

**From Parson to Professional:
The Changing Ministry of the Anglican Clergy
in Staffordshire, 1830-1960**

by

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ABSTRACT

From 1830 to 1960 the parish ministry of the clergy of the Church of England underwent a transformation, which was expressed in the gradual abandonment of the parson model and the adoption of the professional model. Staffordshire provides a good case-study area because of its wide variety of urban and rural parishes where this development can be assessed. Amongst the many causes of the change, the population size of the parishes and the sources of clerical funding are considered to be crucially important. The evidence suggests that where parishes exceeded 2000 people and where the worshipping community became the main provider of financial support, the parson model was increasingly difficult to operate. Out of necessity, and sometimes subconsciously, the clergy developed a model with significant professional features, even though the parson model continued to be promoted as the ideal. There was a narrowing of the remit of the clergy and within their local communities they were less involved and less influential. If as a consequence the incarnational aspect of local ministry has been eroded then there are far reaching implications. This study shows how practical circumstances, such as those that relate to geography and economics, although not always recognised, have an important effect upon the practice and the theology of ministry.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated in grateful memory to my maternal grandmother Doris Mary Pryce, who was born in 1905, and whose enthusiastic and informal love of history inspired me from an early age. Her many stories, some of which she had heard as a child, brought to life people and events as far back as the early nineteenth century. Although always entirely personal and without the benefit of analysis, her view of the past was electrifying and stimulating. Her death in 2000, at the age of 94, gave me the opportunity to pursue this study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of this study was born at the discovery of a large and intriguing clerical tomb stone in the graveyard of a small country church, a monument to a long lost era of ecclesiastical life. It has to be recognised that that generation or two of clergy deeply effected every parish.

I wish to acknowledge the support and assistance of my tutor Hugh McLeod whose persistent and probing comments and suggestions over six years have guided my studies into many fruitful areas. I am grateful to several others along the way and in particular the late Michael Greenslade and the staff of the William Salt Library in Stafford, the Staffordshire Record Office, the Lichfield Record Office, the Kinder Library of St. John's College in Auckland, and St. Deiniol's Library in Hawarden. The backing of the Bishop of Lichfield and the Parish of Shelton and Oxon, Shrewsbury, was also important.

Finally, I must record with gratitude the encouragement of Helen, Rhys and Anna, who, whether knowingly or not, allowed me the time away from home to spend with dusty records and seemingly endless statistics.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

To travel by train from Wolverhampton to Stoke on Trent via Stafford is to take a journey of less than an hour that traverses the whole county of Staffordshire. Passing from industrial conurbation, through sprawling suburbs, out into open countryside, passing through villages and market towns, a subdued county town, and more rich green countryside with moorland hills in the distance, you arrive in another city that also bears all the signs of the social and economic change of the last century and a half. What you might notice through the train window are the church towers and steeples that scatter the entire landscape. Nearly always old, and standing amongst other buildings, in the city their profiles are obscured and dwarfed by other structures. Where they once stood high and unchallenged they now compete with office blocks, high-rise housing, factory chimneys and the great bulk of modern industrial and commercial architecture. Only in the market towns and in the countryside have the churches retained their apparent dominance.¹

Slowly, and almost imperceptibly the other buildings have grown up around the church towers. The skyline has changed in each generation at such a pace that perhaps many would not have noticed. Only in old photographs and old prints can we see the view of what has been lost and what can never be regained. Some of the Victorian structures have been pulled down, factory chimneys felled and tower blocks razed to the ground, but often in their place

¹ Writing in the 1950s one clergy mentor commented on the same scene: “The country church stands up clearly from the surrounding buildings. Everyone knows where it is, even if they ignore it. In towns, the church may well be hedged in by towering buildings”. Reindorp

have been erected new giant buildings. Neither Wolverhampton, nor Stoke on Trent, nor Stafford will ever have a skyline dominated by the church again.

This change in the architecture profile reflects the change in the role of the clergyman in his community. Once very much at the centre, prominent in so many aspects of life, he had a role that was closely linked to the identity of the locality. Ideally, he felt a responsibility for every parishioner, assuming a paternalism that in some places was the very cement of social life. He had a stake in the economy of the parish, and his fortunes related very much to the economic well-being of the people whom he served. This was the model of the ministry of the parson, which in some places in Staffordshire was successfully practised even up until the second half of the twentieth century.

Over the course of time and due to a variety of circumstances, others obscured the position of the clergyman in society. Politically, his influence waned, economically he became disconnected and poorer, and socially he was outdated and marginalized. He retreated into a more specialised role and undertook fewer non-religious activities. When they beat the bounds at Rogationtide in the mythical Ambridge they no longer walk around the parish, but confine themselves to the churchyard instead.

In some places the clergyman's role retained a more traditional pattern. In the smaller communities of the countryside his position still had some influence, largely because he was known by most of his parishioners. Up until the 1960s many small rural Staffordshire parishes still had a resident clergyman, even if by then they were “a sadly bewildered and sorely

(1957), p34.

worried lot of men.”² Within a decade or two such deployment would become impossible to sustain and the phenomenon of the clergyman in one small parish would disappear. The church architecture of the countryside portrays an illusion because in a changing society the clergy of the countryside have become almost as marginalized as those in the town.

Clergy were vanishing, both in a physical sense as fewer were deployed, and in terms of the strength and variety of ways they influenced local society. The Anglican ministry underwent a transformation, as noted by Towler and Coxon: “The familiar figure of the clergyman of the Church of England is inevitably disappearing, and with him the whole clerical model of a previous era.”³ B R Wilson put it more poetically when he described the clergy in the 1960s as “the charcoal-burners or alchemists in an age in which the processes in which they were engaged had been rendered obsolete, technically and intellectually.”⁴

The clergy are the focus of this study because they had a crucial role in the relationship of the church to society. In virtually all parishes they were the paid and full-time officers of the church, undertaking and often monopolising the duties of the Christian community, representing the church and even personifying it to those within and outside the church. In the Church of England clergy had a position that was paramount. The role of the laity, although always significant and increasing in importance from the nineteenth century onwards, was determined in relation to the role of the clergy. Laity helped out when there were not enough clergy and their views were more readily sought when their assistance was needed. Generally, such is the strong identification of the clergy with the church that their position in relation to

² A general comment on the clergy in small rural parishes by one of the clergy mentors, Hart (1959) p9.

