

ANGLICAN CHRISTIANITY IN BIRMINGHAM 1945 – 1975

by

ANDREW PERRY

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Abstract

This thesis examines the state of religiosity in Britain during the period from 1945 – 1975 through a local case study of the Anglican Diocese of Birmingham, and upon the parish of St Mary's Bearwood in particular. It will consider the nature of changes to Anglican Christianity during this period, examining previously untapped statistical records for Birmingham parishes during this period. These statistical records of church attendance will be considered alongside oral history which has been gathered from parishioners of one typical Birmingham parish during this period, St Mary's Bearwood. Through the oral history gathered, this thesis will explore the changes that occurred during this period, considering the relative importance of young people and women during this period. Finally the overall changing relationship between local Anglican Christianity and the wider community will be explored and analysed.

This dissertation is principally based upon the evidence provided by statistics based in Birmingham City Archives and oral history interviews which took place with parishioners of St Mary's Bearwood during 2010.

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I must express heartfelt thanks to all those who have accompanied me on the journey towards completing this thesis.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will tell the story of the rise and decline of Anglican Christianity, in thirty years of post war Britain, through a case study of its second city of Birmingham. I will argue that the 1950s should be characterised as a decade in which Anglican Christianity enjoyed a surge in strength, in terms of numbers practising conventional religion but more significantly in terms of the relationship between Anglican Christianity and society as a whole. The 1950s were a decade in which Anglican Christianity found itself to be highly compatible with the society around it, heavily due to the important roles played by young people and women. The arrival of the 1960s brought with it sweeping and dramatic changes as people sought to own their own homes and holiday abroad. At a local level, change was not overnight but increasingly as the role of young people and women in particular changed, the Anglican Church became increasingly distanced from society around it, in terms of both practice and morality.

There are many schools of thought within the study of secularisation. This is an exciting topic in which there is presently a significant amount of disagreement among historians. Scholars of secularisation generally position themselves along an axis of opinion. At one end of the scale are those who subscribe to a more traditional understanding of secularisation, who see the progress of secularisation in Britain as a steady march alongside modernism. Such scholars include the sociologist Steve Bruce who describes secularisation in 1960s Britain to be the later part of a long trend of secularisation.¹ Other scholars such as

¹ Steve Bruce, *Religion in Modern Britain* (Oxford: University Press, 1995).

Simon Green,² Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley³ are inclined to share this view of secularisation as part of a long trend. Green describes those at the other end of the scale of opinion regarding secularisation as “revisionists”.⁴ One such revisionist – Grace Davie – argues for the evolution rather than the decline of religion in society, arguing that “religious activity is not the only sign of Anglican significance”.⁵ Likewise scholars such as Gerald Parsons describe a far more complicated trend than traditionalists might accept, arguing that the religious history of Britain following the Second World War has shown a capacity to “confound observers – both academic and popular – who have predicted the steady demise of religion and the emergence of a more straightforwardly secular society”.⁶ Arguably the most colourful and controversial revisionist is Callum Brown, who in 2001 published *The Death of Christian Britain*.⁷

In *The Death of Christian Britain* he seeks to re-characterise the period between 1800 and 1950 as being Britain’s “last puritan age”⁸. He argues that traditional understandings of Christianity’s decline are based upon a number of misunderstandings that fail to recognize the strength of popular religiosity in this period. Brown’s argument is a marked departure from the work of those with a traditional understanding of secularisation. He argues against the idea that religion and modern society are incompatible. Such accounts- he feels - are guilty of misunderstanding what occurred in urban and industrial environments and fails to take into account the impact of the evangelical age.⁹ Instead Brown describes an age of discursive Christianity. In the post script to the second edition Brown provides a useful

² S J D Green, “Was there an English religious revival in the 1950s?” *The Journal of United Reformed Church History* 7 (2006) pp.517 -538.

³ Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Church-goers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 128.

⁴ Green, “Religious revival”, 518.

⁵ Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945: Believing without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 53.

⁶ Gerald Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain from 1945* Vol.1 (Routledge: London, 1993), 7.

⁷ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* Second edition (London: Routledge, 2009).

⁸ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

quotation which defines the Christian Britain that he proclaims dead as: “Christian Britain not as Christianity, but as the dominance of a Christian culture within British society.”¹⁰

This dominance, Brown argues, saw the majority of society living their lives under the shadow of Christian culture, rules and codes of conduct. Crucially this dominance was not state enforced but policed by the force of popular culture in which deviants from the system were punished. Brown argues that one should measure the religiosity of a society by assessing the state of ‘discursive Christianity’ rather than an empirical measurement of expressions of religiosity.¹¹ He feels that discursive Christianity which was dominant in the 1950s was ruptured “suddenly in 1963”.¹² After this point the intergenerational transmission of the Christian faith from generation to generation was fundamentally ruptured and Britain thus entered into a “truly secular condition”.¹³

The argument which this thesis will put forward should be placed within revisionist understandings of secularisation. The steady march of secularisation which traditionalists describe is not overwhelmingly apparent in post war Birmingham; indeed I would argue that a large number of those living in Birmingham between 1945 and 1960 were living their lives under “the dominance of a Christian culture” which Callum Brown describes. I also reject much of the methodology which is employed as conclusive by traditionalist historians such as empirical measurements of national church attendance. There is a danger that worthy studies of religion in Britain such as Adrian Hastings’ *A History of Christianity*¹⁴ can provide a sound overview describing the state of Britain but fail to consider the stories of individuals – who ultimately provide the discussion which historians are conducting. By discussing everyone and everywhere, one could mistakenly discuss no-one and nowhere.

¹⁰ Ibid., 200.

¹¹ Ibid., 11.

¹² Ibid., 1.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Adrian Hastings, *A History of Christianity 1920 - 1985* (London: Collings, 1986).

While this research recognises the validity of Callum Brown's assertions regarding the religiosity of Britain until 1963, in the case study of Birmingham it fails to find the dramatic implosion of discursive Christianity which Brown describes. In 1960s Birmingham gradual and confused, rather than dramatic changes within society began to cause popular Christianity to evolve. This process of evolution would see the first dramatic and meaningful secularisation to take place.

This story is an important one, but arguably the methodology with which it is constructed is just as important as the narrative. It is not a top-down or general account of religious decline, but rather an account in which the voices of those who witnessed these decades inform us of their realities.

I have focused upon the Anglican Church in the city of Birmingham in general, but upon one parish within the Birmingham Diocese in particular – St Mary's in Bearwood. In preparation for this study interviews have been conducted with people who lived in Bearwood or worshipped at St Mary's. These interviews were recorded but informal, in which the interviewees were asked broadly the same questions, regarding their memories of the years in question. The interviewees were a mix of genders and ages (some bringing up children during the 1950s and 1960s while others were themselves growing up). All those interviewed were white British and still have some contact with St Mary's Church.

The oral history provided through the interviews can be considered alongside the evidence provided by archived St Mary's Parish Magazines, in which monthly articles provide one with an impression of the hopes and fears of the vicars through the period. Both these primary sources are complimented by statistical models which I have produced, showing average Sunday and Christmas attendances for a selection of parishes within the Diocese of Birmingham from 1945 – 1975. These statistics show one narrow aspect of

religiosity during this period, the oral history gained through interview does what statistics cannot, they reveal to the historian the motivations of those questioned. Religion is ultimately an emotional phenomenon, one which it is difficult to measure purely through statistics.

The Diocese of Birmingham provides an appropriate location in which to conduct this case study. In many respects, the experiences of the city of Birmingham can be seen to mirror the post-war experiences of other urban environments. It was a manufacturing centre which had played an enormous industrial role in the war, and like many other manufacturing centres enjoyed relative stability in the 1950s and 1960s before hardship in the 1970s and 1980s.¹⁵

In the aftermath of the Second World War Birmingham was certainly an urban environment which embraced the national spirit of rebuilding and renewal. This spirit is described in a work published by the Bournville Trust in 1941 *When we build again*.¹⁶ Birmingham mirrored the national desire for a return to normality but also an improvement of conditions. Christopher Upton remarks that the Luftwaffe had simplified the jobs of post-war planners¹⁷ as, due to the sheer scale of damage, Birmingham was forced to rebuild a radically new city for the post-war era. The largest task with which the planners had to contend was a massive house-building programme which saw communities in Birmingham build more housing than any other authority, between 1945 and 1970 demolishing 55,000 homes and building 81,000 new.¹⁸ Birmingham can certainly be considered to be distinct in this regard and, arguably, in the vigour with which planners constructed high rise towers to house the population of the second city. These towers formed the basis of many new

¹⁵ Malcolm Dick, *Birmingham: A History of the City* (Birmingham: Birmingham Library Services, 2005), 38.

¹⁶ The Bournville Trust, *When We Build Again* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1941), vii.

¹⁷ Christopher Upton, *A History of Birmingham* (West Sussex: Phillimore and co ltd 1997), 205.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 204.

neighbourhood communities which residents were quick to describe as “concentration camps”.¹⁹

In many respects the parish of St Mary’s Bearwood upon which this thesis focuses appears to be a typical high street town within a larger city. It is placed within Birmingham’s ‘middle ring’ comprising a large number of residential streets gathered around a busy High Street. Many of Bearwood’s working population worked for the locally based employer ‘Midland Red’ or worked in another skilled or manual industry. Those questioned describe the wealth of small shops along the high street: “really nice shops you know. Individual ladies’ clothes shops....we didn’t have the supermarkets like now of course. There was the butcher next to the church which is still there.”²⁰

Bearwood of the 1950s and 1960s also possessed opportunities for recreation. One gentleman recounted that there were two cinemas and a dance hall.²¹ This was a residential community which was huddled around the facilities of Bearwood High Street, which was in turn linked to the city centre by tram links.²² During the 1950s Bearwood was a relatively stable community in which change was gradual. In the 1960s the pace of change increased but not dramatically so. One of the largest demographic changes recalled by those questioned was the movement away from Bearwood during the 1960s of young people who sought to buy the cheaper houses being constructed in ‘outer ring’ suburbs such as Halesowen and Quinton.²³ Bearwood should be seen to be distinct in the relative stability which it experienced in the post-war period. It was broadly speaking a settled community which did not experience large-scale redevelopment or community restructuring as did many other areas of Birmingham. Neither did Bearwood see the impact of widespread

¹⁹ Ibid., 205.

²⁰ ‘Linda’, Oral History

²¹ ‘James’ Oral History

²² ‘James’ Oral History

²³ ‘Patricia’ Oral History

immigration, although by the late 1950s it was certainly aware of the numbers of immigrants in neighbouring communities.

Scholars such as Hugh Mcleod place great importance on the role of class within the study of secularisation so it is therefore important to place St Mary's. Accounts of interviewees are agreed on this subject, that the majority of the population of Bearwood could be described as "Overall probably middle class".²⁴ They describe the population of the parish having professions including white collar workers, school teachers, small business owners locally and skilled manual workers. .²⁵

St Mary's church during this period seems to be neither particularly 'high church' nor evangelical. One interviewee who moved to St Mary's during the early 1960s described the church as being: "prayer book orientated. Things like matins. At Bearwood they liked morning and evening prayer. Some people would have been happy not to have communion every week."²⁶

Perhaps St Mary's should be considered a contradiction of traditions – embracing both the ritual of 'high church' communion services²⁷ and the simpler service of matins. The Church of England is, however, a relatively broad church and St Mary's should not be considered distinct in this regard. It is important to consider the role of women in St Mary's of the post-war period. The incumbent priest for the majority of the post war period from 1949 to 1965 did not encourage female parishioners to assume positions of authority within its worship. One 1950s parishioner describes how "he was all for no women or girls in the choir it had to be boys only".²⁸ With the arrival of his successor in 1966 a far more family friendly environment is described. Another parishioner described "there was much more of a family

²⁴ "Carol" Oral History

²⁵ "William" Oral History

²⁶ Sandra Oral History

²⁷ 'Carol' Oral History

²⁸ 'Linda' Oral History

feel to things, involvement, as Raymond had two daughters. So that gave another dimension to the parish”.²⁹ It is interesting to note that despite this apparent difference in churchmanship, the attendance of women at church and participation in church satellite organization remained high during the 1950s and early 1960s. It is also interesting to note the spike in attendance which takes place following the arrival of the new incumbent and a “family feel to things”.

The Church of England, like the rest of the country in 1945, seized upon the spirit of rebuilding, of new beginnings and embarked upon a significant rebuilding programme. As the 1950s continued, those that craved normality and religiosity found churches and began to be part of a curiously religious post-war decade, one in which Anglicans found themselves to be very compatible with society around them. It was a religious resurgence which was built around the participation of the young – who in the 1950s could be defined as anyone between the ages of 14 and 21 – who seemed strangely engaged with and excited by the ordinariness of Anglican religious life. It would appear that a significant proportion of those growing up in the 1950s gained something from Anglican Christianity, whether spiritually through church services, musically through the choir, or their first boy or girlfriend through the church youth club. This was not a one-sided relationship, however, as the churches enjoyed the vitality, the manpower and the hope for the future which this generation provided.

If the resurgence which provides the backdrop to this thesis was reliant upon the young, it was equally reliant upon the involvement of women. One could argue that since 1800 women have embraced organised religion more readily than their male counterparts.³⁰ This thesis will argue that the 1950s were no exception to this rule. The strength of Anglican Christianity in the 1950s can be seen through growth in the church and interestingly social

²⁹ ‘William’ Oral History

³⁰ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 200.

participation around the church. Like a traditional cricket club, Anglican churches enjoyed the patronage of ‘non playing members’ who would not attend churches but would run the scouts, brownies, play for the church football team and look forward to vicarage whist drives. Women played a central role in coordinating these extra-curricular activities. Certainly in Bearwood it appears that it was the norm for married women not to take paid employment, which gave them additional time to run keep fit classes, young mothers clubs and the youth club. Crucially women played an encouraging role within the family unit, ensuring their children’s attendance at Sunday school or choir and, wherever possible, encouraging their husband’s participation.

The combination of social factors, the participation of the young and women produced a decade in the 1950s which was markedly religious. That is to say that it fits with the definition of Christian Britain provided by Callum Brown who describes “the dominance of a Christian culture within British society”. The 1950s were certainly a decade in which Anglican Christians found themselves to be fairly compatible with the society around them. This can be seen through a society in which Sunday was sacred in both religious and comparatively irreligious homes and where quietly secular parents sent their children to receive religious education because they felt it to be the right thing to do. Thus this thesis will tell the story of a decade in which the difference between religious and irreligious was difficult to detect.

The experience of Birmingham and the community of Bearwood in the years following the war appear to be in keeping with broader national trends. Statistically and colloquially, a picture is painted of a world filled with relief at the end of the war. Those questioned describe days which always seemed sunny, beyond the rays of light which nostalgia invariably provides. This was a world in which the bombs had stopped falling and children were allowed to roam freely – all domestic dangers seemed trivial. It was also a

world in which those that had “been worried about Nazi jackboots marching down the Bearwood Road”³¹ no longer needed the spiritual comfort of evensong. Attendance statistics confirm this fall in attendance immediately following the war.

However with the 1950s the desire for ordinariness and normality began to strongly assert itself at a local level. A sample of church attendances in Birmingham (collated in the first chapter of this thesis) shows a steady increase throughout the 1950s. In society, also, Anglican Christianity began to strongly assert itself. Those interviewed reflect upon the presence of the young both in and around the church community through satellite organisations. Prevalent memories of the 1950s centre around youth clubs boosting attendance at evensong and gatherings in the Nissen Hut donated by American GIs stationed in Bearwood. Interviewees also emphasise the role of local women – largely absent from leadership roles within the church – leading the majority of satellite organisations. It is clear that in 1950s Bearwood to be labelled as ‘religious’ was taboo but curiously the vast majority of the population desired to be seen as good, Christian, God-fearing members of the community who lived within a Christian framework of morals and an Anglican framework of ritual.

This thesis will describe how the ordinary, normal and highly religious decade of the 1950s changed with the arrival of the 1960s to a decade in which Anglican Christianity found itself increasingly distanced from the society around it. To many historians the beginning of the 1960s marks a transition, in which settled assumptions were challenged and a genuine belief that there was something better around the corner.³² The changes that interviewees recall and statistics report at a local level are neither sweeping nor dramatic. They are however extremely profound and significant in discovering the reality of Christian decline.

³¹ ‘James’ Oral History

³² Alistair E McGrath, *The Future of Christianity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 14.

Crucially during the 1960s Anglican Christianity began to lose the active support and participation of young people and women, whose participation had been so evident within the resurgence of the 1950s. Growing up in the 1960s was a sharp contrast to growing up in the 1950s. During the 1950s the Church of England had tapped into the desires of the population in general – and it would appear – young people in particular, for ordinariness and normality. For the young of the 1960s this was far less attractive. Some accounts of those growing up during the 1960s describe the excitement of drinking in Soho Bars and admiring the outrageous fashions which appeared on their local high street. Others less dramatically describe a realisation that they did not ‘have to’ attend church. They recall realising that church was not interesting them so they just wouldn’t go. This manner of thinking was increasingly possible as the 1960s progressed.

It is possible that the gradual drift of the young away from Anglican Christianity during the 1960s was made possible by the loss of the Church of England’s other key demographic of the 1950s – women. As economic conditions improved and opportunities emerged, married women began to take paid employment. This taboo of the 1950s was gradually vanquished as married women desired to take advantage of the full employment available, own their own homes and buy the consumer goods that were now readily available. Inevitably the role of woman in society changed. The role model of the 1950s of the ‘good housewife’ gradually evolved during the 1960s, until it was acceptable for a married woman to consider herself an economic cog within the household – an earner – with ambitions of her own. A combination of these factors meant that the Church of England became increasingly distanced from a generation of women who would not play a central role in encouraging their children to go to church and would not manage multiple elements of the church’s social dimensions.

At a local level it is impossible to detect the rupture in Christianity which Callum Brown describes. This rupture is certainly not evident in 1963. It is clear that changes do occur economically and socially during the 1960s which fundamentally weaken the dominance of Anglican Christianity over society. Some of those interviewed for this study refer to an acceleration of secularisation occurring in the early 1970s - rather than the early 1960s.

Ultimately this thesis aims to explore post-war religious decline through a local case study of a relevant urban environment. It will seek to describe the 1950s as a markedly religious decade in which a combination of factors including the role of young people and women conspired to produce a decade which was noteworthy for its ordinariness, its normality and most notably its religiosity. This confusedly religious decade will be contrasted against the 1960s in which, at a local level, changes to the role of young people, women and changes to society in general contributed to the collapse of Christian dominance over society as this decade progressed.

