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THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH AND
MANOR OF WIGAN, PART I**

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GEORGE T. O. BRIDGEMAN

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THE
History of the Church & Manor of Wigan
IN THE
COUNTY OF LANCASTER.

BY THE HONOURABLE AND REVEREND
Thomas Orlando
GEORGE T. O. BRIDGEMAN,
*Rector of Wigan, Honorary Canon of Liverpool, and
Chaplain in Ordinary to the Queen.*
(AUTHOR OF "A HISTORY OF THE PRINCES OF SOUTH WALES," ETC.)

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PART I.
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INTRODUCTION.

THE History of the Church and Manor of Wigan possesses an interest of its own, not only from the close connection of the one with the other, but also from the fact of its being the only instance, as far as I know, in which a secular priest held, in right of his church, such plenary powers as were conferred upon John de Winwick and his successors by King Edward III. There were others who became lords of the manor as parsons of their churches, as for instance the rectors of the neighbouring parish of Winwick, but I am not aware of any, beside the rectors of Wigan, who enjoyed a view of frankpledge, acquittance for themselves and their tenants from attendance at the Sheriffs' tourns, cognizance of all pleas as well concerning lands, tenements and rents as concerning transgressions, covenants and complaints, together with issues, forfeitures, amercements, fines and redemptions in cases of this sort arising within their town, manor or lordship, and also pleas of assizes, concerning tenants within their manor, who should happen to be arraigned before the King's justices appointed to hold assizes within the county, so that the said justices, when called upon by the parson or his bailiff, should give them up to

him to be tried in his own court. The parsons, moreover, were empowered to enquire into all felonies perpetrated within their town or liberty, and to keep the felons in their own prison until the next gaol delivery. These, with other privileges, were conferred upon the parsons of Wigan for ever by a charter of Edward III., and were exercised by them for a long time.

In compiling these records I have endeavoured to search out the individual history of these parson-lords from as early a period as I could meet with them. The succession is nearly complete from the time of Richard I. to the present day; and I trust the result of my researches may not be altogether devoid of interest, at all events to the local antiquary.

During this period of many centuries the benefice has been held by several men of mark, who have played no unimportant part in the occurrences of their times. Their characters, accomplishments and lines of thought have been as varied as the events of the days in which they lived. Among these, the most conspicuous, perhaps, were, (1) parson Maunsell, the military churchman of the time of Henry III., who personally engaged in the King's wars in France, and in one engagement with his own hands took prisoner a person of some distinction; who acted for many years as the King's chief councillor, at one time presided over his finances as the first English Chancellor of the Exchequer, and afterwards became Keeper of the Great Seal; and who was a person of considerable importance to Wigan, inasmuch as it

was through him that the town acquired its first charter of freedom :— (2) John de Winwick, who stood high in the favour of Edward III., from whom he received a confirmatory charter extending the privileges formerly granted to Maunsell with respect to the town of Wigan, and who likewise appears to have held the great seal as keeper at the time of his death :— (3) the learned and accomplished Thomas Linacre, M.D., in the reigns of Henry VII. and Henry VIII., who may almost be said to have introduced into the English Universities the study of Latin and Greek, who was largely instrumental in creating in them a taste for polite literature, and who is said to have rescued the art of medicine from the low position to which it had then fallen :— and (4) John Pearson, bishop of Chester in the reign of Charles II., the eminent divine whose great work on the Creed is the principal text-book of all our theological students even to this day.

The lives of such men cast an historical interest over the church of Wigan with which they were connected, though its spiritual interests were probably better cared for by rectors of less celebrity.

In early times the whole township of Wigan belonged entirely to the parson, and probably a large part of it was forest. In the course of time, however, the lands were gradually let to tenants in fee, who reclaimed them, and paid what was then a fair proportion of rent to the lord of the soil, to whom also they owed suit and service. But these perpetual fee farm rents, being fixed sums, became