³ Towler and Coxon (1979) p202.

society is an indication of the position of the church. The study of the clergy and their pastoral models will show how influential the church was in local communities. The very survival of the church was seen to be dependent on the clergy in the parishes, a view recognised by the Church Assembly in the 1950s: “if the Apostolate of the whole Church, clergy and laity alike, is to be recovered, if the Church itself is to become a weapon for evangelism, the clergy are, and must be, the key to the situation ... the Church cannot rise higher than the lives of its clergy the parish priest is the gift of the Ascended Christ to the Church.”⁵

This study will examine the relationship of the Anglican clergy to their parishes and how this has changed over 130 years. It will look at the changes in the variety of contexts provided in Staffordshire. It will look at how and why the role of the clergyman has developed, and how the model has metamorphosed, in some ways, from parson to professional. It will consider two particular influences upon the changing role, one geographic and the other economic. This is part of the wider discussion about the position of the church in society and will be a contribution to the ongoing debate about secularisation. There is a review of the studies relating to this debate in chapter three.

The period of the study begins in 1830 and ends in 1960. These dates approximate to times of great changes in church and society of England. At the first date the Church of England was about to experience major reforms, foreshadowed in the first three decades of the century. Following reports on the state of the church, the call was for a more efficient body to serve a nation undergoing a social transformation. The church had to justify its cost and position in a

⁴ Wilson (1966) p76.

⁵ From a report to the Church Assembly quoted in Allan (1954) pp99-100.

period when the economy was becoming more industrial, capital more related to production, and personal and corporate merit increasingly important. It was the beginning of a time of great expansion for the church, of hopes realised in the creation of hundreds of new parishes and the building of hundreds of new churches. The Church of England as a national institution was not poor, and although its financial support from the government was fading away, it had vast resources at its disposal. The identity of the Church of England was changing, particularly as it faced up to the competition of other churches, Nonconformist and Roman Catholic. What had been an unassailable Established Church was becoming a denomination amongst others, especially in the urban areas. The Anglican monopoly in the political and educational establishments of the nation could no longer be justified, a trend that was equally recognisable at the local level. It was in the 1830s that the Church of England underwent changes, greater than anything it had known in the previous one hundred years. What emerges from that time and what is solidified in the succeeding six or so decades is a pattern of church government, economic structure, liturgical practice and, most crucially, parish ministry that will determine the strategy and policies of the church for much of the twentieth century. The inheritance that is formed and shaped from 1830 will last for at least 130 years.

The decade that begins in 1960 also marks a very significant change. The mood for change in the Church of England was growing, with calls from reports for a church better equipped for the demands of modern society. In the system of church government a new national body was about to be developed and far-reaching liturgical reforms were about to be tried and implemented. The lifetime clerical freehold as a basis of parish ministry was about to be abolished. The term 'parson' was going out of use, no longer favoured by those who wrote the clergy manuals. As before in 1830 none of these was a change in isolation but rather part of

ongoing developments. However, as the 1960s was a decade of considerable change it seems appropriate to be a point at which to conclude this study. Furthermore, some have suggested that this was the decade when the Church of England recognised that it no longer held a central position in society both at the national and local level, and when secularisation in British society came of age.⁶

The primary sources of this study are personal records both clerical and lay, especially diaries, letters and notebooks, parish records, including worship registers, minute books, newsletters and magazines, diocesan and county records, such as visitation returns, reports and minutes of synods and other meetings, and clerical files. Another important source are the clergy manuals written by clergy mentors seeking to advise those embarking on or already fully engaged in parish ministry. These manuals are written in every generation in the period 1830-1960, often, but not exclusively, by those who had made a conspicuous success of parish ministry. Several of the mentors went on to be rewarded with hierarchical positions in the church. It can be assumed that although none was written by a Staffordshire clergyman they were read by such and had an influence on the clergy of the county. Almost all were committed to the ideal of the parson model and were eager to provide methods to bolster up such a system at all costs. Maybe because of their own personal success as parish clergy very few addressed the reality of the changing social situation and how it had a detrimental effect on the parson model.⁷

The picture of the clerical life that emerges is incomplete because the sources are not

⁶ For this realisation by the Church of England see Towler and Coxon (1979) p3; for the thesis that this was the decade of secularisation see Brown (2001).

⁷ A full list of the clergy manuals is provided in the bibliography.

universal. Despite their literate abilities few clergy have left a record of their thoughts for future generations, perhaps in part because so many were conscious of their public role and the need to maintain propriety in the face of posterity. The notorious and infamous clergy, who are revealed through the accounts of disputes and licentiousness, either in the public domain of newspapers and the like, or privately in diocesan files, were a small minority. Although the sources are incomplete it would be reasonable to assume that they are fairly representative, not just of Staffordshire, but also because of the rich variety of contexts within the county, of England as a whole.

Reference has also been made to the literature of popular novels. George Eliot wrote as one who knew the clergy of the county and thereabouts and some of the settings of her books although fictitious are modelled on places close to Staffordshire. Arnold Bennett was a keen observer of church life, though more readily that of the Non-conformists, as would befit his upbringing in The Potteries. Such authors provide a valuable contemporary picture of the clergy within the scope of this study.

Chapter two will consider the geographical, economic and social setting of Staffordshire, how this has changed over the period, and how it had a bearing on the strength of the church and the role of the clergy. It will show how the three districts of the Black Country, the Potteries, and the rural areas, provide a microcosm of the nation. Chapter three will consider the theories of secularisation, summarising what have been considered the main causes for the change in the position of the church and the clergy since the early nineteenth century, and the two catalysts of parish population and financial support will be introduced as factors that have not always been fully considered. Chapter four will assess the first of these factors, parish

population, with particular reference to indicators such as church attendance and confirmation statistics. Chapter five will consider how clerical funding has changed and how this has affected the relationship of the clergy to their communities. Chapter six will look at the prevalence of the parson model in Staffordshire and how it persisted particularly in those parishes less affected by the geographical and economic trends already noted, and how it survived as an ideal in the mind of most clergymen. Chapter seven is a survey of the growing evidence of the practice of the professional model, brought about by the necessities of the situation. Chapter eight will offer some general conclusions arising from the study.