CHAPTER ONE: THE STATISTICAL STORY

This chapter aims to provide a statistical backdrop to the stories which the other chapters will tell. It is, however, important to emphasise that statistics do not form the backbone of the argument contained within this thesis. Callum Brown's scepticism regarding the validity of statistics in describing secularisation is warranted.³³ The popular religion of a post-war urban environment which this thesis describes through the testimony of those questioned cannot be measured purely in terms of statistics of church attendance. The attending of weekly Sunday worship is one narrow expression of popular religiosity in post-war Britain. When considered in isolation, these statistics are useful but hardly conclusive. However, when statistics are considered alongside oral testimony they add another dimension to our discussion.

The statistics behind this thesis provide a local snapshot of Anglican churchgoing within the Diocese of Birmingham. Some historians describe a religious revival which occurred following the Second World War.³⁴ This thesis can show that this revival took place numerically in the second largest city in the United Kingdom. Rather than discussing general national trends, it is possible within this chapter to draw broad conclusions regarding the state of Anglican churchgoing within the Diocese of Birmingham as a whole and in selected parishes in particular.

To this end, statistics have been collected from eight Anglican parishes within the diocese of Birmingham, which have been collated to show trends within Sunday attendance at these parishes alongside trends of church going at arguably the most popular Christian

³³ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 145.

³⁴ Hastings, *History of Christianity*, 437.

festival of the year, at Christmas. Statistics have been gathered from each of the eight parishes which show attendance at the early and mid-morning Sunday services. At several churches the times of services fluctuate between 1945 and 1975; however, for the purpose of this thesis, the early morning service is labelled as eight o'clock and the midmorning service as eleven o'clock. In many instances, oral interviews indicate that the evensong service was well attended (in some cases the most well attended). I cannot comment upon evensong in this chapter as the records simply do not exist to confirm or deny these assertions.

The statistics of church attendance contained within this chapter have been gathered by using the statistical methodology currently employed by the Church of England in measuring church attendance. This involves measuring attendance on a 'normal Sunday':

Attendance on a 'normal' Sunday – For the purpose of this return a 'normal' Sunday is one which is not a major festival or contained in a peak holiday period. If attendance fluctuates a weekly 'average' should be given. Sundays when no services are provided are excluded.³⁵

Thus attendance figures have been generated for each October between 1945 and 1975. I have been forced to make several methodological compromises to this end. Firstly, the Church of England recommends excluding major festivals from statistical analysis. For reasons of practicality I have included the Harvest Festival services within the data sets gathered. In many cases removing this data would undermine the credibility of a data set as a whole. Also statistics indicate that the presence of the Harvest Festival does not materially affect weekly church attendance. The second compromise that I have been forced to make relates the counting of individuals. The Church of England guidance suggests that "all

³⁵ The Church of England, *Statistics for Mission Notes 2007: How to fill in this form*

people should be counted only once each Sunday no matter how many times they attend.”³⁶

In terms of my research this methodology is simply not practical. The church registers viewed are in some cases poorly written and incomplete but regardless will not indicate the presence of ‘duplicate’ worshippers at two Sunday Services. This is simply a margin of error that I must allow for within my research.

Historians and the Statistics of 1945 – 1975.

It is far from clear whether a religious resurgence in the 1950s followed by a decline in the 1960s can be proven empirically. This chapter attempts to illustrate the fortunes of eight Birmingham parishes from 1945 – 1975 through examination of records of attendance. There are other empirical measures of a society’s religiosity which are not readily available for the eight parishes within the Diocese of Birmingham that this thesis also considers.

A society or individual’s religiosity might be assessed by their tendency to mark significant events in one’s life with a religious ritual. It is interesting to note that the fall in numbers of marriages solemnised in church during wartime was largely reversed following 1945 as peace returned.³⁷ However the 1960s saw an enormous decline in marriages solemnised in church. The level of marriages solemnized in church from 1900 – 1987 fell 33 points during this period but 16.5 of these points fell during the period from 1962 – 1973.³⁸ Equally, the levels of baptism per 1000 of the population in the Church of England stood at 602/1000 in 1956. This was a negligible drop of only 7/1000 from the baptism level of 1900. Again, rapid decline followed as baptisms fall 174 points between 1956 and 1976, although

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Callum G Brown, “The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s have done to the study of religious education” In *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe*, ed. Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 31.

³⁸ Ibid.

this statistic might mask a degree of decline in baptisms which occurred during the early 1950s.³⁹

³⁹ Ibid., 32.

Weekly Sunday Worship in the Diocese of Birmingham 1945 - 1975

The eight Birmingham Church of England Parishes from which the data shown below were gathered were from a selection of geographical locations within the city. Birmingham Medical Officers of Health had long divided the city into three distinct zones emerging from the city centre. They described the inner wards, the middle ring and the outer ring.⁴⁰ These rings or zones did change over time as demographics changed and areas developed, but in general the Medical Officers of Health were eager to retain the distinctive features of each ring.⁴¹ For the purposes of this chapter, each of the eight parishes considered have been placed in one of Birmingham's three rings based upon the boundaries of 1961.

In post-war Birmingham the central wards were the poorest with the most inferior housing⁴² and highest proportion of unskilled and semi-skilled workers.⁴³ In 1951, the central wards were the smallest zone in terms of population, containing only 132,000 of Birmingham's population. The central wards would shrink dramatically during the post-war period. Excluding boundary changes, the central wards shrunk by 27.3 percent between 1951 and 1966.⁴⁴ During this period the central wards contained a high proportion of males and children.⁴⁵ Of the eight parishes whose statistics of attendance are presented in this chapter, only St Mary and St Ambrose represents the central wards.

Further from the centre, the middle ring contained the majority of the city's growth between 1860 – 1918. In terms of housing, the middle ring contained contrasts – from larger Victorian properties to 'tunnel-back houses'.⁴⁶ In 1951 the middle ring had a population of

⁴⁰ Anthony Sutcliffe and Roger Smith, *History of Birmingham Vol. III 1939 – 1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 181.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 190.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 213.

344,000 people.⁴⁷ Demographically, the middle ring was mixed during this period, containing a mix of male and females, young and old.⁴⁸ When immigrants arrived in Birmingham during this period it was usually the middle ring which they settled in.⁴⁹ In this chapter the middle ring is represented by St Mary's, Handsworth, St John's, Sparkhill and St Mary's, Bearwood (St Mary's is included despite the fact that it is actually not within the boundaries of the city of Birmingham. It is however a part of the Birmingham Diocese and its fortunes were intrinsically linked with the city whose boundary was only metres from it.)

The outer ring contained the majority of inter and post-war building and growth. In 1951 it was the largest of the city's rings, with 637,000 people; it held over half of Birmingham's population.⁵⁰ It can be characterized during this period as containing a higher proportion of elderly and female residents than the other rings.⁵¹ It is difficult to be precise as to the class breakdown of each of Birmingham's rings, but it is clear that the outer ring had the highest proportion of professionals and skilled workers.⁵² Of the eight churches considered in this chapter, St Michael's, Yardley, St Peter's, Harborne, Christchurch, Quinton and St Barnabas, Erdington represent the outer ring.

Birmingham as a whole can be seen to be distinct from other cities within the United Kingdom, during this period. In 1951 Birmingham enjoyed a generally higher proportion of skilled workers than other cities.⁵³ This difference is however far less pronounced by 1966.⁵⁴ Between 1951 and 1966 Birmingham's middle class shrunk. This period saw a significant decline in the number of skilled workers and a natural increase in the number of semi and unskilled workers. This is contrary to the national trend. Smith and Sutcliffe argue that this

⁴⁷ Ibid., 181.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 183.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 210.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 181.

⁵¹ Ibid., 183.

⁵² Ibid., 217

⁵³ Ibid., 216.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 217

can be explained as those with increased spending power emerged in Birmingham during this period, they moved away from the city.⁵⁵

The statistics gathered from the eight parishes, representing all three of Birmingham's rings combine to show a model of average church attendance for these parishes.

Figure 1: Average Sunday Morning Anglican Church Attendance in eight Diocese of Birmingham Parishes 1945 - 1975

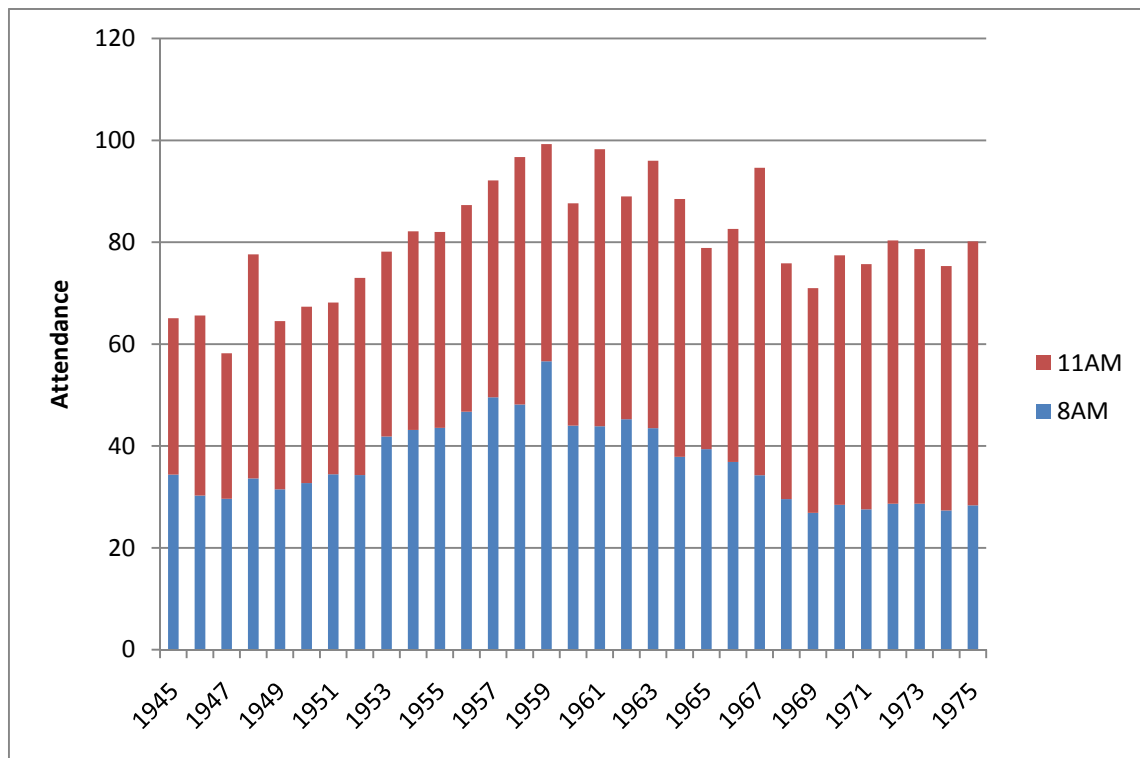


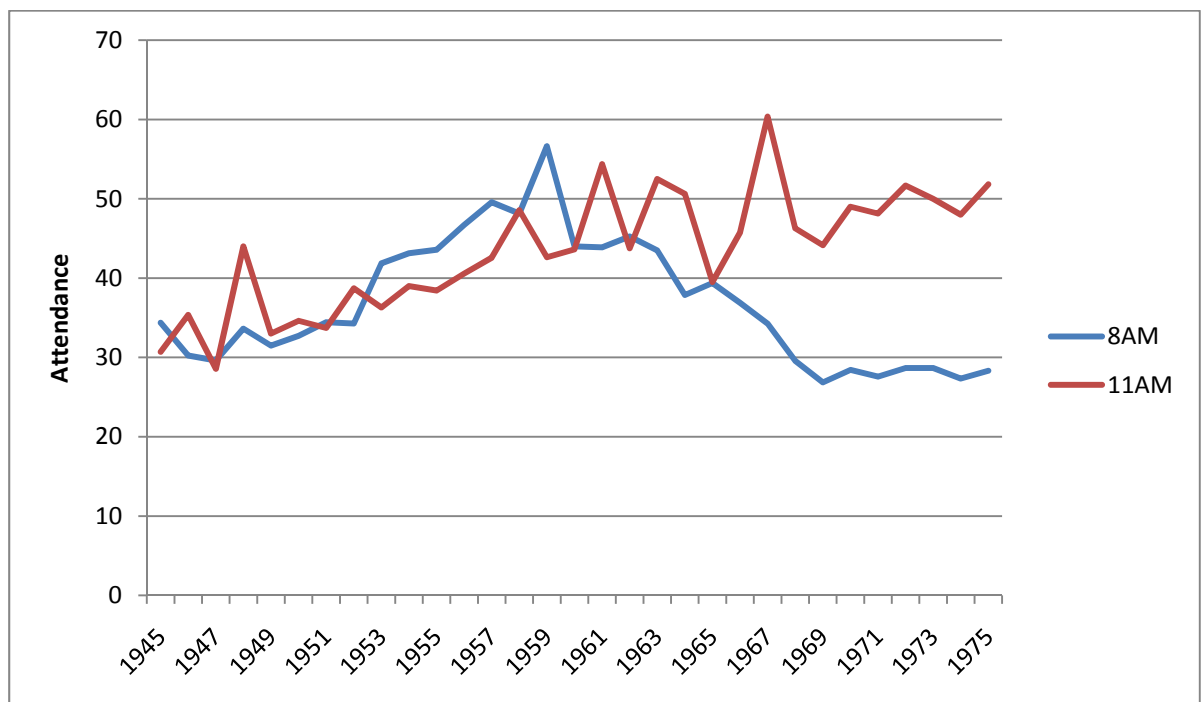
Figure 1 shows a clear growth in churchgoing during the 1950s. This might be seen as a growth which was built upon the popularity of the early morning service, although numbers for the mid morning services are also seen to rise. Church attendance can be seen to rise throughout the 1950s, peaking in 1959. Even allowing for potentially anomalous results in anyone of these parishes for one of the years in question this growth shows a clear trend. The scale of growth which this trend shows should not be underestimated. During the 1950s

⁵⁵ Ibid., 217

‘Figure 1’ shows church attendance to increase by forty eight percent. Even allowing for statistical anomalies, this trend is significant.

The second factor which is clear from ‘Figure 1’ is the decline in attendance which can be detected in the early 1960s which is neither sudden nor dramatic. There also appears to be a stabilization of numbers during the late 1960s and early 1970s. One might describe the decline depicted within these statistics as a confused decline. One cannot detect clearly in these statistics a ‘rupture’ to the fabric of organized Christianity which Callum Brown describes in 1963.⁵⁶

Figure 2: Average Sunday Morning Anglican Church Attendance in eight Diocese of Birmingham Parishes 1945 - 1975



The data set which is represented in ‘Figure 1’ is also shown in ‘Figure 2’ – in a form which demonstrates the fluctuating fortunes of the two dominant Sunday Morning services. It is

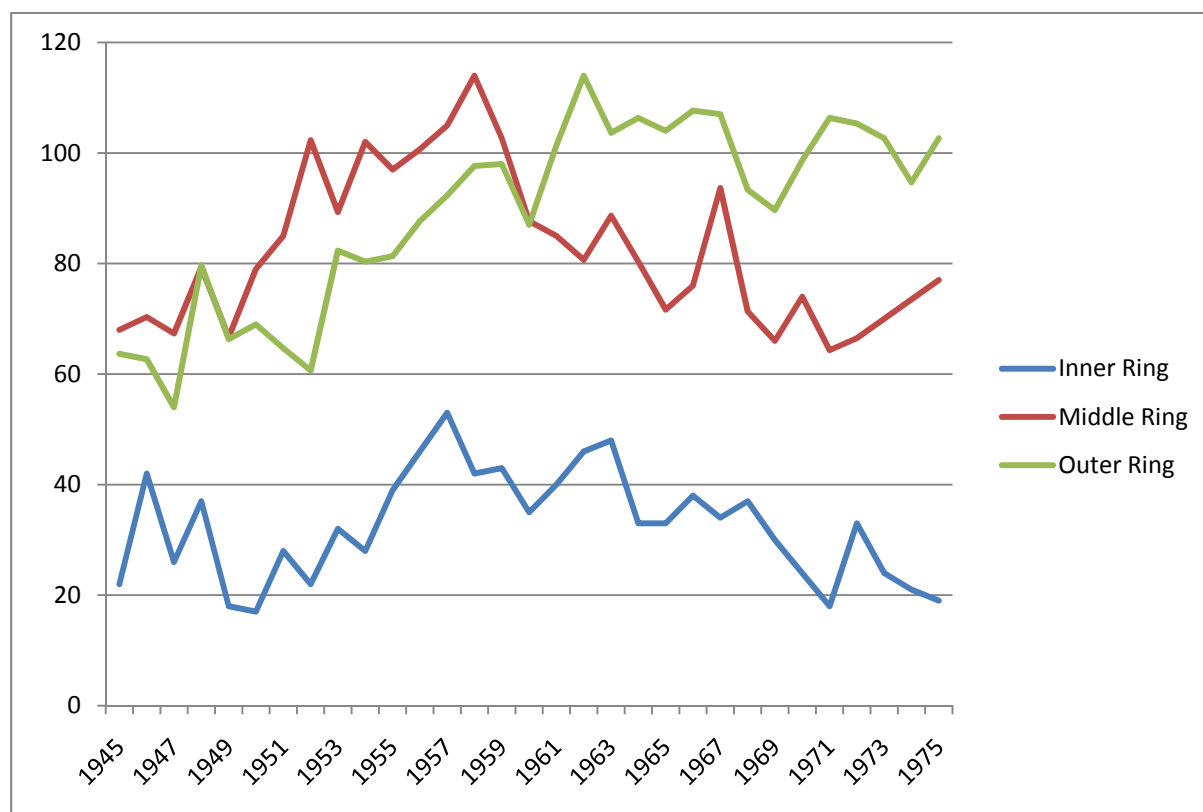
⁵⁶ Brown., *Death of Christian Britain*, 1.

clear to see that the early morning Sunday service is dominant during the period of statistical growth during the 1950s. It is also clear that during the 1960s the early morning service declines significantly but the later eleven o' clock service gains strength. There could be numerous explanations for this anomaly. One could argue that the eight o' clock service was one which would attract the more devoted worshipper. It might, however, be more plausible to suggest that the young people who attended during the growth of the 1950s found it more appropriate to bring their young families to the later morning service during the late 1960s. This theme will be explored more fully in the chapter which deals specifically with the religious young of the 1950s.

