

William Lyndwood was a leading churchman and royal servant of the Lancastrian era, who ended his career as bishop of St David's. A canon lawyer by training, Lyndwood gathered together the constitutions (or statutes) made by the archbishops of Canterbury from the early thirteenth century onwards, to which he added his own gloss (or line-by-line textual analysis). This work, called the 'Provinciale', swiftly became the preeminent source for the law of the Church in England and Wales. Widely copied, it was one of the earliest works to be printed, and remained influential after the break with Rome. Lyndwood's primary purpose was didactic: to explain how the church courts of his province should operate. But he also sought to harmonise: to rationalise local custom and the dictates of papal decretals (or laws) within the framework of international canon-law learning. This balancing act meant that the 'Provinciale' was subsequently open to competing interpretations. The question arose of whether the medieval Church in England and Wales was bound by the laws of the universal Church. Important to Reformation debates, this issue once more came to matter in the nineteenth century, the era of Catholic emancipation, the Oxford movement, and the campaign for the disestablishment of the four Churches of the United Kingdom. How Lyndwood should be interpreted was the crux of the so-called 'Stubbs-Maitland' controversy of the 1880s and 1890s. William Stubbs, regius professor at Oxford, argued that the medieval Church in England and Wales regarded decretals and international canon law more generally as only advisory. F. W. Maitland, Downing professor at Cambridge, countered that these laws were treated as binding because the pope was held to be the sovereign legislator. This controversy informed the debate surrounding the disestablishment of the Church in Wales, which was gathering momentum at that point. To both sides of the argument, Lyndwood's text offered supporting evidence: it could imply that the pre-Reformation Church was the agent of a foreign power, and yet that there was such a thing as a discrete Church in England and Wales with a continuous identity. Consequently, even as the fourth and final disestablishment bill made its way through parliament on the eve of the First World War, the 'Provinciale' provoked controversy. One of those who contributed to the pamphlet war waged between the two sides was a Kentish rector called Arthur Ogle, who had previously served as warden of the Church Hostel here in Bangor (what later came to be known as the University's Anglican chaplaincy). Dismissed at the time by historians, Ogle's book of 1912 anticipated some of the criticisms of Maitland's view that scholars would advance in the second half of the twentieth century. Thus Ogle's work reminds us that religious commitment has been not only an obstacle, but also a spur to good history.