Chapter Two

THE SETTING

Staffordshire was a county of the English midlands, which in the period 1830-1960 covered over 1,000 square miles and stretched 54 miles from north to south and 36 miles at its widest. Although much of it was quite unremarkable it provided a wide spectrum of natural and human environments. In contrast to the heavily industrialised and urban areas there were the bleak upland moors and the rich lowland pastures. Situated in the centre of the country it shared environmental and social features with both the north and the south of England. The Staffordshire novelist Arnold Bennett wrote of the representative character of his county: “It has everything that England has, including 30 miles of Watling Street; and England can show nothing more beautiful and nothing uglier than the works of nature and the works of man to be seen within the limits of the county. It is England in little, lost in the midst of England, unsung by searchers after the extreme.”¹

Its central position assured Staffordshire a place in history. Henry Tudor passed through to Bosworth, and the county hosted several significant military encounters, potential and real, up until the abandonment of the Pretender’s march to power in 1745. Soon after this time

¹ Bennett (1908), p9.

Staffordshire underwent a rapid transformation from an agricultural shire to an arena for the first stages of the industrial revolution. As a county its role in the political and economic development of the nation should not be under-estimated. However, it is the very ordinariness of Staffordshire that makes it a good setting for an historical study, not least the position of the clergy in society.²

Established in the tenth century the boundaries of Staffordshire remained fairly static until recent times. Apart from the removal and addition of small areas the changes have been few. Within the period of this study the only major alterations were in the south of the county. Harborne was taken into Birmingham in 1891, followed by Handsworth in 1911. Tamworth was divided between Staffordshire and Warwickshire until 1889 when it was transferred as a whole to Staffordshire. Dudley remained an enclave of Worcestershire within Staffordshire until 1966. For the purposes of this study the area to be considered is the ancient county of Staffordshire that existed before these changes.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Staffordshire was a relatively under-populated and rural county. The ancient towns of Lichfield and Tamworth, established in the Mercian era, and the medieval foundations of Stafford and Burton, all situated on navigable rivers, were the major centres. The rapid industrialisation of the nineteenth accounts for the dramatic population growth and the shift of importance to the new industrial towns.

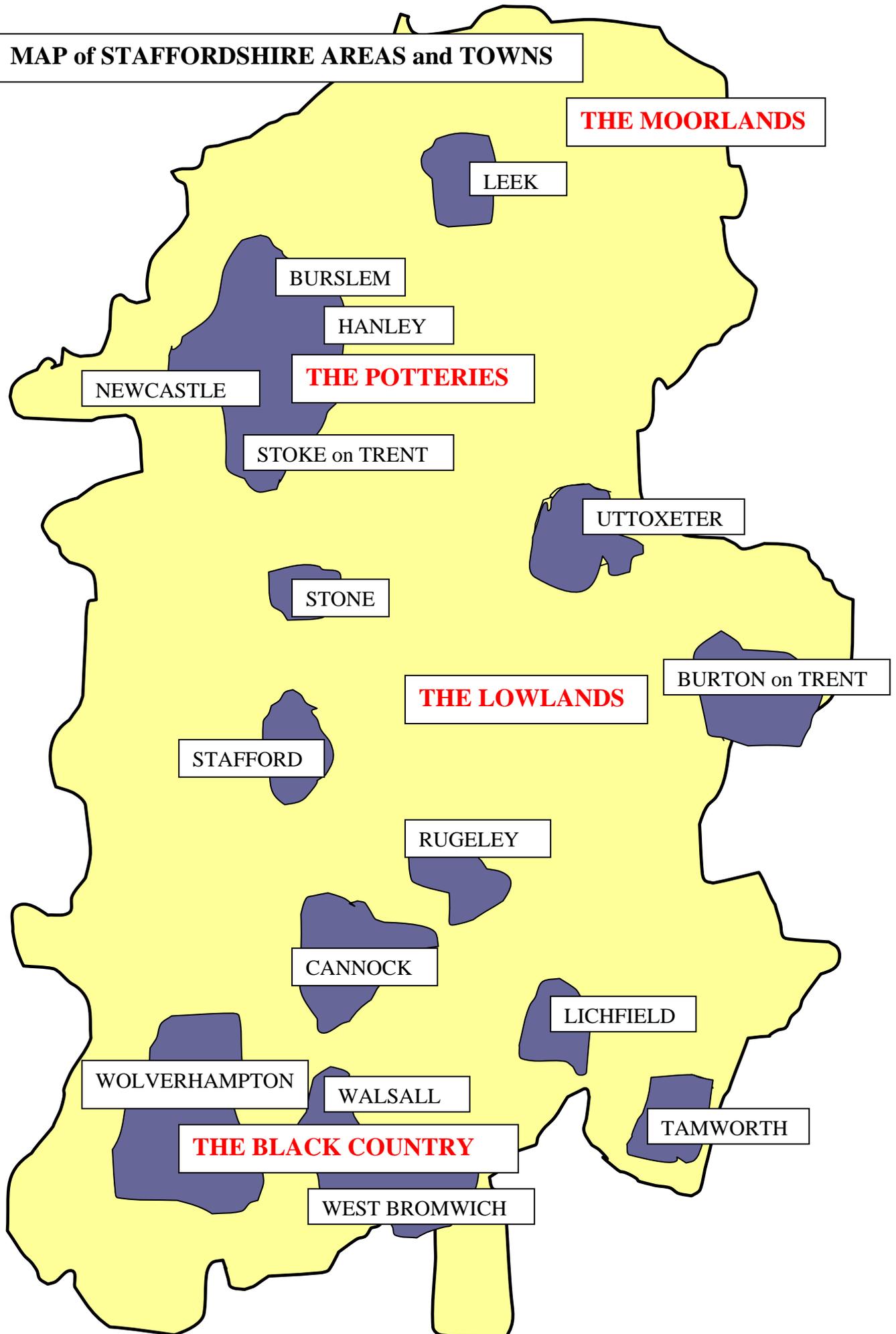
² Lichfield Diocese, which contains virtually all of Staffordshire, is considered a transitional diocese between the north and south of England, see Mather (1985).

Between 1831 and 1851 the population of the county increased by almost half, rising from 409,000 to 609,000. Between 1851 and 1901 the population more than doubled to 1,235,000, and Staffordshire became the fourth most populous county in England. In the 150 years since 1750 the density of population had risen from 140 people per square mile to 862. By 1901 the four largest towns of Wolverhampton (94,000), Walsall (87,000) and West Bromwich (65,000) in the south, and Hanley (62,000) in the north, had all increased by sevenfold or more during the previous century.