It is interesting to consider the difference which the geographical location of a church within the city of Birmingham might make to its levels of attendance. This chapter has already illustrated that during this period the inhabitants of Birmingham were more likely to be professional or skilled workers, more likely to be affluent and live in a higher standard of home the further one travels from the central wards. No such clear trend can be drawn in terms of church going. In many respects Figure 3, shown below, reflects the broader trends discussed above. It is clear to see a surge in church going in all three of Birmingham's rings during the 1950s. The declining population of the central wards is clear and reflected in low levels of church attendance. Given the declining population of the central wards, the increasing average attendance is interesting, but hardly conclusive as only one of the eight parishes considered comes from the central wards. Arguably the strongest trend within Figure 3 is the point in 1959 which shows average attendances in the outer ring overtaking those of the middle ring. This might be explained by oral history interviewees from St Mary's Bearwood in the middle ring who assert that by the late 1950s and early 1960s:

“The older people were still alive and so the younger ones had to move. And nearly all our rover group at St Marys had to go and live and bought houses at Halesowen where they built a big estate that were not expensive. They all moved out.”⁵⁷

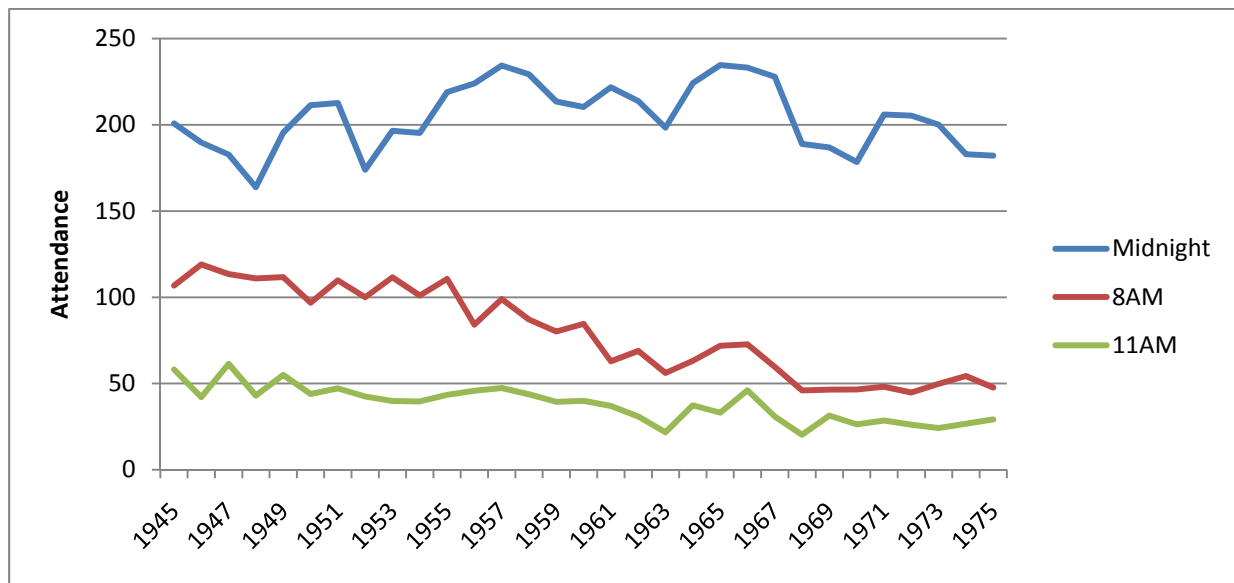
Figure 3: Average Sunday Morning attendance for both services according to location within the city of Birmingham



⁵⁷ “Patricia” Oral History

Christmas attendance in the Diocese of Birmingham

Figure 4: Average Christmas Anglican Church Attendance in eight Diocese of Birmingham Parishes 1945 - 1975



The statistics gathered regarding Anglican Christmas church attendance in Birmingham between 1945 and 1975 are far less clear than those showing Sunday morning attendance. Figure 4 shows two distinct trends of Christmas churchgoing.

Firstly, average attendance at Midnight Mass appears to be relatively stable. Further evidence is provided for the post-war disillusionment with church as average attendance at midnight mass slipped to its lowest point during the thirty year period in 1948. The morning Christmas services remain relatively stable immediately following the Second World War. Midnight mass attendance then proceeds in an erratically upward trend until the latter half of the 1960s when a more serious dip can be detected. It is interesting to note that this dip does not however sink lower than 1948, this is also an indication of the strength of popular religiosity during this period. The erratic nature of Midnight Mass attendance could be

explained by patterns of Christmas visiting; that every other year families visit each other and boost the attendance of the host's church. Poor weather could also be a factor. Although useful, Figure 4 masks the true growth in the popularity of Midnight Mass as it only provides an average attendance. At the beginning of this period several parishes did not offer midnight mass services. As more parishes offer midnight communion, and the majority of these services become more popular, the total number of parishioners who are recorded in attendance of these eight parishes increases dramatically. As demonstrated below by Figure 5.1.

Figure 5.1: Total Anglican Christmas Midnight Mass Attendance in eight Diocese of Birmingham Parishes 1945 - 1975

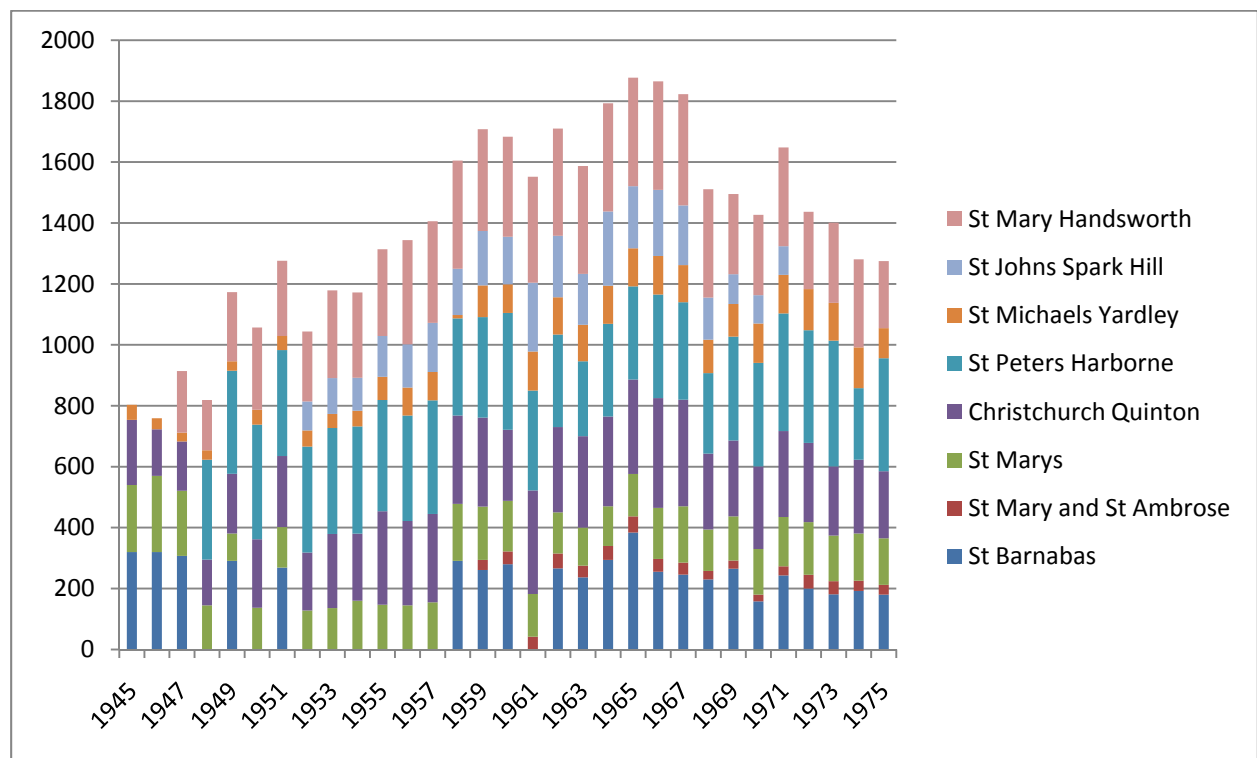
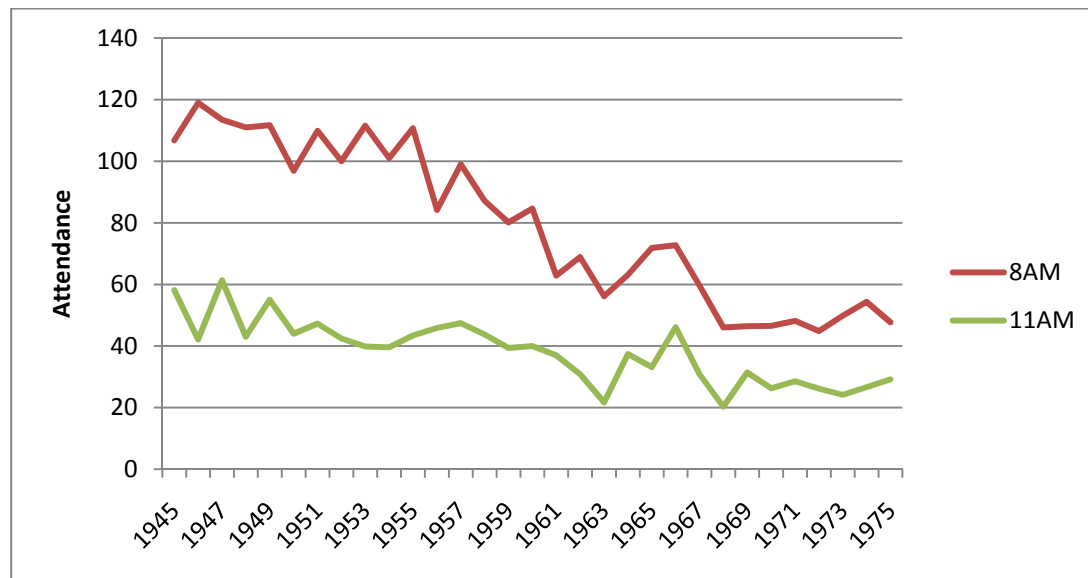


Figure 4 can be seen to reveal an increasing demand for Midnight Mass in Birmingham during the majority of this period, peaking with a total Midnight Mass attendance across eight parishes of 1877 in 1965. One should also quantify the dip which occurs during the late 1960s and early 1970s, and consider that this period finishes with a total attendance at the midnight Christmas service across eight parishes of 1275. This attendance is 472 higher than

the total who attended Midnight Mass across eight parishes in 1945. Therefore, on the basis of the statistics gathered regarding Christmas Midnight Mass it would be reasonable to argue that this popular expression of religiosity at Christmas became more popular during the 1950s and early 1960s.

Figure 5.2: Average 8AM and 11AM Christmas Morning Anglican Church Attendance in eight Diocese of Birmingham Parishes 1945 - 1975

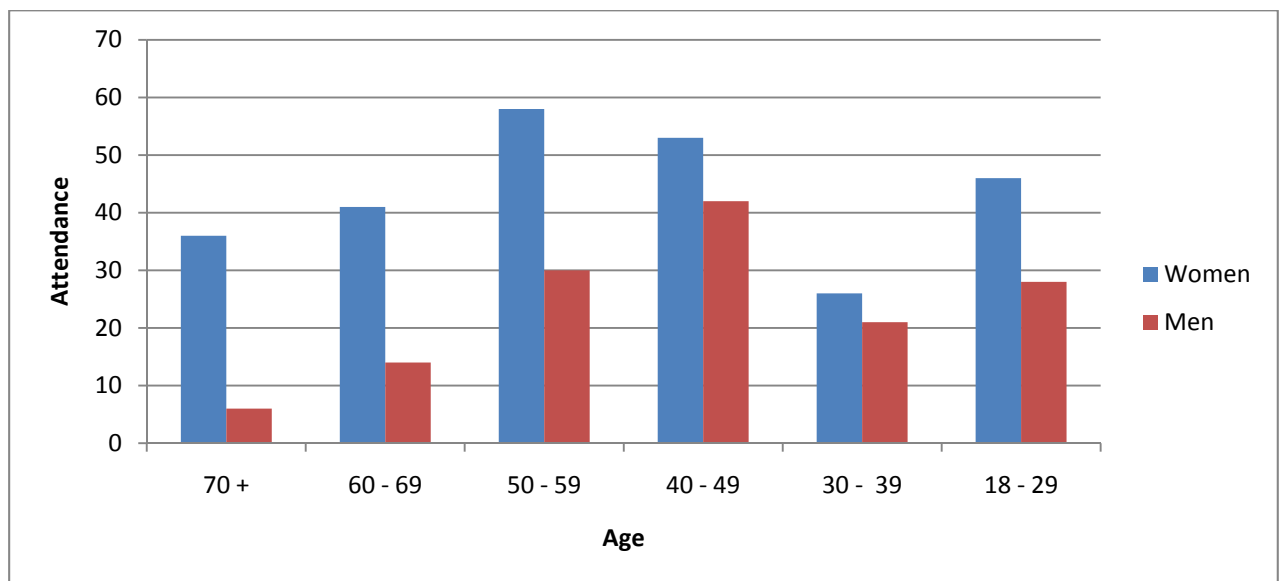


The second trend which has been alluded to in Figure 5.2 is that of falling attendances at both the early and mid morning Christmas services. In the case of eleven o' clock Christmas morning services this fall is not dramatic. It might be possible to argue that attendance at this service actually remains relatively stable during the religious revival of the 1950s. Average attendance at the mid morning Christmas service falls by fifty percent from 1945 to 1975. In the case of the early morning, eight o'clock Christmas service, the trend is one of overall decline. Average attendance at this service falls by fifty five percent from 1945 – 1975.

Gender and Age in Statistics

In 1957 R H T Thompson published a study of four Church of England Parishes. The identity of the four parishes are not revealed, but simply labelled as St Mathew's, St Mark's, St Luke's and St John's. Two of these parishes are within the inner ring of 1950s Birmingham and two are located in the newly developing suburbs. Thompson's study is of particular interest as Thompson includes a breakdown of attendances at these churches by gender, age and marital status.⁵⁸ The results are stark.

Figure 6: Attendance at four Birmingham Parishes by age and gender.⁵⁹



One can see from the above graphic (Figure 6) that in the four parishes considered women are more inclined to attend church. This is particularly the case for women at either end of the age spectrum. Attendance appears low for both genders in the 30 – 39 age group. Low male attendance could be to some extent influenced by casualties of the war which finished only

⁵⁸ R H Thompson, *The Church's Understanding of Itself: A study of Four Birmingham Parishes* (London: Camelot Press ltd, 1957).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

12 years previously. It is also interesting to consider the affect which marriage would appear to have had on church attendance in 1957.

Figure 7.1: Men's Marital Status and Church Attendance across Four Birmingham Parishes⁶⁰

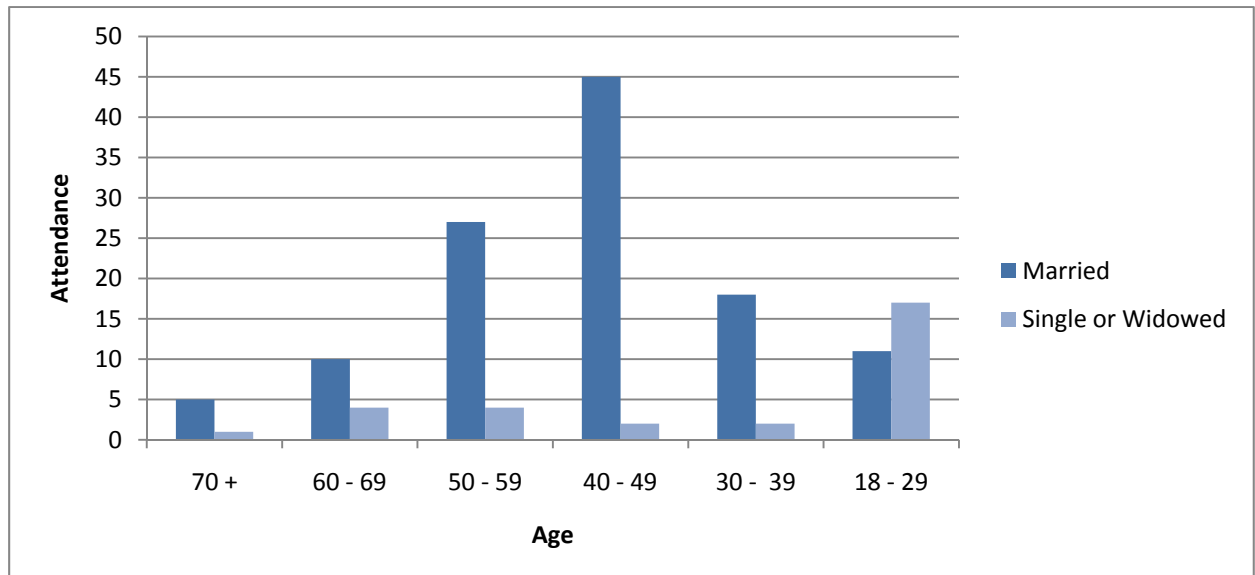
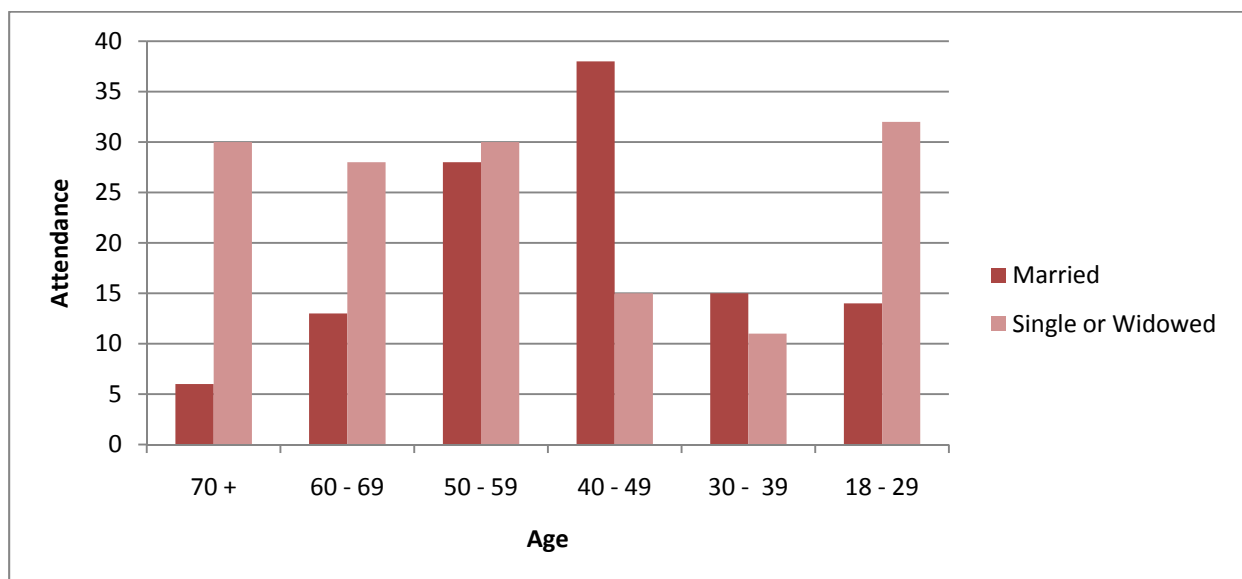


Figure 7.2: Women's Marital Status and Church Attendance across Four Birmingham Parishes⁶¹



The figures 7.1 and 7.2 demonstrate that in the four Birmingham parishes which Thompson examined, marital status would appear to impact upon church attendance. It would appear (Figure 7.2) that women were inclined to attend church regardless of their

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

marital status; indeed, in the case of the young and the old there are more single women than those who were married. Equally it seems that men were far more likely to attend church once married. The same statistical story is generated from statistics gathered from attendance records of another Birmingham parish, St John's, Spark Hill. These statistics shown below, chart attendance at the church from 1945 – 1971 in terms of gender balance at both primary Sunday morning services.

