Bishop of Winchester
1585
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1585
Letter from Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester  SHC: LM/COR/3/377
single sheet  (13 May 1585)

To all ministers, Constables Churchwardens and other like officiers, and to the discreetest persons of Townes & Parishes and to all and every of them within the dioces of Winton

Wheras a heathenish and vngodly custome hath bene vsed before time in many partes of this land aboute this season of the yeare to have Church Ales, maygames, morish daunces, and other vaine pastimes vpon the Sabath Dayes, and other dayes appointed for common prayer, which they have pretended to be for the relief of their Churches, but indeede hath bene only a meanes to feed the mindes of the people, and specially of the youth with vaine sightes, alluring them from Divine service, and hearing of the woord of God, and inducing them to the prophaning of the Sabath, to the provoking of Gods heavy wrath and Indignation against vs, when as no time hath bene so lewdly and vngodly spent as that hath bene, on which principally we ought to have served God reverently, and given thankes for his benefites which from time to time he hath bestowed vpon vs: I cannot therefore but be hartily sory to heare and vnderstand, that after so long preaching of the Gospell, the people in many places of this dioces, continue in the delight of those vaine and vngodly pastimes, on those dayes that are dedicated to the service of God, and pretend as before time the reliefe of their Churches. Which is a straunge perswasion among Christians, that they can not by any other meane of contribution repaire their Churches, and set forth the service of God, but that they must first do
sacrifice to the Devill, with Dronkennes and dauncing, and other vngodly wantonnes. These are therfore to charge all Ministers Churchwardens, and other like Officers, together with the discreetest of the parishes, that as they tender the true Service of God, and will avoide such penalties as may comme vnto them by lawe, that they suffer not any such Church Ales, morish daunces, or Riflinges within their parishes. And if any persons shall shew them sleves so obstinate that they will not obey this order: I require the saide Ministers, Baylifes, Churchwardens, and other, with Speede to desire the aide of somme of her maiesties next lustices of peace to represse them, and to put them in bandes to appeare before me, or before the lustices of peace, at the next Sessions for the peace, there to receive further order, for their disobedience vsed. Which assistance I doubt not, but the worshipfull est of them selves, will be ready to yelde vnto you, without any further request by me made. And hereof faile you not as you will aunswere to the contrary att your perilles.

/This xiiijth of Maye 1585:

Thom. Winton

Notes: ‘Riflinges‘ = gambling. Thomas Cooper (c 1517-1594) was Bishop of Winchester from 1584 until his death. Cooper had already shown himself a staunch reformer as Bishop of Lincoln and at Winchester strove to fight recusancy with measures such as this one, seeing the persistence of ales and morris dancing as indications of Catholic sympathies in the diocese (Oxford Dictionary of National Biography). How effective Bishop Cooper’s prohibition was is questionable. Some Hampshire parishes recorded holding king ales well after 1585, including St John’s, Winchester, and especially Wootton St Lawrence, which held elaborate king ales in the first decade of the seventeenth century. Other parishes, like Bramley and Crondall, may have continued to hold ales, obscuring the fact in the churchwardens’ accounts by referring only to the parish’s ‘gains at Whitsuntide’. 