The population in the rural areas increased in the nineteenth century before returning to 1801 levels in 1901. In some decades certain local communities underwent dramatic changes in population, and so ceased to be rural. Cannock increased from 1,771 in 1831 to 23,974 in 1901 as a result of the opening of the coalmines on Cannock Chase after 1850. Biddulph in the same period rose from 1,987 to 6,247 for a similar reason. The increase from 1901 to 1961 was less dramatic, although both Cannock and Biddulph doubled in population. Through industrialisation, places that had been small villages in the early nineteenth century had become sizeable towns in the twentieth. Sometimes the increases were short-lived. The transient labourers who built the canals and railways temporarily swelled small villages like High Offley, Church Eaton, Lapely and Gnosall in 1831, and Leigh in 1851.³

³ Page (1968) pp318-329.

2.1 MAP of STAFFORDSHIRE AREAS and TOWNS



The general pattern of population distribution remained largely unaltered after 1901, with the large conurbations established in the south and north of the county. By 1960 twelve towns had populations of over 48,000, the six largest being Stoke with 265,000, Wolverhampton with 150,000, Walsall with 118,000, West Bromwich with 96,000, Newcastle with 75,000, and Smethwick with 68,000. ⁴

The Black Country

Staffordshire can be divided into three distinct areas: the Black Country, the Potteries and the rural districts. In the south the Black Country based on the large towns of Wolverhampton and Walsall and the many smaller urban settlements in-between was heavily industrialised from the early nineteenth century, and probably ranks as one of the most despoiled landscapes in England. Dudley, which accounted for about one quarter of the population of the Black Country, was never part of Staffordshire during this period. The rich ten-yard coal seam and the closeness of iron ore and limestone nourished the development of the iron industry in a proliferation of smelting workshops. By 1865 there were 172 blast furnaces in this area and these industrial units pumped out clouds of black smoke and gave the area its name, 'black by day and red by night'. ⁵

One clergyman, the perpetual curate of Coseley, who wrote to try and convince manufacturers of the need to introduce special services for workmen, extended the

⁴ *1961 Census of England and Wales, County Report: Staffordshire*, HMO Table 3.

⁵ Millward and Robinson (1971) p97.

description of blackness to include the lifestyle of the people: “Black, in truth it now is, alike in its appearance, and in the character of a large section of its inhabitants ... black with dilapidated and ruined habitations, strewn in all directions, like the ravages of a general earthquake or volcanic eruption, but many of which, melancholy to reflect, are yet tenanted by whole families of human beings – black as to the unwashed and dejected faces of those miserable drudges, who seem to have toiled all their lives in dirt and darkness.”⁶ The clergy at this time, because of their position in society and presence in virtually all communities were some of the most important commentators on the local scene.

It was a scene of rapid and unplanned development where the towns and villages had no obvious centres or boundaries. One Victorian visitor in the 1840s wrote that the visitor, “never appears to get out of an interminable village, composed of cottages and very ordinary houses ... interspersed with blazing furnaces, heaps of burning coal in process of coking, piles of iron-stone, calcining forges, pit-banks and engine chimneys.”⁷

A report in the following decade revealed the way in which the landscape was being changed: “The appearance of the country around Wolverhampton, Willenhall and Bilston ... is strange in the extreme. For miles and miles the eye ranges over wide-spreading masses of black rubbish, hills on hills of shale, and mashed and mudded coal dust, extracted from

⁶ Vance (1853), pxi.

⁷ From *The First Report of the Midland Mining Commission*, 1843, quoted in Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p19.

beneath, and masking, as it were, the whole face of nature.”⁸

Another visitor in the 1860s was more excited by what he found. In Bilston he marvelled that “clouds of smoke perpetually hang over it, and the country around by night time is lighted up with lurid flames from the neighbourhood blast and puddling furnaces. The fires from the coking-hearths also occasionally burst forth like mimic volcanoes, and the whole scene in a time of active trade is wonderful and impressive.”⁹

The biographer of Sister Dora who arrived in the Black Country in 1865 to establish an Anglican religious order described Walsall as a place with “forests of chimneys which vomit forth volumes of smoke and fierce tongues of flames, its steaming polluted steams, its rows of red brick houses, beginning inside and out with dirt, crowded with men, women and swarms of blackened people. At night, the blinding glare of blast furnaces, the snorting of engines and the ponderous thud of steam hammers bewilder the senses.”¹⁰ Throughout the Black Country the features of the pre-industrial era were being obliterated, except for the medieval pattern of the roads and the occasional ancient building such as the parish church. The common and open fields were swallowed up by iron-works, or housing, or covered in spoil, and about a fifth of the land was pit-mounds, slag-heaps and water-filled hollows.

There were considerable social as well as environmental costs arising from this hurried

⁸ A journalistic report of 1850 quoted in Philips (1976) pp32-33.

⁹ From Murray’s Handbook for Travellers in Staffordshire, quoted in Millward and Robinson (1971) p98.

¹⁰ Lonsdale (1880) p27.

industrial growth. Not only was the development unplanned, but also the nature of industry in the Black Country had a detrimental effect on the way that people lived. By the 1860s about twenty firms, which were an integration of coal and iron mines, blast furnaces, forges and puddling mills, dominated the district. Much of the work was carried out in small workshops usually close to domestic premises. Specialised work was concentrated on certain localities, such as the locksmiths of Willenhall, the key cutters of Wednesfield and the nail makers of Sedgley, most of whom lived and worked in poor conditions. The arrangement of small workshops made the organising of labour difficult and as a consequence the wages were low. This may account for the lack of political interest. When the Chartists established a headquarters in Bilston during the 1842 Staffordshire Colliers Strike the call for support met with a poor response.¹¹ Towards the end of the century manufacturing was drawn away from the immediate vicinity of domestic premises and into larger workshops, largely for the sake of greater efficiency.

In the towns contemporary accounts refer to a population squeezed into hovels situated off dirty alleyways and courtyards. Stagnant cesspits and heaps of filth were everywhere. Not surprisingly health conditions were very poor, as witnessed by recurring epidemics. In 1832 in Bilston cholera killed 4% of the population and such was the ferocity and infamy of the outbreak that a national appeal raised £8,000 for the victims, in part to provide a school for

¹¹ Page (1968) p303.

the 450 orphans.¹² The clergy, because of their firsthand experience, sense of responsibility and connections, played an important role in assisting those affected and raising national attention to the epidemic. A memorial to the event was placed in St Leonard's Church, Bilston.¹³ The next devastating outbreak was in 1848-9, and again the poor of Bilston were badly affected.