Figure 8.1: Attendance at St John's, Spark Hill Sunday Morning 8AM Service by gender 1945 - 1971

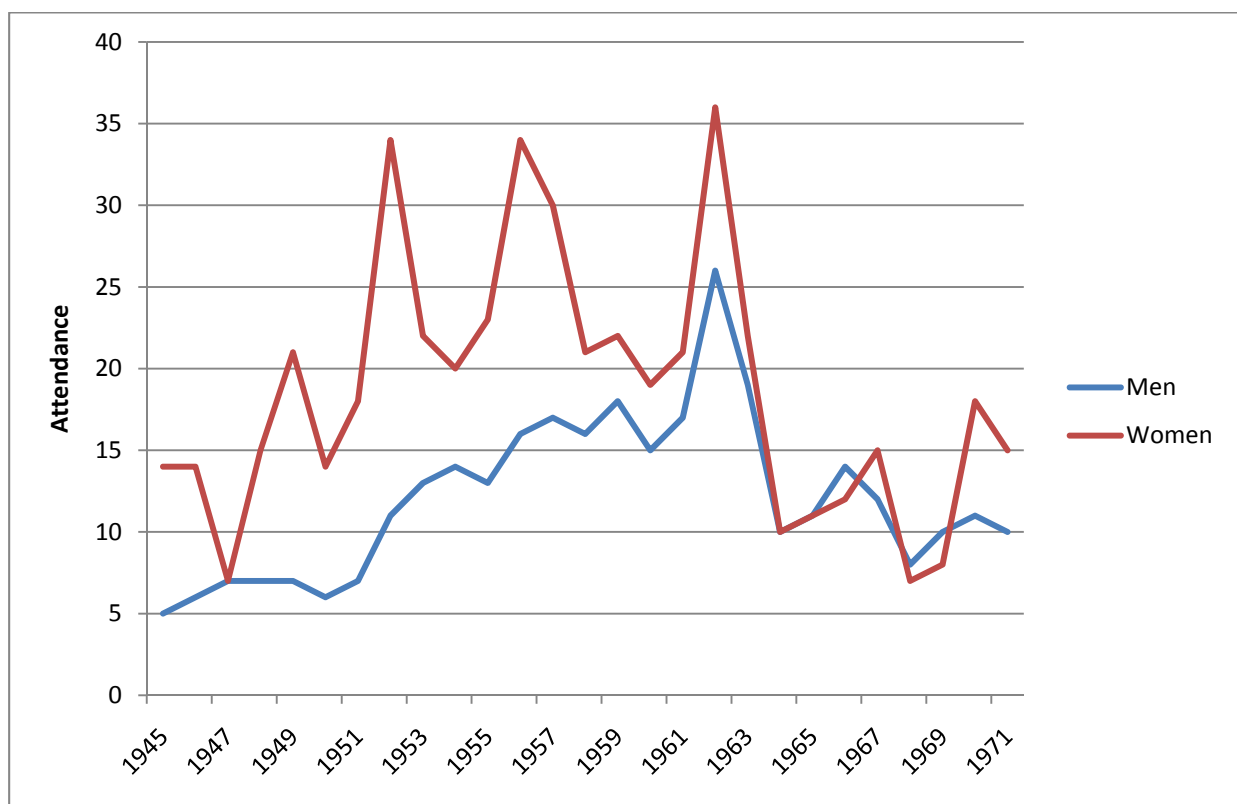


Figure 8.2: Attendance at St John's, Spark Hill Sunday Morning 11AM Service by gender 1945 - 1971⁶²

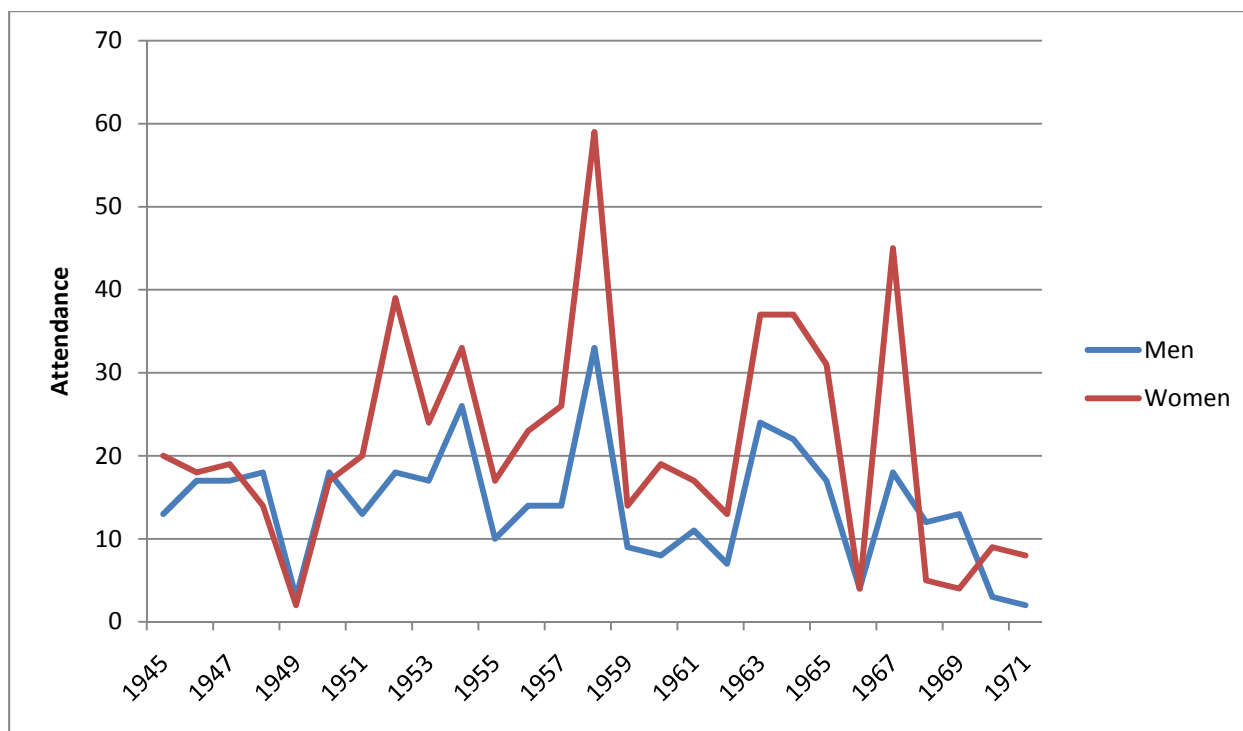
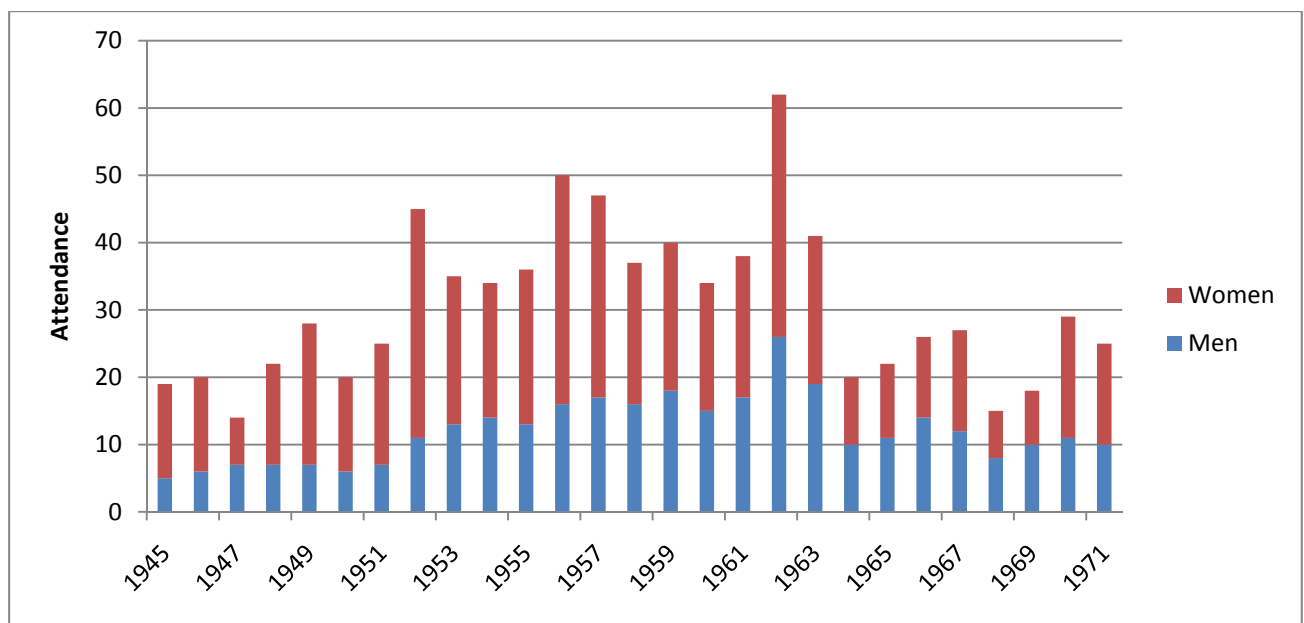


Figure 8.1 and 8.2 illustrate dramatically how the peaks experienced in attendance during the mid to late 1950s at St John's, Spark Hill can largely be explained by the numbers of women in attendance increasing. It is also interesting to note how attendance of both genders appears to follow one another until the 1960s. In Figure 8.1 there appears to be a clear change to this pattern of attendance as the numbers of women attending plummet, until male attendance was actually greater than female at several points in the 1960s. I would argue that Figure 8.3 shown below provides the final evidence that, in the case of St John's Spark Hill during the 1950s and 1960s, male attendance fluctuated very little when compared to the attendance of women. It is the numbers of women who provide the red 'spikes' in attendance shown below.

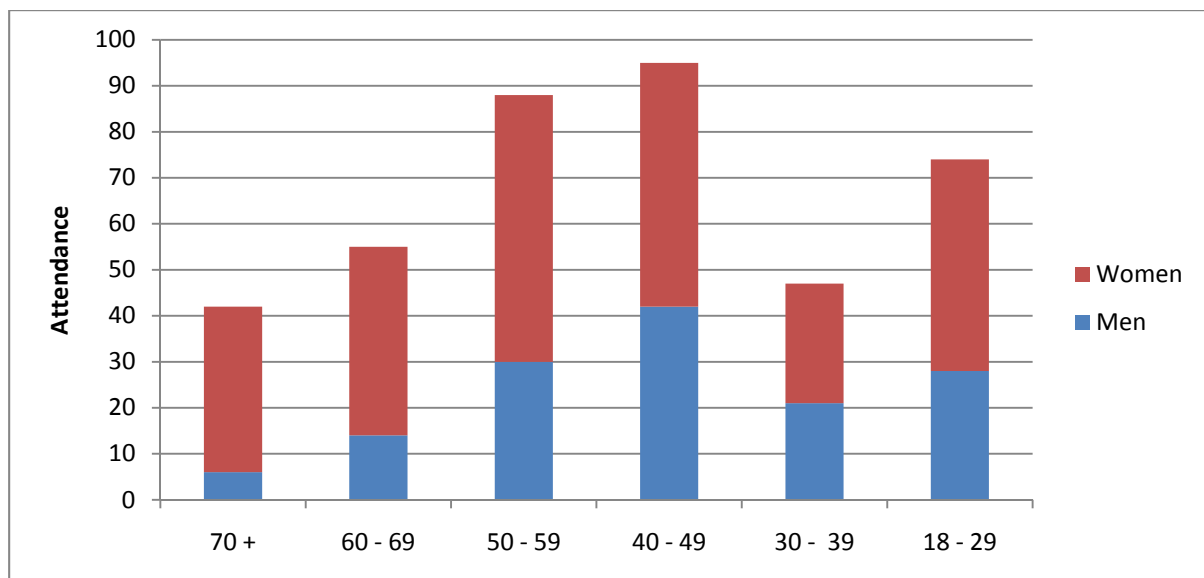
⁶² Service Registers St John's Spark Hill 1945 – 1971, Archived Birmingham Library Services.

Figure 8.3: Attendance at St John's Spark Hill Sunday Morning 8AM Service by gender 1945 - 1971⁶³



The evidence provided by Thompson's survey would appear to indicate that women were an important statistical element within the surge in church attendance of the 1950s. It would also indicate that there was a young element to the resurgence.

Figure 9: Church Attendance across Four Birmingham Parishes: breakdown by age group⁶⁴



⁶³ Service Registers St John's Spark Hill 1945 – 1971, Archived Birmingham Library Services.

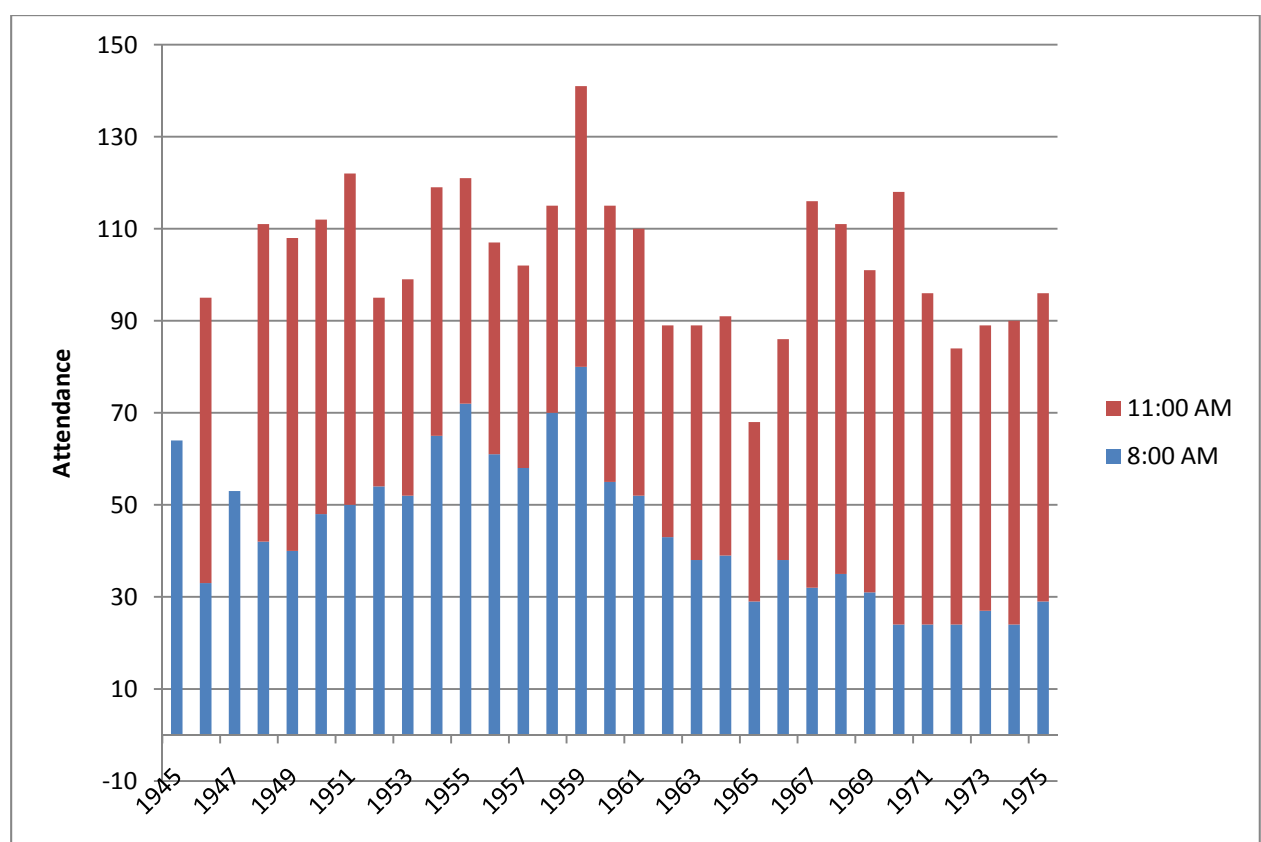
⁶⁴ Thompson, *The Church's Understanding of Itself: A study of Four Birmingham Parishes*.

Figure 9 shows that there is a significant attendance across the four parishes within Thompson's enquiry by those between the ages of 18 and 29. This age group is far more likely to attend church than those a decade older aged between 30 and 39. Thus, it is possible that the resurgence of the 1950s was assisted by a 'younger generation' who were far more enthusiastic about Anglican religion those ten years their senior.

St Mary's, Bearwood

Subsequent chapters in this thesis will focus particularly upon the case study provided by one Birmingham parish in particular – that of St Mary's, Bearwood. It is therefore useful to assess whether the broad statistical trends discussed in this chapter apply in this parish.

