by over a half, from 1,400,000

to 600,000, and the number of parishes reduced from 586 to 315. The loss of west Surrey, the Aldershot-Farnborough area of northeast Hampshire, the greater Portsmouth area and the Isle of Wight meant that the diocese was more compact and less unwieldy; taking Southampton as its geographical centre, it was only 30 miles from both Bournemouth and Basingstoke. Wolvesey became the bishop’s residence, situated very close to the cathedral and centrally placed in the newly defined diocese. The smaller diocese also meant that a much larger proportion of clergy and laity could be represented in the newly constituted Diocesan Conference, a point that had often been made by the supporters of the sub-division. Such benefits were claimed not just for the Winchester scheme but also for other re-organisation schemes within the Church of England; 19 new dioceses had been added to the existing 24 between 1877 and 1927 in the belief that dioceses of a manageable size were essential for the ministry and mission of the church. In 1922 a committee of the Church Assembly had recommended that dioceses should have not less than 150 benefices and not more than 250, and no diocese should be so large as to require more than one suffragan bishop. The committee recommended the creation of 12 new dioceses but in the event only five were established: Blackburn and Leicester in 1926, and Derby, Guildford and Portsmouth in 1927.

1927 was the last year in which the Church of England would create new dioceses at home. Thereafter the expense and upheaval of re-organisation militated against further new sees at a time when the Church of England was declining in terms of church attendance, social esteem and political influence. The large dioceses that remained, such as neighbouring Oxford, increasingly came to rely on suffragan bishops and as the century proceeded more and more were appointed to the point at which they outnumbered diocesan bishops. This of course was a line of action that Winchester could have taken, but at the time the view that the appointment of suffragan bishops was little more than an expedient still prevailed; for churchman like Lord Selborne a diocese could only have

one 'Father in God' and this provided the main ecclesiastical argument for smaller dioceses.

The nineteenth century diocesan revival in Winchester under Sumner, as in other dioceses, had seen the growth of what Burns calls 'diocesan consciousness'. It had raised expectations as to the role of the diocese but with an ever-rising population it became increasingly difficult for the diocese to meet them, especially in places like south London. Although Sumner recognised that the diocese had become too large for one bishop, Wilberforce was opposed to any division of the diocese, and both bishops disliked the idea of suffragans. It was Bishop Browne who was prepared to give up south London in 1877 and accept the help of suffragan bishops. It was also Bishop Browne who established the Diocesan Conference, which over the years helped to promote diocesan consciousness and took on

increased responsibilities, as well as becoming the main advocate of further diocesan division. Whilst the first division of the diocese took less than three years to achieve and was the work of mainly three men, the Bishop of Winchester, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Home Secretary, the second was a much longer, more democratic and controversial process. Perhaps it is not surprising that the Church of England has been reluctant to embark on any major diocesan re-organisation since then.

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