The epidemics heightened the awareness of the ongoing problems, which were regularly reported on by the clergy. One of their main concerns was the lack of education. Because of a ready employment for young people in the local iron and coal industry it was reckoned that in the mid nineteenth century up to a quarter of the children in some Black Country areas was not receiving any education. For example, Bilston with a population of 20,000 in the 1840s had only four day schools. In Wolverhampton the situation was worse, as reported in 1842: "Among all the children and young persons I examined I found, with a few exceptions, that their minds were as stunted as their bodies, their moral feelings stagnant as the nutritive process whereby they should have been built up towards maturity".¹⁴

Baring Gould of St. Mark's Church, Wolverhampton, described what he found when he arrived in 1846: "In this filthy house, where the two bedroom chimneys are stuffed with straw and the windows are never open, are eleven inmates. Crowded into the first small bedroom, on two wretched beds, are the husband and wife, a youth of 16 and three boys aged

¹² Page (1968) p307.

¹³ Mee (1971) p29.

¹⁴ Page (1968) p304.

ten, seven and five. One thin dirty old blanket, two filthy ragged sheets and a tattered quilt are all the bedclothes for both beds. In the other room, covered with rags, sleep two girls aged 17 and 12, a grandmother over 70 and a younger child".¹⁵

However, although the clergy were important in their role of reporting on social conditions, very few of them challenged the social and economic system that had created the situation. More directly the church was in part held responsible for the over crowding. In Wolverhampton the ecclesiastical authorities would not release land for necessary development, a situation that was only relieved after 1869 when the Wolverhampton Corporation was given power to challenge those who blocked social and environmental improvements to the town.¹⁶

There was much comment upon the crime of the Black Country, often attributed to the ubiquitous drunkenness. From the 1850s an extra assize was necessary to deal with the increase in cases brought to court. This was in part due to the growth in population and the increase in property crime, which tended to rise in the periodic slumps of the iron industry.¹⁷

It has been estimated that in the middle of the nineteenth century 90% of the population of the Black Country was working class.¹⁸ Some towns, such as Willenhall, Sedgley and

¹⁵ *The Story of a Century, St. Mark's, Wolverhampton, 1846-1946*, SRO D4970/1/120.

¹⁶ Page (1968) p306.

¹⁷ Philips (1976) p283.

¹⁸ Trainor (1982) p70.

Bilston, were almost entirely working class and so in these communities the small workshop masters, who might employ up to three apprentices, were the social elite. A visitor in 1844 described Willenhall as lacking any civilisation, even though it was only six miles from Wolverhampton. It had no magistrates, no police, no merchants and no large shops. Sedgley was home to only a few middle class families, notably those of the clergy, some teachers and one or two industrialists and shop keepers. Bilston was “almost exclusively inhabited by colliers and ironworkers.”¹⁹ As shall be shown later this had an affect upon both the type and degree of church attendance.

Older towns, which had existed before the industrial development, such as Wolverhampton and Walsall, had recognisable town centres with some civic features and a significant middle class population. Not surprising those with the means chose to live away from the pollution and disease of the workshops. Edward Scott was asked to be Deputy Lieutenant of Staffordshire but declined when he was told that it would mean having to live in the Black Country. He said “it would indeed be a bold man and indifferent to dirt who could venture to settle himself among those cloud-compelling furnaces.”²⁰

In contrast the western suburbs of Wolverhampton provided suitable locations for the homes of the middle class. In 1846 Tettenhall was the setting for “those huge architectural affections, termed ‘country houses’, in which the hardware gentility of Wolverhampton

¹⁹ Philips (1976) p31.

²⁰ Philips (1976) p33.

carries on its evening and Sabbath masquerade, at the convenient distance of a mile and three quarters from the locks, nails and frying pans of the productive emporium".²¹ The wealthiest of the industrialists could afford to move further out into the countryside.

At the top of the social scale in the Staffordshire Black Country was the Legge family, the Earls of Dartmouth.²² They profited greatly from the mineral resources of their estates and lived at Sandwell in West Bromwich in the heart of the industrial area. Up until the 1830s, before the emergence of a significant middle class, the Legges dominated the local political and religious life, and the Church of England in particular benefited from their patronage. After the 1842 strike the Legges had to share their power with other local industrialists, who tended to be non-conformist, and from this point their influence waned. Significantly the family took the decision to abandon their original home in Sandwell in 1853 and moved to the rural estate of Patshull, no doubt driven out by an increase in environmental pollution and social competition. Their interest in West Bromwich was maintained until the First World War, though by then they had become merely 'civic celebrities'. By 1960 they were only a faint memory.

The variety of social structures within the Black Country was significant for the development and life of the churches in the nineteenth century. In places, such as Willenhall, Sedgley and Bilston, where the working class predominated, the church had a weak

²¹ Quoted in Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p49.

²² A description of the Legge family and their social and economic impact in the Black Country can be found in Trainor (1982).

presence. In Wolverhampton and Walsall where the middle class were established the non-conformist churches were relatively strong. In West Bromwich, where landed interest had an influence in an industrial and urban area, the Anglican Church had a definite advantage, not unlike that which it enjoyed in most of the rural areas.²³

In the twentieth century the population changes were less marked. Much of the land was recycled for industry and housing, and the improved transport links enabled people to live further from their place of work. The industrial process was drawn into larger units away from the close proximity to domestic premises. There was a considerable improvement in living conditions, partly due to the increase of local authority housing after the First World War. The influence of the individual industrialist and his family lessened as firms were amalgamated. With a mobile population the social structure of the Black Country became more complex, and the former distinctive nature of working class towns became less prominent. However, the outline and pattern of the urban environment that had arisen in the previous century was to persist. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the distribution and localised strengths of the churches.

²³ Robson (1979 and 2002) outlines the denominational differences across the Black Country.

The Potteries

The other industrial area was in the north of the county and took its name from the main product of the district. The Potteries was a collection of towns and villages including Stoke, Burslem, Hanley, Tunstall, Longton and Fenton. The ancient borough of Newcastle immediately to the west, while not always considered part of the Potteries, was part of this industrial conurbation. Within the area there had been pot making since Roman times, and it was the presence of clay and marls, along with quick burning coal, that engendered the first industrial villages in the area. In 1835 Pigot wrote, “the opulent and interesting district designated 'The Potteries' extends about ten miles in length and one mile and a half in breadth ... abounding with coal, and clays of great variety - which, with the great canal intercourse existing with every part of the kingdom, combine to render it, above all others, the most eligible seat for these ingenious manufactures that have so long made it conspicuous”.²⁴

In the eighteenth century Wedgwood and other pottery manufacturers introduced innovations, which led to a rapid industrialisation. The infrastructure was improved after the opening of the canals in 1777 and the arrival of long-haul railways in 1837, which allowed the import of good quality china clay from the south of England and the export of superior fragile goods. Of crucial importance was the invention of water pumps for the coal pits

²⁴ Pigot (1835) p425

because the north Staffordshire mines had a tendency to flood. A district of isolated moorland settlements was transformed into one of the most compact industrial areas of England, producing coal, iron, bricks and tiles, as well pottery. Chimneys dominated the landscape and at one time there were nearly 3,000 bottle shaped pottery kilns.