Figure 10.1: Average Sunday Morning Church Attendance at St Mary's, Bearwood 1945 - 1975⁶⁵



In many respects the average church attendance at St Mary's, Bearwood during this period reflects the broader trends shown occurring within the eight Birmingham parishes which this chapter has considered. It is possible, for example, to observe increasing church attendances during the 1950s which culminate in the peak of 1959. It is also clear that

⁶⁵ Service Registers St Mary's Bearwood 1945 – 1975, Archived Birmingham Library Services.

numbers fall away during the early 1960s. Perhaps most interestingly the rising numbers towards the late 1960s, which are built upon strong numbers at the mid morning service, reflect the assertion of this chapter that the decline of the 1960s in Birmingham was not a sudden rupture, or dramatic fall but rather a confused downward trend. The rise in attendance during the late 1960s is reflected in oral history accounts from this parish which describe a new vicar taking over in 1966 who introduced a “family feel to things”⁶⁶

Figure 10.2: Average Christmas Church Attendance at St Mary’s, Bearwood 1945 - 1975⁶⁷

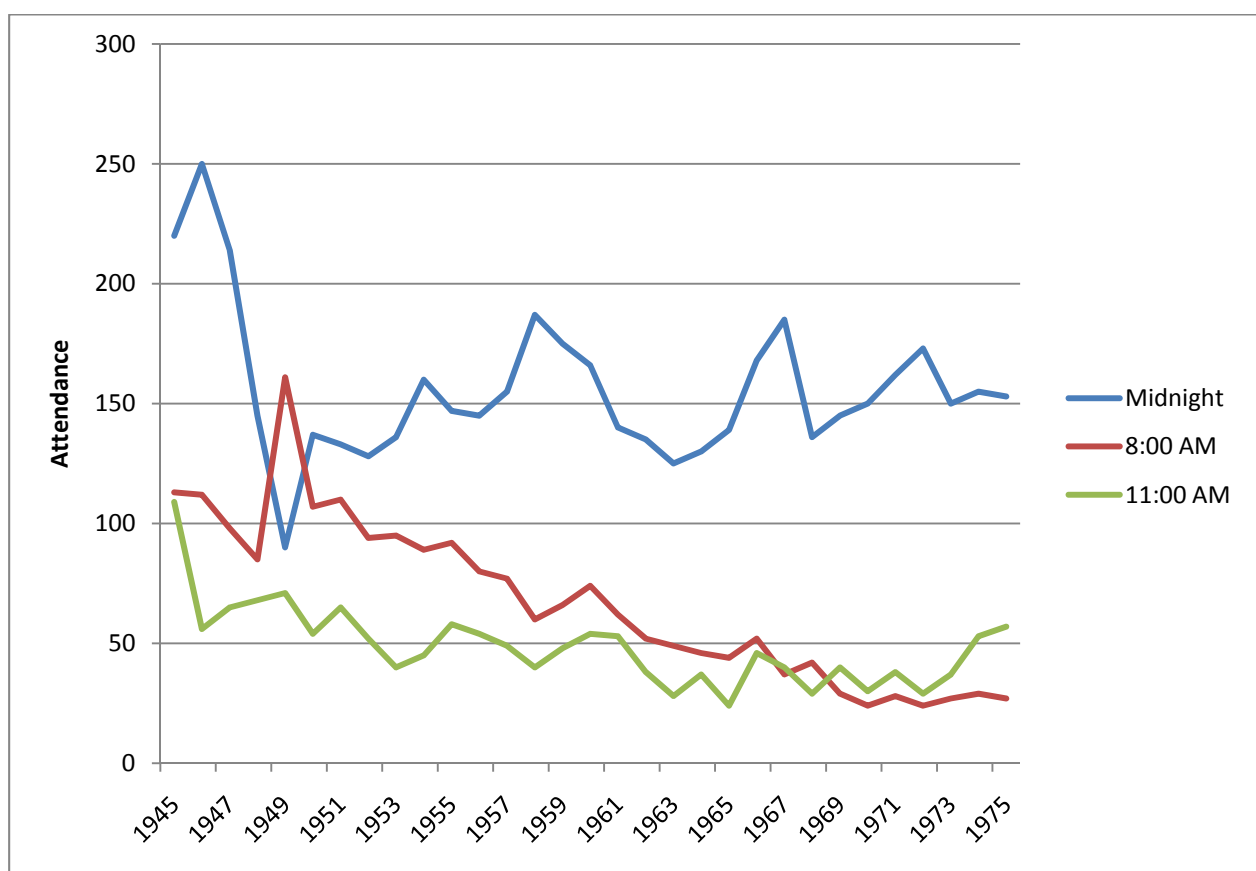


Figure 10.2 demonstrates that the wider diocesan trends regarding the attendance of Christmas church services are reflected in the numbers of Christmas churchgoers at St Mary’s Bearwood. Like the Diocese as a whole, St Mary’s Christmas attendance is a tale of two trends, relative stability and gradual decline. The Midnight Mass service remains

⁶⁶ William, Oral History

⁶⁷ Service Registers St Mary’s Bearwood 1945 – 1975, Archived Birmingham Library Services.

relatively stable for the majority of the period in question. One might argue that the previously referred to dip in church going following the Second World War is reflected in falling attendance at the Midnight Service. Indeed, in 1949 numbers at Midnight Mass dip below 100 for the only point during this period. It is possible to detect peaks and troughs in the attendance of Christmas Midnight Mass throughout this period. This might be explained by bad weather or families visiting one another and attending their hosts' church service on a rotational basis. Both the early and mid morning Christmas Day services are seen to decline at St Mary's during this period. This decline is fairly gradual. Perhaps the confused aspect to the declining numbers of the 1960s in the Diocese in general is reflected in the rise in attendance of the mid-morning Christmas day service at St Mary's in particular in the early 1970s.

Conclusion

The eight churches whose attendance figures from 1945 – 1975 are included in this chapter broadly represent a good sample of parishes within the Diocese of Birmingham. The eight include parishes from the inner, middle and outer rings. They include areas which were relatively prosperous and those that were extremely poor. They include parishes which saw considerable immigration and some that saw very little. From the evidence provided by these parishes I think that it is appropriate to make a number of general observations regarding the Diocese of Birmingham during this period.

Firstly, there is some evidence of a decline in church going immediately after the Second World War, which was followed by a surge in church attendances during the 1950s

and early 1960s. This surge is visible at both the early and mid morning Sunday services. It is interesting to note that the 8am service appears to be far more popular in the 1950s than the 1960s. It is also clear that this surge in church attendance declines from the mid 1960s onwards, although this decline is gradual rather than dramatic. Attendance would appear to shift towards the 11am mid morning service as the 1960s progress.

The data presented in this chapter could also suggest that the participation of young people and women played a role in the resurgence of the 1950s. It could also be argued that the numbers of male churchgoers appears to follow (in reduced numbers) their female counterparts. Again, it is interesting to note that the dramatic element of declining numbers in the mid 1960s occurs in the sharply falling numbers of women. It is fascinating to note the presence in churches of those between the ages of 18 and 29 in the 1957 survey who appear more ready to attend church than those aged between 30 and 39. Based upon these statistics it would not be unreasonable to suggest that a relative religious resurgence that was heavily based around women and young people took place in the Diocese of Birmingham during the 1950s. Neither would it be unreasonable to suggest that this was a revival that lost significant momentum as it lost the popular support of its principal demographic element of women during the 1960s. It should however be emphasised that based upon the statistics presented within this chapter that churchgoing in the early 1960s appears to be generally more healthy than churchgoing between 1945 – 1950. The evidence of these statistics do not support the assertion of Callum Brown that a rupture to church going occurs, but rather that the loss of popular female support severely undermined the revival of the 1950s. The statistics included within this chapter do not paint a straightforward picture of the growth in church attendance that appears to take place in the 1950s. I would argue that the statistical decline that they appear to show in the following decades is equally complex.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE YOUNG

The previous chapter has discussed the statistics of revival in the Diocese of Birmingham during the 1950s and 1960s. These statistics provide a useful backdrop to this discussion but are of limited use in telling the human story of secularization. The next three chapters will discuss three distinct elements of this resurgence and decline through use of oral history gathered from one of the eight parishes discussed in the previous chapter - that of St Mary's in Bearwood. This thesis will argue that there were three key elements to the apparent resurgence in the 1950s and subsequent decline of the 1960s, the participation of the young, of women, and the overall relationship which Anglican Christianity had with wider society around it. These three elements were evident in the oral history gathered.

When one considers the oral history gathered in the course of writing this thesis, one is struck by the presence of young people in descriptions of 1950s church life. The young are not simply mentioned in passing but are central to many of the church's organizations, activities and life. Indeed this chapter will suggest that the religiosity of the 1950s – reflected in both church attendance but also a culture of Anglican Christianity in the community – was heavily reliant upon the presence and support of the young. Many adolescents of the 1950s appeared attracted to church life. Some expressed this attraction through attendance at church services but many more through participation in church satellite organizations.

In many respects the 1950s can be seen to be a confused decade. Thompson describes the “confused state of the general religious environment”.⁶⁸ It is important therefore that historians of this period to do not allow themselves to be confused or side tracked by the

⁶⁸ Thompson, *The Church's Understanding of Itself*, 78.

confused nature of their subject material. It is important to be clear that the evidence of oral history gathered would suggest that many of those growing up in the 1950s grew up with strict expectations as to their lifestyle. Pressure to conform to these expectations stem from parents but also a tight knit, fairly conservative community around them. One such expectation encouraged regular attendance at church. One teenager of the 1950s described that “You had to go to school and then you got to church”⁶⁹. Such statements relating to standards of behaviour by all interviewees are presented stoically and firmly. Another parishioner of the 1950s describes that “there was a certain amount of discipline that was built into a lot of people. Half past seven was the time I went to bed. I knew that, there was never any pressure at all I just knew.”⁷⁰

Many of those growing up in the 1950s were therefore compelled to adhere to standards of behaviour and attend church by their parents and wider communities. However, it would appear that many of the young of the 1950s were attracted to the culture of Anglican Christianity to an equal or greater degree than their parents. In his study of four Birmingham parishes R H Thomson notes the absence of those aged between 30 and 39 from congregations.⁷¹ The young of the 1950s describe being brought up relatively strictly with clear expectations of what was considered right and what was wrong. Virtually all those questioned growing up in the 1950s describe an adherence to “standards of behaviour”.⁷² The sources of these standards of behaviour were not, however, attributed to religion, Holy Scripture or the church. Rather, several of those questioned describe standards as being “passed down from their parents during the twenties and the thirties.”⁷³ Brown argues that

⁶⁹ “James” Oral History

⁷⁰ “William” Oral History

⁷¹ Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself*, 78.

⁷² “James” Oral History

⁷³ “James” Oral History

many of the features of childhood remained unchanged between the 1900s and 1950s.⁷⁴ It is, however, interesting that many of the parents of those questioned appear relatively irreligious. The majority of those questioned were made to go to Sunday school at a young age and yet their parents did not attend church themselves.⁷⁵ Strangely, several of those questioned described introducing their parents to church during their late teenage years. One teenager of the 1950s described how her parents “saw that I enjoyed it, I used to like communion I used to go to 8am communion, a lot in my teens” and went on to be confirmed late in life.⁷⁶

There is little evidence to suggest that St Mary’s of the 1950s was overly welcoming to the young. A parishioner of a neighbouring parish to St Mary’s describes how in the 1950s:

Adults were right and children were not there to question. They weren’t unkind. In church particular the adults were the governing body. The children were taken care for but in no way was the service altered for the benefit of the children.⁷⁷

Despite this, many young people in the 1950s did form a positive relationship with Anglican Christianity. This relationship manifested itself in number of ways. The motivations for this interest were equally varied. In the case of St Mary’s and the community of Bearwood around it a significant number of young people explored their relationship with Christianity through attendance of church services and through active participation in these services. It is possible that this attendance and participation was not solely motivated by spiritual concerns. Throughout the 1950s St Mary’s had an extremely strong choir, which was heavily supplemented by front rows of young boys from the local community. This choir was

⁷⁴ Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 175.

⁷⁵ “Carol” Oral History

⁷⁶ “Carol” Oral History

⁷⁷ “Sandra” Oral History

professionally run. Within several days of moving into the local community, William's family received a call and he "was whisked into the choir".⁷⁸ Many other boys were recruited from local schools.⁷⁹ Once a member of the choir, young boys (girls were not permitted until the mid 1960s at St Mary's) "were suitable after voice training. Then can you read. Then you belonged to the choir".⁸⁰ Many other young people participated in Sunday worship by serving at the altar.⁸¹ The strong relationship between conventional Anglican Christianity and the young during the 1950s is illustrated by the fact that over eighty percent of those confirmed in the Church of England in 1958 and 1960 were between 12 and 20.⁸² For many, confirmation describes a conscious choice as an adult to embrace Christianity further. It would appear that Anglican Christianity had captured the imagination of many young people. Geoffrey Gorer argues that the young of the 1950s were extremely energetic in religious rituals, that teens were the most frequent churchgoers.⁸³

In order to fully appreciate the relationship between Anglican Christianity and the young of the 1950s, one must broaden one's conception of religiosity beyond attendance at church, singing in the choir or serving at the altar. Young people played a significant role in Anglican religious culture during the 1950s through participation in and membership of satellite church organisations. In the early twenty-first century, Sunday school is intrinsically linked with Sunday worship. In 1950s Bearwood, however, Sunday school might be considered one such satellite organisation. A member of St Mary's Sunday school during the 1950s states "we used to be taken into church once a month from the Sunday school."⁸⁴ Sunday school was therefore only intrinsically tied to Sunday worship twelve times per year.

⁷⁸ "William" Oral History

⁷⁹ "James" Oral History

⁸⁰ "James" Oral History

⁸¹ "William" Oral History

⁸² Currie, *Churches and Churchgoers*, 90.

⁸³ Callum G Brown, Paper to Workshop: *Religion and Political Imagination: Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, (Cambridge: Kings College July, 2007), 3.

⁸⁴ "Carol" Oral History

Nevertheless at Sunday school, children found themselves within a Christian environment, and within the framework of Anglican society.

Membership of such organizations for the young was central to the religiosity of 1950s young. Sutcliffe and Smith argue that such church based organizations profited from the boredom of many young people at a time when alternative forms of entertainment were not common.⁸⁵ Many of these organizations were facts of life for churches, alongside Sunday morning worship. Thompson describes “St John’s” as possessing “the usual organizations such as choir, Sunday-school, youth clubs, scouts, brownies, etc”⁸⁶ Thompson’s study describes “St Mark’s” having most extra-curricular activities for young people.⁸⁷ These themes are reflected in broader oral history from the period. To Valerie Walkerdine growing up in the 1950s, church, school, brownies and guides were the building blocks of her foundation.⁸⁸ For many young people attendance of such organizations were accepted cultural norms. It was always “Brownies on a Friday night”.⁸⁹ An older resident of Bearwood describes how her children attended Scouts, Brownies and sang in the choir. To her children growing up in the 1950s “The church was their life.”⁹⁰ It would appear that her children were not unusual. In her road alone she reports nine choir boys.⁹¹

In much of the oral history gathered for this period, the term “ordinary” or a similar semantic is used excessively. Walkerdine continually used the word ‘ordinary’. She describes how she came from “ordinary working people” and describes “the ordinariness of manners of please-and-thank you’d politeness, of being a nice girl, who went to brownies and

⁸⁵ Sutcliffe, *History of Birmingham Vol. III 1939 – 1970*, 267.

⁸⁶ Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself*, 67.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁸⁸ Valerie Walkerdine, “Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood” In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron (London: Virago Press Ltd 1985), 65.

⁸⁹ Gail Lewis. “From Deepest Kilburn” In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press Ltd 1985), 221.

⁹⁰ “Patricia” Oral History

⁹¹ “Patricia” Oral History

guides, and for whom the competitions in the annual produce association show proved one of the most exiting occasions of the year”.⁹² Carolyn Steedman likewise describes the “Odd typicality of my childhood”.⁹³ In a decade in which ordinariness, typicality and conformity were praised it would appear that it was a cultural norm for many children in 1950s Bearwood to spend their formative years within some aspect of Anglican Christian culture. Those young people that deviated from these norms may have struggled socially. Stef Pixner describes her lack of conformity to prayers in assembly resulting in her being “taunted and called a heathen”.⁹⁴

Many elder teenagers of the 1950s found themselves introduced to Anglican Christianity through youth clubs. At St Mary’s the youth club was very strong. Again it is interesting to note that this was a satellite organization – like Sunday school – whose members did not necessarily attend church and certainly not every week.⁹⁵ It was, however, another significant organization through which young adults could be brought under the umbrella of Anglican culture. In many cases there was a strong incentive to attend the youth club, as one might meet members of the opposite sex. This phenomenon is not unique to St Mary’s or Anglican Churches during this period. Sheila Rowbotham describes how, during the 1950s, Methodism provided her with a route to “romance and sort of sex”.⁹⁶ For young people at St Mary’s, social aspects of Anglican Christianity in general and the youth club in particular provided them with the chance to form liaisons with other young people. Four of the individuals questioned in the course of this research met their future wives and husbands through the church. It is clear that at a local level, just as it was ‘normal’ to attend church, it

⁹² Walkerdine, “Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood”, 65.

⁹³ Carolyn Steedman “Landscape for a Good Woman” In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press ltd 1985), 105.

⁹⁴ Stef Pixner. (1985) “The Oyster and the Shadow” In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press ltd 1985), 85.

⁹⁵ “Linda” Oral History

⁹⁶ Sheila Rowbotham, “Revolt in Roundhay” In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press ltd 1985), 204.

was also normal to match-make through the church. One gentleman recalled that they “had dances and social functions in the church. That’s how it happened, you fancied somebody you got together and that was it.”⁹⁷ For many of those questioned church services in their late teens were exciting social occasions. Several recall fondly discussing how “there was someone in the choir who likes you” to which the reply was “he likes me that much he will come forward”.⁹⁸

Such oral history provides amusing and nostalgic insights into the romantic affiliations which occurred through Anglican Christianity during the 1950s. Ian Jones argues that there is a far more serious and significant aspect to such anecdotes. He describes the tendency for couples to support one another in their churchgoing.⁹⁹ Jones cites the tendency among evangelical youth workers to couple young charges with other young Christians, in adherence to the commandment of St Paul to “be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers”¹⁰⁰. Certainly at St Mary’s it could be argued that many of the couples, who got together in the late 1950s and early 1960s through the youth group, did continue to support one another’s churchgoing for subsequent decades. The church reaped the rewards of enjoying a vibrant youth element to its wider community for several decades.

When interviewees began to discuss St Mary’s during the 1960s one is struck by two factors. Firstly, that very little dramatic change is described. This might be attributed to the presence of the same conservative vicar who had led throughout the 1950s until 1965, and the slow pace of economic change in Bearwood at this time. Secondly, one is struck how young people whose presence is evident in the interviews relating to the 1950s are far less frequently mentioned when discussing the 1960s and 1970s. The young are still mentioned,

⁹⁷ “James” Oral History

⁹⁸ “Carol” Oral History

⁹⁹ Ian Jones, *The “Mainstream” churches in Birmingham, c1945 – 1998; The local church and generational change* (University of Birmingham: PHD Thesis, 2000), 119.

¹⁰⁰ 2 Corinthians 6:14 (Authorised Version)

but rather in the context of discussing the extremely young, who were brought to pram services. This was perhaps a reflection of the “family feel to things” following the arrival of a new vicar in 1966.¹⁰¹ Those in their mid to late teens are far less frequently mentioned.

This is reflected in the demise of church youth organizations during the 1960s. One parishioner struggles to describe these changes but argues that:

You only have to look at the choir really. The choir became virtually non-existent.

You always used to get the older men in the choir and the older ladies but no one came up to replace them you know.¹⁰²

This would also seem to be true in the case of the youth club and scouting organizations based at St Mary’s Bearwood. During the early to mid 1960s oral history reports the vigorous nature of youth organizations being reduced. Equally, the relationship between the diminishing numbers of young people in youth organizations and the church became increasingly distant

As the 1960s progressed, at a local level, young people whose participation had been integral to the St Mary’s, Bearwood community during the 1950s became far less evident. A common theme amongst those interviewed was to suggest that during the 1950s many young people based their free time around church-based activities. As the 1960s progressed the church ceased to be the primary social influence upon many young people. The 1960s can in many ways be seen as a decade in which young people had more choice than ever before. Increasingly, as the 1960s began, young people had access to a wide variety of leisure pursuits.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ “William” Oral History

¹⁰² “Carol” Oral History

¹⁰³ Sutcliffe, *History of Birmingham Vol. III 1939 – 1970*, 267.

The “ordinary” nature of the 1950s appears out of place in many accounts as the 1960s progressed. New, alternative forms of entertainment emerged and young people with increased prosperity were able to explore new opportunities. Socially, the semi monopoly which church organizations held as a social meeting point appears to have been broken. Interviewees describe coffee bars becoming extremely popular.¹⁰⁴ Increasing access to cars allowed young people to travel further away from their local communities and explore.¹⁰⁵ Perhaps young people have always enjoyed music. In the 1950s many interviewees cite church music as a major incentive to attend. They enjoyed singing in the choir or listening to choir pieces. In the 1960s new music provided another alternative to Anglican Christianity. Many young people in Bearwood “bought record players they wanted more singles and albums” as the 1960s progressed.¹⁰⁶

Increasingly, many young people embraced at least subtle changes as the 1960s developed. Many began to think of themselves as a distinct element within the population, as teenagers¹⁰⁷ rather than older children or young adults. These teenagers increasingly defined themselves against their parents, with their peer group. As a group they began to be bound together by identity, music and fashions.¹⁰⁸ Crucially, many young people began to find themselves at odds with Anglican Christianity, it was “the religion of their parents”.¹⁰⁹ In much of the oral history contained within this thesis those that were young during 1950s cite Anglican Christianity being “the religion of their parents” as being a reason to attend church. Only a decade later, the above quotation from McGrath suggests that this label has acquired negative connotations.

¹⁰⁴ “William” Oral History

¹⁰⁵ “William” Oral History

¹⁰⁶ “William” Oral History

¹⁰⁷ Patricia Vereker, “From Emancipation to Liberation” In *Very Heaven: Looking back at the 1960s*, ed. Sara Maitland (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1988), 141.

¹⁰⁸ Sara Maitland, “I believe in Yesterday” In *Very Heaven: Looking back at the 1960s*, ed. Sara Maitland (London: Virago Press Ltd, 1988), 5,

¹⁰⁹ McGrath, *The Future of Christianity*, 14.

Could the churches have prevented this separation of the young from Anglican Christian culture? One might be tempted to suggest that the strength of Anglican Christianity, and the role played within this strength during the 1950s was extraordinary. Post-war Christian theologians had created a brand of Christian community¹¹⁰ which suited the decade of the 1950s and the young people of that decade. Its ordinariness is extolled. Many young people appeared to welcome the simple pleasures of the Anglican Christian community in a world with few other entertainment choices. However with the arrival of the 1960s the ordinary, bland and controlled Christianity which had been palatable to the young of the 1950s was abhorrent to the teenagers of the 1960s, many of whom increasingly looked for excitement and change.

Brown writes how nationally some churches attempted to adapt to the arrival of youth culture by making services more “happy clappy” – possibly involving the use of guitars and tambourines in worship during the late 1960s.¹¹¹ Once again St Mary’s Bearwood appears somewhat behind the national trend, with the “happy clappy” approach reportedly arriving in the early to mid 1970s alongside revised service books. From the early 1970s, services included guitar pieces by younger members of the congregation. Rodney, a younger member of the congregation in the early 1970s, recalls that this “was the age where it was pretty trendy to sing ‘Kumbaya’ and ‘Give me oil in my lamp’. There were lighter school hymns starting to invade.”¹¹²

There is a sense in the oral history gathered that those at St Mary’s during the early 1970s were aware of the challenges which faced them in recruiting and retaining young members. At this time St Mary’s had good attendances at its services and events for very

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 19.

¹¹¹ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 180.

¹¹² “Rodney” Oral History

young children, but many were becoming aware of the difficulty of recruiting teenagers.

Rodney recalls that:

“There was recognition that if you did not incorporate children as they went to secondary school you would lose them. We used to get the children of those who got married and try and keep that connection. When they got to secondary age we would lose a lot of them.”¹¹³

This separation of the young from Anglican Christian life was not over night nor dramatic. It is in fact subtle and difficult to detect. At an obvious level it is noticeable simply from the absence of those growing up in the 1960s from the congregation of St Mary’s Bearwood in 2010. Those teenagers of the 1960s are far outnumbered by those growing up a decade before.

¹¹³ “Rodney” Oral History

CHAPTER THREE:

GENDER: THE ROLE OF WOMEN 1945 – 1975

Many historians agree that there was a religious crisis in Britain during the 1960s. Historians are, however, far more divided in assessing the factors which brought this crisis about.

Callum Brown argues for the importance of gender as a factor in this transformation arguing that the transition away from a state in which discursive Christianity was dominant during the 1950s was a highly gendered one.¹¹⁴ Other scholars such as Hugh McLeod are unconvinced by the singular importance of gender within secularization.¹¹⁵ It could be argued that gender as a factor within the study of secularisation is relatively under explored. Indeed Brown observes that the role of gender is considered in the medieval and early modern period of history, and questions why gender should not be considered as a factor within the study of secularisation.¹¹⁶ There is certainly a case for exploring the role of gender within this subject, although as Brown admits one is hindered by a lack of available data. The majority of data focuses on issues such as class and denomination rather than gender.¹¹⁷

The previous chapter explored the importance of young people in the apparent religious resurgence during the 1950s and subsequent decline during the 1960s at a local level. This chapter will argue that women also played an important role in the apparent dominance which Christianity had over society during the 1950s. It will agree with the

¹¹⁴ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 7.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

assertion of Callum Brown that the changing nature of women's gender was central to the weakening of Christianity influence over society.¹¹⁸

Women's Gender Role 1945 - 1960

In *Women in Britain Since 1945*, Jane Lewis argues that the most significant changes of the post-war period affect women especially. She highlights three distinct trends: the role of married women in paid employment, the increasing divorce rate, and the rise of illegitimacy.¹¹⁹

In the aftermath of the Second World War this thesis is describing a local situation that reflects broader national trends and with regards to gender issues this pattern is largely repeated. Generally in society post-war Britain was craving a return to normality. This craving impacted especially upon the women of post-war Britain. Jane Lewis describes a period of anxiety regarding the role of the family during the period immediately following the Second World War. It was felt that an important step on the journey back to normality was to rebuild the family unit.¹²⁰ The worries and desires were embodied in 1945 by a Royal Commission to investigate issues of population, to put forward a process by which Britain could increase her population following the war.¹²¹ The falling birth rate was blamed upon feminism and likewise the rise of women taking paid employment.¹²² Therefore the government began to encourage women that their role was to be in the home.¹²³ Penny Summerfield argues that there were two discourses among women following the turmoil and opportunities which the Second World War had provided: the modernizing woman who saw the war as an opportunity and the traditional woman who saw the war as a distraction from

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 20.

¹¹⁹ Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing ,1992), 2.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 11.

¹²¹ Ibid., 16.

¹²² Ibid., 17.

¹²³ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 170.

her primary role as housekeeper, mother and wife.¹²⁴ Harriet Gilbert describes how in the post-war world mothers were torn between these two discourses, between “vicarious pleasure at what we might enjoy and achieve and a fear (born of their own experiences) that the bubble might again burst, that their educated daughters might find themselves discarded”.¹²⁵ In the post-war world, it was the role of the traditional woman which was encouraged by popular media such as magazines.¹²⁶ It was encouraged heavily in magazines aimed at women that had become very popular during the Second World War. In peace time these magazines found a market niche in exploring the role of the woman in the peacetime return to home.¹²⁷

The model of the ideal woman that some magazines and other popular media encouraged is clearly recalled by young women growing up in 1950s Bearwood. Most interviewees recall their encouraged gender role humorously in retrospect. Carol recalls how in a popular magazine that she read as a teenager:

“There was an article about housekeeping. I laughed about it since. Where it was the ideal wife. You know, she’s everything done ready for her husband, to come home from work. The children are bathed and kept quiet and she’s got a bow in her hair and all that sort of thing, oh dear!”¹²⁸

If the traditional gender role of women was encouraged through popular magazines there is evidence to suggest that it was also encouraged from the pulpit during the 1950s. In 1957 Basil Wescott attacked divorce in his monthly letter, citing reasons for divorce being

¹²⁴ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 10.

¹²⁵ Harriet Gilbert, “Growing Pains” In Liz Heron (ed.) *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties* (London: Virago Press Ltd 1985), 54.

¹²⁶ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 10.

¹²⁷ Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, 171.

¹²⁸ “Carol” Oral History

“1.The emancipation of women. 2. Cheaper and easier divorce 3.Social stigma no longer attaching to divorces. 4. Unsettlement of the war years. 5.Press publicity. 6.Greater laxity in moral standards.”¹²⁹

At a local level it is clear that an important ingredient of the post-war traditional woman was a lack of paid employment post matrimony. This is a trend which can be seen to extend from inter-war mothers. Carol stoically observes that “my mother she obviously didn’t work. Married women didn’t work in those days.”¹³⁰ Patricia, who got married at St Mary’s in Bearwood immediately following the end of the Second World War, admits that:

“To be perfectly honest a lot of people even in those days, we were more interested in getting married, not really going to work. We didn’t go to work and stayed at home and looked after our babies and things.”¹³¹

In post-war Bearwood the social pressure for a married woman not to work appears to have been quite strong and sustained. When Carol married in 1964, she reveals that her mother in law was a “bit put out” that she was working post marriage in order to “make two ends meet together”.¹³² During the 1950s observation of this taboo was not limited to mothers-in-law. There is a clear sense among interviewees that many local companies “wouldn’t employ married women”.¹³³ This is alluded to by Linda who describes that her “mother didn’t work; once you were married you couldn’t work”.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Revered Basil Wescott, ‘Vicar’s Letter’, St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. June 1957, 3.

¹³⁰ “Carol” Oral History

¹³¹ “Patricia” Oral History

¹³² “Carol” Oral History

¹³³ “Carol” Oral History

¹³⁴ “Linda” Oral History

There is some evidence to suggest that this trend is mirrored nationally. Valerie Walkerdine's mother did not begin paid employment until after her father died as "It was clear where a mother's place ought to be".¹³⁵

Women's Religious Role during the 1950s

At a local level it could certainly be argued that women appeared to have enjoyed a far closer relationship with organized and conventional Anglican Christianity (attendance at formal worship) than their male counterparts. This is a recurring theme within the oral history gathered. When asked whether she felt her parents were "religious" Linda replied "Father, religious? Not as much as my mother".¹³⁶ There is also evidence to suggest that women played a role in motivating others to attend church, Carol recalls "Linda's mother coming up one morning and saying to my mother who wanted me to go".¹³⁷ These recollections appear to be backed up by the statistics presented within this thesis that would appear to show women to be far more likely to go to church than men and men who are married far more likely to go to church than those who are single.

A combination of these statistics and the oral history gathered would appear to support the assertion of Callum Brown that the religion of the 1950s was a young woman's religion.¹³⁸ Brown describes the 'power of guilt' which he argues was central to women's religiosity – arguing that many girls of the 1950s described their Sunday frilly frocks with

¹³⁵ Valerie Walkerdine, "Dreams from an Ordinary Childhood" In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press Ltd 1985), 74.

¹³⁶ "Linda" Oral History

¹³⁷ "Carol" Oral History

¹³⁸ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 4.

horror.¹³⁹ It is noticeable that this guilt is not evident in the oral histories contained within this thesis, as many of the interviewees appeared to cherish the rituals of Sunday.

Women's participation within Anglican Christianity during the 1950s should be understood to go far beyond higher levels of attendance at church than men. Central to women's contribution to Anglican Christian culture was their membership, participation and organization of church satellite organizations such as Sunday school, social clubs and fund raising events.

It would appear that at a local level the encouraged gender role of home-maker gave women a degree of flexibility and greater time in the middle of the working day, time that many married women chose to use to organise the satellite organizations of Anglican Christian culture. Oral history from this period is dominated by accounts of women who ran organizations or made social functions a reality. Interviewees described "a lady who lived in Herbert Road I think and she did all the cooking and she used to go out in the countryside and pick fruits to do jams for the pies for the bazaar."¹⁴⁰ Others describe several "austere spinster" (s) one of whom ran various classes for young mothers.¹⁴¹ This is reflected by the high proportion of social organizations at St Mary's during the 1950s which were either aimed exclusively at or ran by women. Women can be seen to provide a "backbone" to 1950s Anglican Christian Culture at a local level.¹⁴²

It would appear that in the Anglican Christian culture of 1950s Bearwood, women certainly provided a backbone. It would also appear that many girls did not resent this role or

¹³⁹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁴⁰ "Carol" Oral History

¹⁴¹ "Linda" Oral History

¹⁴² Kim Knott, "Women and Religion in Post-War Britain" In *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945*, ed. Gerald Parsons (London: Routledge, 1994) 203.

fulfil it from a sense of “guilt”¹⁴³ In an otherwise scathing attack on the lack of welcome provided by her local Anglican Church, a woman quoted in Thompson’s study describes how “If it wasn’t for friends in the Mother’s Union I’d go to church and come home again without speaking to anyone”¹⁴⁴

Women’s Gender Role 1960 – 1975

By 1960s the discursive background of women was changing, new magazines such as “*Jackie*” emerged which discarded traditional moral language. Magazines like ‘*Jackie*’ redefined women, pushing for women to enjoy careers, and become strong sexually, negotiating rather than prohibiting sexual relationships which would occur on their own terms.¹⁴⁵ There were even magazines aimed at older married women – *Every Woman* – for example began to accept that women should work.¹⁴⁶ These factors illustrate how the discursive role model for women, of virtue being linked to being the home-maker, a traditional image of femininity was rapidly broken going into the 1960s.¹⁴⁷ At a local level these changes are hard to detect yet present.

Arguably the most striking change which affected the gender roles of women at a local level occurred as women were encouraged to become an economic unit. Just as during the 1950s interviewees refer to a pressure of indeterminate source which encouraged women not to work, when discussing the 1960s women refer to a growing pressure and need to take employment. Patricia describes how “*Then they encouraged women to go to work*”.¹⁴⁸ Carol recalls encountering this pressure in the early 1970s when visiting the optician who asked her

¹⁴³ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 11.

¹⁴⁴ Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself: A study of Four Birmingham Parishes*, 59.

¹⁴⁵ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 176.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ “Patricia” Oral History

“what I did for a living and he thought that there weren’t many people left like me who didn’t work! I felt a bit bad afterwards!”.¹⁴⁹

It would appear that as Bearwood progressed into the 1960s there is a clear perception among interviewees that increasing numbers of married women were taking on paid employment. The motive for this shift was materialistic. Patricia goes on to explain why she herself took employment during the 1960s. She explains:

“People wanted more, they wanted their own homes, they wanted different things in the home, which without going to work you couldn’t have. I went to work after my daughter wanted to get married. I’d like my daughter to have a nice wedding.”¹⁵⁰

To her there is a certain degree of liberation in taking employment that “It seemed as if I was suddenly free, I could go and do all the things I wanted to do. Gradually I was earning money, as things got dearer and got better.”¹⁵¹ Ultimately the generation of young people reaching maturity during the 1960s wanted to “buy nice houses” and an important ingredient of this acquisition was for both halves of the married couple to work.¹⁵² It was important to work to make such material acquisitions as Hugh McLeod argues that just as the 1960s was characterized as ‘swinging’ it might also be characterized by the manner in which DIY became a national past time as people improved their homes and enjoyed watching television within them.¹⁵³

The shift towards women being considered an economic unit is reflected in the testimony provided by Sandra, a woman who went away to university during the early 1960s. Her testimony shows marked differences to those of women describing their lives ten years

¹⁴⁹ “Carol” Oral History

¹⁵⁰ “Patricia” Oral History

¹⁵¹ “Patricia” Oral History

¹⁵² “Patricia” Oral History

¹⁵³ Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: University Press, 2007), 170

earlier. Sandra's description of this period is heavily focused upon her studies and career choices. Whereas Carol and Linda's accounts of growing up in the 1950s are dominated by church organizations and local anecdotes, Sandra is far more aware of decisions relating to career choices. Her testimony makes numerous references to the pressure of parents regarding a young woman's career choices, warning that "when parents were in the professions they had ideas of what they wanted their children to do."¹⁵⁴ It is conspicuous that Sandra refers to parents considering what their "children" might do for a career. This is a stark contrast to what Harriet Gilbert describes in the 1950s as the "middle class problem of what to do with daughters".¹⁵⁵

Women's religious role changes

To historians such as Callum Brown the victim of the changing nature of femininity which occurred during the 1960s was Christianity.¹⁵⁶ At a local level this chapter has demonstrated that a dominant discursive ideology which encouraged married women not to work and to see their principal role as home-makers undoubtedly worked to the benefit of Anglican Christian society at St Mary's Bearwood during the 1950s. At a local level it would appear that changes to the nature of femininity did not occur instantly nor did these changes suddenly rupture women's role underpinning the strength of Anglican Christian culture. Changes to women's gender role did, however, affect the women of Bearwood, and those changes can be seen to impact the Anglican Christian community based around St Mary's.

It would appear that many women in Bearwood found themselves to be highly compatible with Anglican Christian Culture during the 1950s but this compatibility was greatly reduced during the 1960s. Hugh McLeod introduces the idea that by the 1960s many

¹⁵⁴ "Sandra" Oral History

¹⁵⁵ Harriet Gilbert, "Growing Pains" In *Truth, Dare or Promise: Girls Growing up in the Fifties*, ed. Liz Heron. (London: Virago Press Ltd 1985), 53.

¹⁵⁶ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 176.

women were leading “double lives”. He describes the example provided by Sandra Cook who might be seen to be representative of the changing role of women during this period. Sandra was brought up within a Christian environment but by the 1960s was leading a “double life” as her churchgoing began to contrast sharply with her social life which involved alcohol and night clubs.¹⁵⁷ Like the previous chapter there is need for qualification, that the idea of the sexualized and liberated woman could be overplayed. It is unclear whether the social life of Sandra Cook was considered outrageous by contemporaries or whether her behaviour was representative of a generation of women. She certainly embodies a new type of woman who was beginning to challenge the ideology of the 1950s and adopting a lifestyle which made her less compatible with the Anglican Christianity of her childhood. Sandra’s story is similar to that of the Catholic girl who experimented sexually and felt guilty going to confession feeling that she had really sinned.¹⁵⁸ Were a generation of women beginning to lead lives that were less compatible with Anglican Christianity than the lives of their mothers?