Charles Dickens visited Stoke in 1852 and described it as “a picturesque heap of houses, kilns, smoke, wharfs, canals and river, lying (as was most appropriate) in a basin.”²⁵ To another observer at about the same time such an environment had a detrimental effect upon the moral character of the people: “I almost tremble when I contemplate the fearful deficiency of knowledge existing throughout the district, and the consequences likely to result to this increased and increasing population.”²⁶ Over a hundred years later the scene was still grim but the residents more highly regarded, when in 1965 Richard Crossman wrote in his diary, “there is nothing in Stoke except the worst of the industrial revolution and some of the nicest people in the world.”²⁷

In common with the Black Country the development had been haphazard. As a distinct area the Potteries lacked cohesion, caused in part by topography, and reflected in the different social attitudes and outlooks of each individual community. Each district maintained a surprisingly strong sense of isolation from its neighbours. Even the elevation of Stoke-on-Trent to city status in 1925 did little to unify the area, and was fiercely resisted by many.

²⁵ Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p22.

²⁶ Page (1968) p305.

²⁷ Quoted in Whipp (1990) p31.

Newcastle with its ancient roots remained a separate borough. The whole area continued to be seen as a disjointed and deprived industrial conurbation, an impression picked up by Priestley as he passed through in 1934. About the towns of the Potteries he wrote, “there is something so self-contained about them and their secular industry that they convey a most unusual impression of provincial remoteness, an impression heightened by their odd littleness and shabbiness.”²⁸

Life for the poorest was as wretched as it was in the Black Country. Newcastle suffered badly in the cholera epidemic of 1849 and the death rate in the working class areas of the town reached 10%. In a government report of the same year the Irish, who as immigrants had to live in cramped lodging houses, were singled out as part of the problem because “their habits are very filthy and that has tended to produce and disseminate disease when any epidemic has existed in the town.”²⁹ As the majority of the Irish in Newcastle would have been Roman Catholic this prejudice against them had a religious dimension as well.

However, there are interesting differences between the Potteries and the Black Country. The industrialisation in the north was not so rapid as that in the south. The nature of the main industry, based more upon the factory unit and with a cleaner product, encouraged a healthier environment and in the north the death rate was lower than in the south.³⁰

²⁸ Priestley (1934).

²⁹ Briggs (1980) p136.

³⁰ Page (1968) p307.

The skills required of the workers in the pottery industry gave them an advantage. The handcraft activities of pot making persisted longer than in other industries and the workers were able to resist the implementation of machinery until the 1870s when it became necessary because of foreign competition. This mechanisation created new employment opportunities for women and children, and as a consequence they received better wages than these groups in the Black Country.³¹ In the Potteries job security was relatively high as was loyalty within families to firms and it was not uncommon to find a whole family employed at various tasks within the same factory. The social difference in the small and medium factories between the workers and the masters were said to be small.³² However, when the workforce were aggrieved they were easily organised, as for example during the Chartist riots of 1842.³³

The history of Burslem is typical of the area. Situated at an altitude of over 700 feet this small town experienced an explosion of growth after the canal arrived in 1777. The rich coal seams under the village also contained Etrurian Marl, the basic material for brick and tile manufacture. Pottery works were set up in the middle of town, amidst the houses, next to the market place and around the parish church and graveyard. A new suburb sprung up called Longport at the canal basin, and a new church was erected in 1831 with the help of a government grant to serve the mushrooming population. Another church was built in 1841 for the new suburb of Cobridge. Evidence of the rapid rise in population in Burslem was the three

³¹ Page (1968) p308.

³² Whipp (1990) p23.

³³ See Fyson, R., 'The Crisis of 1842', in Epstein and Thompson (1982).

extensions made to the graveyard of the parish church in 70 years. Pigot in 1835 was fairly complimentary: “The town is pleasantly situated on a rising ground, and contains many admirably arranged manufactories, numerous dwellings for the workmen employed therein, many good houses for the superintendents of the works, and some handsome edifices for the proprietors.”³⁴ The blocks of bright red terrace houses, set amongst the dark-blue pavements of Etrurian Marl, were colourfully recalled by Arnold Bennett in his novel *Clayhanger*: “In front, on a little hill in the vast valley, was spread out the Indian-red architecture of Bursley - tall chimneys and rounded ovens, schools, the new scarlet market, the grey tower of the old church, the high spire of the evangelical church, the low spire of the church of genuflections, and the crimson chapels, and rows of little red houses with amber chimney-pots, and the gold angel of the blackened Town Hall topping the whole. The sedate reddish browns and reds of the composition, all netted in flowing scarves of smoke, harmonized exquisitely with the chill blues of the chequered sky. Beauty was achieved, and none saw it .”³⁵

In the last four decades of the nineteenth century the development in Burslem was less rapid and some of the buildings reflect a town that had matured. The Wedgwood Institute built in the 1860s included a museum, gallery, library and lecture rooms. A social division in the housing had emerged, as the manufacturers and professionals moved to the middle-class suburbs on the outskirts of the town. By 1901 the population of Burslem was 40,000 but had only increased by another 5,000 by 1960. In the twentieth century the population of the

³⁴ Pigot (1835) p426.

³⁵ Bennett (1910) p5.

central area of the town decreased as many of the smaller older houses, termed 'slums', were demolished and new housing estates on the edge of the town were built to accommodate the transferred population.

Within the Potteries there was not the phenomenon of large working class towns as found in the Black Country. The industrialists had a closer working relationship to their workforce, and thus a greater influence in their local communities. Paternalism was strong in the pottery industry and firms were run as family concerns, with presentations to workers to mark marriages, promotions and retirements. In the 1920s many firms had rest and health clubs and welfare institutions. As a consequence the religious affiliation of the employer was significant, at least in the early years, and because most of the manufacturers were not Anglican this helped to produce strong pockets of Non-conformity in the Potteries.³⁶ For instance, members of the pottery manufacturing Ridgway family of Shelton were strong Methodists and were very keen to link their religious and industrial endeavours.³⁷

In some urban areas the manufacturers were the community leaders and were fulfilling the same paternalistic role as the landed gentry did in the rural areas. There were families that were influential in both the urban and rural context. The most important of these was the Gower-Leveson family, Dukes of Sutherland, although they had less of a stake in the industrial development than the Legge family of the West Bromwich. In the same way they

³⁶ Whipp (1990) p128.