Unfortunately, the records of attendance at St Mary’s, Bearwood do not provide a breakdown of attendance by gender. This is however provided by another ‘middle ring’ Birmingham parish, St James’, Spark Hill whose records are presented in the chapter on statistics. This parish does serve to illustrate that between the late 1950s and the mid 1960s in this particular Birmingham parish a large proportion of the female population of the church ceased attending on a weekly basis. It would therefore be possible to hypothesize that many of those women no longer in attendance, like Sandra Cook, were not finding their attendance at Sunday worship to be compatible with their wider lives.

¹⁵⁷ McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 174.

¹⁵⁸ Brown, *Women and the transformation of religion in Britain since 1960*, 15.

The changing role of women can be seen to have become an issue worthy of mention by 1968. An article appeared in the monthly St Mary's parish magazine in December 1968 which suggested that teenagers living lives estranged from Anglican Christian culture can be attributed to "parents concerned almost entirely with material gain... mother away from home all hours...." The result of which is that the children come home from school "to an empty house – no one wanting to be bothered with them".¹⁵⁹ This implicit accusation and criticism of married women and mothers at work is very much present within the oral history gathered, when interviewees discuss declining attendance and organizational presences during the 1960s. Interestingly, it is also put forward as an explanation for the lack of religiosity among several of the interviewees' offspring. When discussing her daughter's lack of participation within Anglican Christian culture Linda explains that "But you see that couldn't happen now because they're mostly working mothers. Aren't they? I mean our daughter works full time. But she still likes to go to church occasionally at Christmas."¹⁶⁰

There is evidence to suggest that the changing role of women within the Anglican Christian community of Bearwood impacted negatively upon the satellite organizations of which many women had been members or helped to run during the 1950s. An examination of parish magazines from 1955 and 1970 illustrates the decline of many such satellite organizations. This is especially noticeable among organizations aimed particularly at women. The Mother's Union which met an average of five times per calendar month in 1955¹⁶¹ had disappeared by 1970 and been replaced by the 'Women's Meeting' that met an average of twice per calendar month.¹⁶² Across all organizations which were aimed at women the average number of events aimed at women shrank from 11 per calendar month in 1955 to only 6 per calendar month in 1970.

¹⁵⁹ Elizabeth Peters "Catch Them Young" in *St Mary's Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine*. December 1968.

¹⁶⁰ "Linda" Oral History

¹⁶¹ *St Mary's Bearwood Parish Magazine*, 1955.

¹⁶² *St Mary's Bearwood Parish Magazine*, 1970.

One must be extremely careful in quantifying the information gained from the Parish Magazine which ultimately must be considered propaganda designed to promote the activities of the church. It is important to support such assertions with oral history. Interviewees make numerous references to the fact that “I think there was less (social organizations) as the sixties went on.”¹⁶³ It is important to listen to such oral history. One might be tempted to question whether the arrival of a ‘mother and pram’ service at St Mary’s during the early 1970s might cast a fresh complexion onto our view of women at St Mary’s during this period. However, Carol, who attended this service, was able to reveal “Well, I suppose it was not that well attended really. There were about 11.”¹⁶⁴

Carol is equally forthcoming regarding the cause of the decline of many social organizations. When asked why she thought they declined she replied “the younger working people were busy looking after their children all the time. A lot of mothers were working so they had less time to go to these events.” As a mother of this period, she is certain that the increasing employment of married women and people working longer in general was a cause of decline.

This chapter described how during the 1950s women fulfilled an important role in sending their families and especially their children to church but also encouraging them to participate broadly in Anglican Christian satellite organizations such as the choir or brownies. Arguably, the loss of a proportion of these ‘senders’ or ‘encouragers’ during the 1960s could be the biggest loss suffered by the Anglican Christian community in Bearwood during the 1960s. Certainly not all parents ceased stopped encouraging their children to participate, but many mothers during the 1960s did not send their offspring to church with the military determination of their parents’ generation. Certainly, the interviewees who were mothers

¹⁶³ “Carol” Oral History

¹⁶⁴ “Carol” Oral History

during the 1960s do not discuss ‘sending’ their children to participate every week. It is possible that mothers of the 1960s did not consider this to be praiseworthy or worthy of mention, unlike Patricia who brought her children up during the 1950s. This is in keeping with the example provided by Hugh McLeod of Sandra – another 1960s mother. Despite having church forced upon her since a young age, as a mother she rationally decides that her children no longer needed to attend Sunday school during the 1970s. She reasons that “it didn’t work” – that her children did not need to go as they got their dose of discipline from playing sport.¹⁶⁵

Ultimately one could certainly make the case that at a local level women played a central role to the resurgence of Anglican Christianity during the 1950s. It might also be argued that there is some evidence to suggest that the changing gender roles of women during the 1960s materially damaged the fortunes of Anglican Christianity and played a central role in what Hugh McLeod refers to as “The Religious Crisis of the 1960s”.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 174.

¹⁶⁶ McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 170.

CHAPTER FOUR:

ANGLICAN CHRISTIANITY AND SOCIETY 1945 - 1975: A COSY MARRIAGE AND A LONG DIVORCE

This chapter will argue that during the period between 1945 and 1960 Anglican Christianity found itself to be highly compatible with the society around it. It will also describe how this close relationship became increasingly distant as the 1960s progressed. Indeed Anglican Christianity can be seen to have become severely estranged from the wider society around it by the early 1970s. At a local level, this changing relationship is reflected in oral history gathered. Especially during the 1950s many of the local community lived their lives according to broadly Christian principles. Anglican Christian culture was broadly accepted and in many cases admired. However, with the arrival of the 1960s gradual but persistent changes are detectable through local accounts. By the early 1970s accounts would suggest that it was no longer a cultural norm to participate in Anglican Christian culture. More gradually than some historians would recognise, changes to society were separating people from and allowing the people of Bearwood to choose to distance themselves from Anglican Christian culture.

1945 – 1960: Anglican Christianity and the wider community: A happy marriage

The period from 1945 – 1960 should not be characterised as being straightforwardly religious. Although statistics of church attendance in Birmingham would appear to reveal a rising trend in church attendance during this period this does not reveal the true nature of the relationship between Anglican Christianity and the wider community of Bearwood. In his survey of four Birmingham parishes Thompson describes the “confused state of the general

religious environment”¹⁶⁷ Thompson is referring to the contradictions which one must acknowledge in order to appreciate the religious tone of the 1950s.

One such contradiction introduces itself in the oral history of churchgoers who feel that their neighbours are more devoutly religious than themselves. One such housewife of the late 1950s describes how “after we’ve been to church on Sunday morning, my son sometimes goes out in the afternoon and plays football. My relatives, who never go to church, are horrified that he is allowed to do such things on a Sunday”.¹⁶⁸ Another housewife describes how “Sometimes I’ve had to some washing on a Sunday and I’ve felt quite uneasy about it because I felt that one set of our neighbours wouldn’t approve, but they are not people that went to church”.¹⁶⁹

The confused state of the religious environment of 1950s Bearwood is illustrated in the monthly letters published by the incumbent vicar of St Mary’s during the 1950s. In 1949 the Reverend Basil Wescott describes how “there is a clearer distinction now than there formerly was between the Christian and the non-Christian in our land. The decline in churchgoing and the consequent shrinkage of the church membership has brought this about, and the boundary lines dividing the church from the rest of the community is more definitely defined.”¹⁷⁰ However in February 1951 he states “the great mass of people of our country have moved further away from organized religion and the habit and practice of public worship, the place of our national faith has found greater expression at the centre”. He goes on to cite the religious flavour of the King’s Christmas day broadcasts, and the Bishop of

¹⁶⁷ Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself*, 78.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Reverend Basil Wescott, ‘Vicar’s Letter’, St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. November 1949

London preaching before the Conservative party. He concludes by asking “is it in such happenings as these that a religious revival in this country might have its beginning?”.¹⁷¹

Thompson’s 1957 survey revealed that the parishioners of the four parishes examined show very little awareness of distinction between religious and irreligious in society, and little feeling that their beliefs made them distinct from society as a whole.¹⁷² Likewise in his study of St Mark’s, Thompson finds that only one third of parishioners questioned felt that there were occasions when their Christian beliefs separated them from those without beliefs.¹⁷³ Likewise, at St Luke’s only one quarter felt that their beliefs marked them off from society and two thirds felt that their Christian beliefs did not clash with secular ones.¹⁷⁴ Indeed Thompson argues that the values of many church members are drawn from society rather than from church; that “the ways of correct behaviour and values are one or other of the species of middle class values, exalted by their association with the church”.¹⁷⁵

It is possible that Anglican Churchgoers did not detect a clear tension between themselves and non-churchgoers as society was in general extremely compatible with Anglican practice and ethics. In 1959 the vicar of St Mary’s in Bearwood questions

“I often wonder if we generally realize how much the Christian religion governs the practice and habits of our lives. In this country despite the fact that the great majority of its inhabitants are no longer closely identified with the Christian religion, so far as one can observe, yet whether they realize it or not, their mode of living is still largely controlled by the dictates of the Christian church.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Revered Basil Wescott, ‘Vicar’s Letter’, St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. February 1951, 3.

¹⁷² Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself*, 37.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 51.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 64.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 84.

¹⁷⁶ Revered Basil Wescott, ‘Vicar’s Letter’, St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. November 1959, 3.

This close union is best detected in the cult of activities which occurred in both religious and irreligious society to mark the Sabbath day. In 1952 the Reverend Basil Wescott argues strongly against the opening of cinemas on Sunday evening to clash with evensong, for fear that it would “present a temptation to the young”. There was apparently little reason for Wescott’s concern, however, as most of those questioned recall remarkably similar and ritualistic Sunday activities during the 1950s. Sandra recalls how her family would always “Go to church in the morning, eat together lunch as a family, in the evenings my parents would go to evensong”.¹⁷⁷ It is remarkable how similar descriptions of Sunday rituals are among those questioned. Carol recalls another aspect of Sunday ritual that “you had to have your best clothes. White socks, black shoes and a pretty dress. Took them off as soon as you got home. You put your other things on, because they were for the best for Sunday.”¹⁷⁸

Such fairly strict controls upon one’s Sunday activities were not restricted to churchgoers. Indeed they appear to have been widely adhered to regardless of one’s conventional religiosity. This is reflected in the testimony of the 1950s housewives quoted earlier in this chapter who were worried about their non-churchgoing relatives and neighbours judging their lack of conformity to Sabbath regulations. Adherence to this cult of activities concerning the observation of Sunday appears very widespread across religious and irreligious alike.¹⁷⁹

One cannot discuss the religiosity of the 1950s without being confused by labels such as “religious”. Oral history is occupied with the confused tension which surrounds labels such as “religious”. Those questioned in Thompson’s study describe the worry that their

¹⁷⁷ “Sandra” Oral History

¹⁷⁸ “Carol” Oral History

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, *The Church’s Understanding of Itself*, 78.

neighbours might observe them going to church and brand them a “goody goody”.¹⁸⁰ Many of those questioned regarding the religiosity of their parents are keen to stress that “they were obviously going to church every Sunday. Not over the top”.¹⁸¹ Others argue that their parents were “not particularly religious, but good living people.”¹⁸² When asked whether her parents were religious, Sandra appeared hesitant, describing that “Well, we did religious things. We didn’t have grace at the table. Or anything like prayers”.¹⁸³ It is far from clear whether to be considered religious was a good thing. Several interviewees describe those who were considered religious by contemporaries negatively arguing “they were very sort of reverent, sober and forgive me for saying it but one person in particular, very sanctimonious”¹⁸⁴

1960 – 1975: Anglican Christianity and the wider community: The marriage becomes increasingly strained and distant.

It would be convenient for scholars of post-war Britain if the arrival of the 1960s marked a clear, dramatic and marked departure from what had gone before. There is no evidence of a sudden dramatic rupture occurring during the early 1960s, through the case study upon which this thesis focuses. There is however evidence of sweeping and long term changes which began to affect society in general as the 1960s progressed. There is a need for strong qualification. It would be wrong to brand the 1950s as an era in which the entire population submitted to Christian ethics. A study of English character conducted in the 1950s showed that half of all individuals upon marriage had another sexual partner prior to their spouse.¹⁸⁵ It would be equally wrong to brand the 1960s which many British

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 64.

¹⁸¹ “James” Oral History

¹⁸² “Carol” Oral History

¹⁸³ “Sandra” Oral History

¹⁸⁴ “Carol” Oral History

¹⁸⁵ Gerald Parsons, Between Law and License: Christianity, morality and ‘permissiveness’ In *The Growth of Religious Diversity: Britain from 1945*, ed. Gerald Parsons (London: Routledge 1994), 234.

communities experienced as “swinging”. This is reflected in much of the oral history regarding the 1960s which reveals many people’s apparent embarrassment at their “moral seriousness” during this decade.¹⁸⁶ Parsons correctly observes that one should be careful not to generalize. Many of the ‘mods’ of the 1960s still conventionally lived at home with their parents which certainly limited their behaviour.¹⁸⁷

It is clear that changes did occur in society both nationally and locally during this decade which contributed to the distancing of Anglican Christianity from the society around it. At a very practical level many of the inhabitants of Bearwood and Birmingham in general were beginning to prosper economically as the 1960s progressed as “things started working again and people were earning a lot of money”.¹⁸⁸ Increasingly, many people could afford to own televisions and “in a sense people would rather look at the television than go to Sunday school”.¹⁸⁹ The impact of this increased prosperity within the local community is puzzling. One interviewee describes the prosperous 1960s, but also explains how “the standard of life dwindled away” as “people went on big holidays. Bought cars and More and more relaxed, easy come easy go.”¹⁹⁰ The Reverend Basil Westcott also feels that by the early 1960s increased prosperity is beginning to have negative effects upon the dominance of Anglican Christianity. He argues that “In an age where rights are continually being asserted, and privileges claimed, duties are pushed in the background, and discreetly forgotten. Churchgoing suffers in this atmosphere.”¹⁹¹

Thus it is clear that as the 1960s progressed much of the local community of Bearwood had increased options in terms of how they spent their leisure time – options which

¹⁸⁶ Sara Maitland, “I believe in Yesterday” In *Very Heaven: Looking back at the 1960s*, ed. Sara (London: Virago Press Ltd 1988), 13.

¹⁸⁷ David Fowler, *Youth Culture in Modern Britain 1920 – 1970* (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 127.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁸⁹ “James” Oral History

¹⁹⁰ “James” Oral History

¹⁹¹ Reverend Basil Westcott, ‘*Vicar’s Letter*’, St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. April 1962

their increased prosperity allowed them to explore. One interviewee describes “I think this is because outside the church things were moving on. People had more money. Not that people went to church because they were broke or anything like that but they had other attractions”.¹⁹² However there was also a sense in which unspoken attitudes which had compelled individuals to live lives that were compatible with Anglican Christianity gradually disappeared as the 1960s progressed. One interviewee –Robert – worshipped at an Anglican church regularly during the 1950s and explained that “We’d never think of not going. It was alien to us, the idea of not going”.¹⁹³ He goes on to describe that during the early 1960s he felt that church was no longer fulfilling him – and crucially felt that he was able to stop attending.

Many scholars discuss the move towards the permissive as the 1960s went on. Scholars such as Jeffrey Weeks describe this move towards “individual consent in place of the imperatives of public morality”.¹⁹⁴ This is reflected in legislation which was passed during the 1960s. Changes to the divorce law, which had failed to become law during the mid-1950s, passed in 1969 as the Divorce Act was passed.¹⁹⁵ The Abortion Act was passed in 1967 and the Sexual Offences Act of 1967 decriminalised homosexual acts between consenting adults in private.¹⁹⁶ The Church of England appeared to slowly accept the changes that were occurring as the Church of England Moral Welfare Council began to argue for the relaxation of sexual attitudes.¹⁹⁷ Jane Lewis argues that the 1960s saw a move towards private morality.¹⁹⁸ This would be a major departure from the very public morality of the 1950s in which oral history describes the local community of Bearwood policing each other’s behaviour.

¹⁹² “James” Oral History

¹⁹³ “Robert” Oral History

¹⁹⁴ Jane Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945*, 40.

¹⁹⁵ Lewis, (*Women in Britain Since 1945*), 50.

¹⁹⁶ Parsons, *Between Law and License: Christianity, morality and ‘permissiveness’*, 237.

¹⁹⁷ Lewis, *Women in Britain Since 1945*, 53.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

It is very difficult to assess how the community of Bearwood reacted to this permissive legislation. It is clear through the oral history gathered that Bearwood was still a fairly conservative place during the 1960s. Linda describes an unmarried colleague becoming pregnant and being removed from work during the course of her pregnancy in 1960.¹⁹⁹ However, it could be argued that the very act of bringing this legislation as law and moving many morality decisions into the private sphere²⁰⁰ severely and irreparably damaged the position of Anglican Christianity. By accepting previously taboo behaviour in law and moving other decisions into private this legislation severely weakened the role of Anglican Christian culture. A generation of young people would accept this legislative acceptance of behaviour and therefore exist in a moral world which was not compatible with Anglican Christian culture.

Carol, who worshipped at St Mary's throughout the 1960s, was clearly aware of the strain which changing moral standards were beginning to place on the relationship between Anglican Christianity and the wider community of Bearwood around it. She recalls how:

"I think that there were probably different lifestyles. I mean if you haven't been to church for a while you might go back to church and hear something and think, I really shouldn't have been doing that in my private life."²⁰¹

An article appearing in St Mary's Bearwood Church Magazine in 1967 puts forward a traditional and conservative view of sexual behaviour arguing that giving in to the "strong emotions and urgent instincts of the human heart" is an excuse akin to that which might be used by driver to excuse careless driving due to being late.²⁰² By the late 1960s there was an increased acknowledgement within the parish magazine that a significant proportion of

¹⁹⁹ "Linda" Oral History

²⁰⁰ Parsons, "Between Law and License: Christianity, morality and 'permissiveness'", 236.

²⁰¹ "Carol" Oral History

²⁰² Gordon Scorer "Young People and Sex" in St Mary's Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. April 1967.

society were living lives which were not compatible with Anglican Christian culture. By December 1968 the magazine features articles giving advice on how to “Catch Them Young” describing how many parents fear that their children will go to “terrible teenage parties. They will stay out all hours”.²⁰³

It is certainly clear through the oral history gathered that all interviewees upon describing the 1960s describe a certain sense of both economic and social change. People recall the inhabitants of Bearwood generally being more prosperous and able to enjoy more leisure pursuits. They also however describe a decade of slow and cautious change in which many young people had greater confidence that they could succeed by becoming pop stars.²⁰⁴ It was a time in which new developments also brought new and rapidly evolving problems such as ‘Teddy Boys’ fighting outside the Windsor theatre in the late 1950s and early 1960s.²⁰⁵ Despite all those changes St Mary’s church appears to have remained remarkably stable. Interviewees struggle to describe enormous changes within the church to mirror the changes occurring in society around it.

Ultimately the cosy relationship which existed between Anglican Christianity and wider society does appear to have been materially weakened during the 1960s. This was not a sudden change; the young people of Bearwood who were dedicated members of the choir during the 1950s did not all become ‘mods’ and ‘rockers’ in 1963. However, from the 1960s onwards an increasing proportion of the population began to live lives, the moral framework of which began to be radically different from Anglican Christianity. Anglicans appear to be a victim of these sudden changes to society. Opinion within the Church of England was extremely divided in terms of how to react to these changes. Documents such as “Putting

²⁰³ Elizabeth Peters “Catch Them Young” in St Mary’s Church. Bearwood. Parish Magazine. December 1968.

²⁰⁴ “William” Oral History

²⁰⁵ “William” Oral History

Asunder” on divorce and “Abortion: an ethical discussion” were both published in 1966 and show significant fragmentation of opinion regarding the limits of permissiveness.²⁰⁶

In conclusion, this chapter has described how during the late 1940s and 1950s Anglican Christianity appears to have enjoyed an extremely close and compatible relationship with the wider community of Bearwood. At a local level complex changes which occurred during the 1960s would appear to have made this apparently cosy relationship gradually distant at a local level. At this local level, seismic change is impossible to detect; however, it is clear that as a local community Bearwood was becoming gradually more prosperous as the 1960s progressed. Likewise there is a clear sense that changes to economic status occurred alongside social changes which produced a “more relaxed”²⁰⁷ atmosphere. Such changes contributed to a gradual decline in the strength of Anglican satellite organisations and an increasing realisation that church attendance was no longer compulsory. Ceasing to attend church – an idea that had been “*alien*”²⁰⁸ during the 1950s - was now a viable course of action.

It is important to quantify the conclusions of this chapter. It is tempting for historians to brand the 1960s as a dramatic and seismic change – a train wreck – that broke the cosy marriage between Anglican Christianity and society around it. At a local level this is certainly not the case. Changes did occur but so gradually that they are difficult to detect through oral history or written records. There is enough evidence to suggest that factors came to fruition as the 1960s progressed that caused the cosy marriage of Anglican Christianity and society to become increasingly uneasy and distant, to the extent that by the mid 1970s the two parties were arguably sleeping in separate beds.

²⁰⁶ Parsons, “Between Law and License: Christianity, morality and ‘permissiveness’,” 247.

²⁰⁷ “Carol” Oral History

²⁰⁸ “Robert” Oral History

CONCLUSION

The thesis has argued that at a local level the period between 1945 – 1975 can be characterised as being a period of two contrasting halves. An examination of the local case study of St Mary's in Bearwood would appear to indicate that at this local level, Anglican Christianity appears to have enjoyed a resurgence in the period from 1945 – 1960. This resurgence is particularly evident when one broadens one's conception of religiosity to include popular social organisations and discursive 'Anglican' behavioural norms within society. Consequently there is also evidence to argue that this period of resurgence was broken during the 1960s as the 'Anglican Christian community' lost much of its power, and the same community became somewhat estranged from the wider community around it, in terms of both practice and ethics.

1945 – 1960: Anglican Christianity Resurgent

Following the end of the Second World War, the period up to 1960 might be described as a time in which Anglican Christianity enjoyed a period of relative strength and resurgence. To fully appreciate the depth of this strength one must broaden one's conception of religiosity beyond conventional expressions of religiosity - that of church attendance. Although, statistically, Anglican Christianity was resurgent in church attendance also, this only describes a small section of the broader activities which characterised Anglican Christianity during the 1960s. This thesis makes numerous references to this depth of activity as the 'Anglican Christian community'. This is crucial to one's understanding of post-war Anglican religiosity as one begins to appreciate the participation of numerous 'non-

playing members' in Anglican satellite organisations – members who would not frequent Sunday worship but would spend several evenings per week in attendance of satellite social organisations – under the umbrella of Anglican Christianity. Such 'satellite organisations' were a key component of Anglican Christianities strength during the 1950s.

To emphasise how one must appreciate this facet of Anglican religiosity separately from Sunday worship it should be remembered that Sunday school was also a satellite organisation, at St Mary's occurring on Sunday afternoon, at a different time to any other service, without direct input from the vicar and the children appearing in church only once per month. One might be tempted to use labels other than 'satellite' in order to add variety to the discussion of these organisations but 'peripheral' would do these organisations a disservice. Oral history accounts would suggest that these organisations were central to broadening Anglican appeal. Many men who would not perhaps appreciate formal church services regularly enjoyed playing snooker in Church House, next door to the church. These satellites provided entertainment in an era and local community which was lacking in leisure activities.

This thesis has argued that there were two major demographic elements to the religious resurgence and strength which the 'Anglican Christian community' in Bearwood experienced at a local level – young people and women.

At a local level it must be observed that young people play an enormous role in the St Mary's of the 1950s. They are heavily featured in the oral history describing the decade. For many interviewees they symbolise the strength which they associate with St Mary's of that era. The presence of young people manifests itself through rigid statements of compliance. Many interviewees stoically state that as a young person you *had* to go to church. Patricia, who was bringing up children during the 1950s, also states that all her children went to

church. She is proud that she sent them. There were a range of motivations for the involvement of young people in 1950s Anglican Christian culture. It would appear that many young people found themselves genuinely attracted to formal expressions of religiosity through church attendance. Some interviewees recall enjoying their participation through singing in the choir or serving at the altar. Others appear genuinely excited by the drama and mystery of a communion service with music. One must emphasise that this was but a narrow expression of a young person's involvement. Many interviewees describe motivations for participation relating to the social side of involvement. In a world of few entertainment choices, Anglican Christianity provided a rich assortment of activities. Younger children could occupy their evenings through participation in uniformed organisations (which perhaps still held some appeal in a still militarised world). Older children could participate in the youth club which provided an opportunity to socialise with their peers and meet members of the opposite sex. In the 1950s many regarded such youth clubs as rather pushing the boundaries. They were 'cutting edge'; as Sandra recalls, there were some "racy people" in the youth club.²⁰⁹

Just as many young people of the 1950s appeared highly compatible with Anglican Christian culture it would also appear that the same compatibility can be detected with women as a demographic group. The dominant discursive gender role during the 1950s encouraged women to fill the role of housewife and home-maker. This role made women increasingly suited to help provide the 'backbone'²¹⁰ of Anglican Christian Culture locally. At a local level a pressure for married women not to take paid employment would appear to have resulted in married women having more spare time to dedicate to running the satellite organisations of Anglican Christian culture in Bearwood. Within the home also women can

²⁰⁹ "Sandra" Oral History

²¹⁰ Knott, *Women and Religion*, 203.

be seen to play an important role within this decade as the recruiters, senders and motivators within the home, encouraging their children and spouses to attend church and participate in satellite organisations.

This thesis has argued that at a local level during the 1950s Anglican Christianity found itself to be very compatible with society around it. In oral history from St Mary's and several other Birmingham parishes, few parishioners felt that there were occasions when their Christian faith clashed with the values of the society around them. In many respects, the oral history gathered illustrates that at a local level Christian values and ethics had become considered normative by society in general.

1960 – 1975: the end of the resurgence and beginning of decline

At a local level changes to the strength of religiosity can be detected in the period 1960 – 1975. These changes were neither sweeping nor overnight but were equally present. Broadly speaking, this thesis argues that the religious resurgence of the 1950s was interrupted as the Anglican Christian community lost the extremely active support of many young people and women and began to find itself increasingly estranged from the society around it.

Local oral history accounts of the 1950s are dominated with discussions of the young. Church life would appear to have revolved around young people's uniformed organisations and other satellite organisation aimed purposefully at young people. When oral history moves to discuss the 1960s at St Mary's one is struck by two factors. Firstly, that young people and organisations for young people are far less prevalent in accounts. Secondly, that there are fewer parishioners at St Mary's Bearwood in 2010 to be interviewed who grew up during the 1960s than a decade before. This is not to suggest that the young people of the

1950s who appeared so compatible with Anglican Christianity dropped out in large numbers but rather that fewer young people came through to replace them during the 1960s and earlier 1970s. It could be argued that by the 1960s at a local level it no longer appeared to be the norm for young people to participate in Anglican Christian culture. Ordinarity, which appears to have been prized by the young during the 1950s, no longer appears palatable to many of the 'teenagers' of the 1960s who enjoyed a greater variety of leisure activities. During the 1960s there were increasing options through which young people might find a partner.

Likewise this thesis has argued that changes which occurred to the gender role of women during the 1960s reduced the participation and vigour of this key demographic within Anglican Christian society. During the aftermath of the Second World War and the 1950s the encouraged gender role of women was that of home-maker.²¹¹ At a local level within the community of Bearwood, oral history reveals the pressure which many believe to have existed upon married women not to take paid employment. Consequently, it could be argued that this gave married women additional time during the middle of the working day to organise and participate in multiple satellite organisations attached to the church. Evidence of this involvement is found in the parish magazines of the 1950s which exhaustively list meetings of the Ladies Guild and the Mother's Union.²¹² It is interesting to note that a majority of these meetings occur in the middle of the working day at 10.30am or 2.00pm. As the 1960s progressed, this encouraged gender role changed nationally and this change is evident at a local level. By the early 1970s, one interviewee described feeling reticent to tell her optician that she is married and didn't work.²¹³ The result of these changes can be witnessed by picking up a parish magazine from 1970. The April edition of St Mary's,

²¹¹ Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 170.

²¹² St Mary's Parish Magazine April 1955

²¹³ "Carol" Oral History

Bearwood Parish Magazine shows that the Mother's Union had closed and replaced by the 'Ladies Meeting' which met only twice per month. Equally the Ladies Guild certainly had less extra-curricular events in the middle of the day.²¹⁴ In fact, it is noticeable that many more 'satellite organisations' were meeting in the evening rather than the middle of the day, perhaps reflecting the inability of women to attend due to work commitments. Ultimately one could argue that the apparent drop in the support of women during the 1960s might be attributed to the increasing emphasis on women as an economic unit, but also due to the 'double life' which scholars such as Hugh McLeod feel that women are leading by the mid 1960s.²¹⁵ He argues that many women felt uncomfortable within a Christian environment due to other elements of their life which they considered 'immoral'. Perhaps by the mid 1960s women who were leading such 'double lives' felt unable to attend meetings of the Mother's Union?

A combination of factors during the 1960s and early 1970s can be seen, at a local level to have damaged and reduced the close compatibility between Anglican Christianity and society seen at a local level during the 1950s. Oral history accounts of the local 1960s describe sweeping changes in society around the church which contrasts with very little changing within. Interviewees vividly recount the increasing prosperity of the 1960s alongside the increased leisure time opportunities which prosperity afforded. Crucially, coupled to both these factors was an increasingly permissive atmosphere – nationally reflected in permissive legislation – but locally as interviewees describe a “more free and easy way of thinking”²¹⁶ that allowed people to consider not going to church and therefore enjoy alternative leisure pursuits. This is summed up by Robert who said of church going during the 1950s that “We'd never think of not going. It was alien to us, the idea of not

²¹⁴ St Mary's Parish Magazine April 1970

²¹⁵ McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, 174.

²¹⁶ “William” Oral History

going”²¹⁷ but by the early 1960s “just suddenly felt this isn’t getting me anywhere”²¹⁸ and stopped attending church. The majority of interviewees, when questioned, felt that as Anglicans they were more distant from the secular community around them in 1975 than they were in 1955. James describes how by 1970 the majority of Bearwood’s population who were not connected with church “just lived life a bit differently”.²¹⁹ Carol is clearly aware of the tension which changing moral standards placed between the Anglican Christian community and the wider community when she describes “different lifestyles” of people who might have felt awkward in church.²²⁰

It is important to highlight that although this thesis has not focussed specifically on the role of generational change as a factor within secularisation at a local level in its own right, generational change certainly plays an enormous role in the changing participation of young people and women and certainly contributes to the distancing of Anglican Christianity and society. Individual chapters on these issues have reflected that at a local level the dominance of the elders of the post-war period at St Mary’s may have contributed to inadvertently discourage the younger generation from emerging to prominence during the 1960s. Certainly among women, oral history suggests that young women of the mid 1960s would feel very out of place attending meetings of the women’s guild or Mother’s Union. Interviewees describe how social events attached to these organisations would be dominated by the recreational pursuits of the 1940s and 1950s such as “whist drives”. This is but one example of the church’s failure to keep up with generational change (which was occurring faster than ever before during the 1960s, with the emergence of teenagers and popular culture and a local level).

²¹⁷ “Robert” Oral History

²¹⁸ “Robert” Oral History

²¹⁹ “James” Oral History

²²⁰ “Carol” Oral History

Thus the local church must be saddled with some responsibility for the downward trends which are evident statistically and anecdotally at a local level by the late 1960s. During this period the community around St Mary's Bearwood was changing rapidly as increased affluence provided parishioners with alternative leisure opportunities and increased liberal thinking may have strained the relationship between society and the still fairly conservative church. However, the church does not appear to respond effectively to these changes, attempts to make the worship more 'happy clappy' would only appear to have alienated existing parishioners with no reported increase in wider interest. The church itself does not attract much sympathy in this regard. Its relative success during the 1950s stemmed principally from the compatibility of itself to young people, women and society in general. With changes in the 1960s, as these key demographics became gradually less compatible with the church, the church appeared either ineffective or unwilling to reach across the chasm that was developing between itself and the wider community around it. There was no evidence of compromise in the articles published in St Mary's, Bearwood parish magazine of the 1960s which criticised working mothers and promoted abstinence.

The argument put forward within this thesis does not fit into a traditional understanding of secularisation. Evidence gathered locally would not appear to show a slow march towards secularisation which scholars such as Steve Bruce argue for. Statistically, the expression of conventional religiosity through attendance at Sunday worship rises during the 1950s, across the diocese of Birmingham on average but also at a local level at St Mary's in Bearwood. Evidence provided by oral history would argue that this resurgence was even more marked when one broadens one's conception of Anglican Christianity to include all satellite organisations and cultural elements in this resurgence.

This thesis would probably be classed as a revisionist account. It certainly agrees with the argument of Gerald Parsons that religion in Britain following the Second World War

has routinely managed to “confound observers – both academic and popular – who have predicted the steady demise of religion and the emergence of a more straightforwardly secular society”.²²¹

This account also agrees with the argument put forward by Callum Brown that traditional understandings of secularisation fail to recognise and take account of the true strength and power of popular Christianity between 1800 – 1960. This thesis has referred to this strength and power as being seen through ‘Anglican Christian community’ which was very obvious at a local level during the 1950s. Equally, the argument contained within this thesis argues that in this local case study Brown is correct that in the local community large sections of the population were living under the “dominance of a Christian culture”.²²²

In essence this thesis can be seen to agree with many of the accounts of post-war Christian Britain put forward by Callum Brown. It does, however, part company with Brown in his account of the early 1960s. At a local level this thesis cannot argue that dramatic, sweeping or sudden changes occurred in the early 1960s. Statistics would suggest that the resurgence is over by 1963, both nationally and at a local level. However, this process could not be labelled as a rupturing of dominant Christianity. The decline that this thesis outlines during the 1960s both anecdotally and statistically is present but confused and steady. One must qualify all ones conclusions regarding the decline of the 1960s by making two points. Firstly, that in oral history accounts of St Mary’s, Bearwood during the 1960s dramatic changes within the church are not present. Sweeping changes in society are described and the impact of these changes upon the church are subtly present. Secondly, one should temper all judgements regarding statistical decline during the 1960s by emphasising that average attendances at Sunday worship across the Diocese of Birmingham are at no point lower

²²¹ Gerald Parsons, *The Growth of Religious Diversity in Britain from 1945* Vol.1 (Routledge: London, 1993), 7.

²²² Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, 200.

during the period 1960 – 1975 than during the period 1945 – 1950. One might cite numerous reasons such as rising population and servicemen returning from combat, but nevertheless this statistic remains.

It would perhaps be inappropriate to end this thesis with points relating to the statistical story. After all, this thesis has attempted to put forward a local and personal argument based on the memories of those that witnessed a period of history which has attracted so much attention from historians. It has attempted to tell this very human and emotional story calling upon the voices of the parishioners of the 1950s and 1960s, acknowledging the intrinsic limitations of such evidence; their intrinsically anecdotal nature and the ever present companionship of nostalgia. However, this thesis also emphasises the strength which this evidence lends to the study of secularisation. Throughout the chapters of this thesis the focus of discussion has remained on the individuals whose choices make the study of secularisation, on human beings whose emotional reactions to religion will generate many theses in the future and confound observers for years to come.

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Appendix 1: Oral History

Between January and July 2010 I conducted a series of interviews with individuals who attended St Mary's Bearwood during the 1950s. I endeavoured to provide an oral history sample which was diverse in terms of gender, occupation and age. The majority of interviewees were broadly growing up during the 1950s. It would have been helpful to have interviewed more who were growing up during the 1960s, however this demographic are not in evidence at St Mary's in 2010. This might be seen to be revealing in itself.

Each interview was conducted in the interviewees home, was recorded and the majority transcribed in their entirety. The interviews varied in length, but all were conducted in an informal manner. As the interviewer I was relatively well known to most of the interviewees. All interviewees were informed that their testimony might be included within this thesis, that the interview would be recorded and that any testimony given will be presented under pseudonym names as listed below. The occupation of each interviewer is described ambiguously in order to protect their anonymity.

All of the interviewees were still at least loosely connected to St Mary's Bearwood at the point of interview. I am aware of the potential limitation which this provides, and recognises that it would have been useful conduct further interviews with the long term residents of Bearwood who are not affiliated to the church. This was not however practical given the constraints of an MPhil(B) thesis.

Interviewee: “Patricia”

Year of birth: 1925

Occupation for majority of period in question: Housewife and latterly part time schools worker.

Interviewee: “Sandra”

Year of birth: 1939

Occupation for majority of period in question: Student and Medical Profession

Interviewee: “Carol”

Year of birth: 1943

Occupation for majority of period in question: Housewife

Interviewee: “Linda”

Year of birth: 1943

Occupation for majority of period in question: Housewife

Interviewee: “William”

Year of birth: 1939

Occupation for majority of period in question: Student and Financial Sector

Interviewee: “James”

Year of birth: 1933

Occupation for majority of period in question: Apprentice and Entrepreneur

Interviewee: “Robert”

Year of birth: 1942

Occupation for majority of period in question: Student and White Collar

Interviewee: “Rodney”

Year of birth: 1957

Occupation for majority of period in question: Student