³⁷ For an account of this influence see Briggs (1988).

withdrew from the area and demolished their family seat of Trentham Hall in 1911 on account of the pollution of the River Trent. Thus their role in local society, and the support that they could give to the Church of England, was lessened, which helped to bolster up the Non-conformity of the Potteries at that time.³⁸

In the twentieth century all paternalistic relationships were to decrease, both that of landed families and pottery manufacturers. The influence of the latter was reduced particularly after the pottery industry suffered a slump in the twentieth century. Alongside the change in the employers' role and the greater social independence of the workers, the strength of the churches began to wane. To a large extent what took the place of ecclesiastical involvement were the unions and the Labour Party.

The Rural Areas

The third part of Staffordshire consists of the rural areas of the central agricultural districts around Stafford and Lichfield, and the large stretch of upland moors in the northeast. The latter is an area of some natural beauty earning the title 'Switzerland of England' in Victorian tour guides and later becoming part of the Peak National Park. Pigot in 1835 was less inspired by the landscape: "The northern part, called 'the Moorlands' is hilly, and is a

³⁸ The influence of the Gower-Leveson family is outlined in Richards (1981).

bleak, and dreary tract - the soil thin, and yielding but a scanty pasture".³⁹ These rural areas presented a strong contrast to the industrial urbanised conurbations of the south and north. However, no part of Staffordshire, even though it might be sparsely populated, was very remote from a large town.

During the period agricultural development in Staffordshire kept pace with the advances in industry. Noted for its backward agricultural practices in 1796 the county took huge strides in modernisation in the nineteenth century through widespread enclosure. Between 1796 and 1869 pastoral land increased from 100,000 acres to 340,000 acres.⁴⁰ Piggott referred to the fertile lowlands: "The valley along the Trent is mostly very fertile, adorned with seats and plantations, and affords a variety of beautiful prospects ... the dairy has become a source of considerable profit, and much good cheese and butter are made in that district".⁴¹

Improvements in agriculture were encouraged by the proximity of the burgeoning urban areas that were a ready market for the wool, meat and dairy produce of the farms. Staffordshire became noted for its great variety of agricultural activity and productivity.⁴² Apart from the towns within the county there were just beyond the boundaries the regional cities of Birmingham and Manchester, as well as Sheffield, Nottingham, and Derby. Some rural communities were also involved in the provision of primary materials, in particular

³⁹ Pigot (1835) p389.

⁴⁰ Page (1968) pp293-5.

⁴¹ Pigot (1835) p389.

⁴² Caird (1968), p233.

coal, iron, lead, copper and limestone. As a result wages in the rural areas of Staffordshire were kept relatively high.⁴³

The pattern of settlement in rural Staffordshire had an effect upon the influence of the church. In the sparsely populated moorland area in the north around Leek the clergy often found themselves serving isolated hamlets scattered widely across a parish. The process of creating geographically smaller parish units was slow because there was not the population nor the financial resources to support new parishes. In consequence the Nonconformists did better because they were able to set up an outpost in a hamlet some distance from a parish church, and if the chapel was run efficiently, as such places could be, it would suit the social structure of self-reliance and independence found in many isolated rural communities. In rural areas, and in particular in the lowland district south of Lichfield, the pattern of settlement was similar to that found in the south of England. Here the strength of the Church of England was more apparent because in many of these parishes the landowners predominated and in the course of the nineteenth century enhanced their position, often in mutual benefit with the clergy. Nonconformists were sometimes forcibly excluded when they could not purchase land in the parish on which to build a chapel. The closed or estate villages provided the examples of where the parson model of ministry worked best. The only exception was where the principal landowner was not Anglican, as for instance for a time in the village of Alton, which was dominated by the Earls of Shrewsbury. With the fall in the

⁴³ Page (1968) p295.

power of landed wealth, in reality from the 1870s when agricultural profits fell and symbolically fifty years later when the large estates were broken up, the clergy lost a powerful ally.

Within the rural areas some of the larger towns became industrialised though usually with a link to agriculture. Stafford, surpassed in the nineteenth century in population and importance by other towns in Staffordshire, had little of the glamour of a county town and was noted for its footwear manufacture. Charles Dickens on a visit in 1852 described it, “as dull and dead a town as anyone could desire not to see”, and he renamed ‘The Swan’, where he was stayed, ‘The Dodo’.⁴⁴ In Stone the main local industry was also boot and shoe manufacture, Cannock was dominated by coal mining, Cheadle by textiles factories and coal mining, Uttoxeter by the manufacture of agricultural machinery, Rugeley, spurred on by the arrival of the railways, was famous for hat making, Leek involved in the silk trade, and Burton on Trent recognised throughout the world for its beer.

Within the towns there was a social mix arising from the new industrial activity. With the benefit of improved transport links to the cities some of these towns underwent a renaissance in the second half of the nineteenth century. The industrialists and traders were likely to take on civic responsibilities and community leadership, and because many of them were not Anglican this tended to strengthen the Nonconformist presence in these places.

⁴⁴ Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p22.

The rural areas around the towns were also to prosper up until the agricultural depression of the 1870s. It was here that the traditional elite of the landed gentry managed to maintain their unassailable position. The social structure of the countryside underwent significant changes as agriculture went into depression, land values fell, and the work became more automated. The population in the rural areas peaked around the third quarter of the nineteenth century, so that by 1960 it was in many villages similar to what it had been in 1830. One of the most dramatic changes was the break up of the large estates after the First World War, a change that symbolised the decline of landed interest. By end of the period the improvements in road transport were beginning to accelerate the changes and ensure that no part of Staffordshire however rural was much more than half an hour's drive from a major town or city.

The Clergy

The deployment pattern of clergy in Staffordshire reflected the social and economic environment. In the urban areas of the north and the south church attendance was generally lower than the rural areas, although there are some significant exceptions.⁴⁵ The Church of England was strongest in the urban context in the established towns such as Wolverhampton, Walsall, Stoke on Trent and Newcastle where the large parish church had better resources and a civic role. The Nonconformists did better in some areas of the Potteries, probably

⁴⁵ More details of these exceptions will be detailed in chapter four; also see Robson (1979 and 2002).

encouraged by sympathetic industrialists and a social structure independent of the Church of England. Primitive Methodism was strongest where Wesleyan Methodists and Anglicans were weakest.⁴⁶ Roman Catholics had their strongholds in urban areas such as Wolverhampton and in certain estate villages, due to the effects of Irish immigration and the influence of Roman Catholic landowners. In particular places, notably the quickly established communities on the fringes of the industrial conurbations and the sparsely populated rural areas, the church did not attract high attendance and the ministers of any denomination had a less significant role to play in the community than elsewhere in the county.

Where the other churches were strong the Anglican clergy faced stiff competition and were unable to adopt a parson model of ministry that depended on a monopoly of pastoral care. As will be discussed later, much depended on the size of the parish population and only in rural areas and in one or two town centres were such sizes low enough to enable the parson model to be fully implemented. The complex social situation that emerged in the Staffordshire towns of the nineteenth century, brought on by rapid industrialisation, encouraged a more competitive church life where denominations vied with each other and with other institutions. The weakening of the link with the tithe and other traditional ways of ecclesiastical finance forced the clergy of the Church of England to depend more on congregational support. Such features, which were more apparent in the urban parishes,

⁴⁶ See Johnson (1989).

encouraged the adoption of the professional model of ministry. These changes may be evidence of a growing secularisation, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

THE CATALYSTS

The debate about the place of religion in society perennially engages the minds of historians, sociologists and theologians, as they grapple with the important theme of secularisation. Much has been written about the emergence of secular thought and practice, and there is no agreement as to when and where secularisation began and how it has been manifest. Harvey Cox's *Secular City* first published in the 1960s introduced the idea of secularisation to a wide audience, and the debate was taken up by two of the main proponents of the theory, Bryan Wilson and Peter Berger.¹ Although Berger has revised his theory taking into account the persistence of religious institutions in the USA and Wilson has maintained his view over the last thirty years, together they have helped to establish secularisation as an accepted historical process. Wilson has found support in the work of Steve Bruce, who maintains that individualism and diversity have resulted in the decline of religion, as evidenced in every statistic about the church.² The USA is an exception because religion acts as a 'cultural defence' in a multi-ethnic society, which because it is less centralised allows religious sub-cultures to develop. Jeffrey Cox disliked the word 'secularisation' and preferred 'religious decline', and was critical of Wilson and Bruce for their deterministic theories. He claimed that there is not enough evidence to suggest that such trends are not irreversible, and that the

¹ Cox (1964), Wilson (1966) and Berger (1967 and 1969).

² Bruce (1992 and 1996).

secularisation has followed or will follow any predictable pattern. He drew on the USA-Europe comparison and questioned whether church decline is linked to a dependence upon the state and an inability to sell itself. ³ More complex theories have been put forward by David Martin and Grace Davie. ⁴ Martin rejected the view that secularisation is a straightforward and inevitable process and Davie argued that the historical background to religion in Europe, where there has been an association of the church with power, meant that Europe rather than the USA is the exception. Religion persists in Europe even though the church may seem to decline, and the greater individual choice made possible by diversity allows individuals to choose religion and remain in contact with some of the traditional practices and beliefs.

The relevance of the secularisation debate is as strong as ever because of the perceived decline of the church. This decline is backed by considerable evidence, and so the debate is concerned with the reasons, the nature and the projection of decline. ⁵ On the one hand, there is the view that the progress of secularisation has been along a linear projection, reaching its culmination in the present age. Conversely, secularisation is seen as part of a cyclical pattern with waves of intensity periodically detected throughout history. Whether linear or cyclical the effects of secularisation can be seen at the national, the local and the personal levels, although within the evidence there is considerable scope for interpretation. It is likely that the debate will continue as long as society has a place for any kind of religious expression.

³ Cox (1982).

⁴ Martin (1978 and 1997) and Davie (1994 and 2000).

⁵ Currie, Gilbert and Horsley (1977).

It is important to distinguish between secularisation and the decline of the institutional church. However, those who defend the notion of linear secularisation are most eager to highlight the signs of a shrinking church. Bruce defines secularisation as “the shift from institutional religion to some amorphous supernaturalism”.⁶ This decline, in as much as it can be measured in terms of the two indices of church adherence and the societal role of the ordained ministry, is undeniable. The pattern is consistent even though there is variety between the denominations: Anglicans began to experience falling attendance and the reduction of ordinations in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Methodists following some 25 years later and Roman Catholics sustaining their numbers until the middle of the twentieth century.

The danger of a concentration upon these two indices of church attendance and ministerial role is to ignore many of the other forms of religious expression by individuals and groups of people in society. Neither attendance at worship, nor ordination, is a guarantee of a person’s spiritual interest, and there have always been other reasons and motives for such expressions of commitment. However, recognising the limitations of the focus upon just two indices, an investigation of the patterns of church adherence and ordained ministerial roles will add to the study of the church in society and enhance the wider debate about secularisation.

Accepting that there was a general decline of the church from 1830 to 1960, there have been several attempts to explain the causes. The classic reason, as put forward by Gilbert, is

⁶ Bruce (1996) p59.

industrialisation.⁷ At the basic level, reliance upon land and the rhythm of the seasons had been interwoven with the culture of the traditional church. The estrangement from the traditional way of life meant a divorce from the traditional church. Technological advances weakened the sense of dependence upon God.⁸ However, some churches attracted those associated with the new ways of production who had benefited from the new social structure. For instance, the Methodists flourished in an environment of new wealth based not on traditional livelihoods such as agriculture but on business enterprise and industrial manufacture.⁹ The communities that quickly grew up in the new industrial areas needed a focus of stability and respectability, which would be provided by religious affiliation. Where the sacred has a social role to play, such as in what Bruce terms 'cultural defence' and 'cultural transition', religious expression will be recognised and valued.¹⁰ The Church of England with its associations with the economic order founded on land and the structure of a hierarchical society was likely to suffer a decline at the beginning of the industrial era. Thus Gilbert can explain the apparent success of the Nonconformist denominations as revealed in the general conclusions of the 1851 Religious Census.

Gilbert argues that it was after the 1840s that the process of industrialisation resulted in the creation of large urban areas where new communities did not have traditional social structures. He paints a bleak picture of Christendom in retreat in the face of secular progress, with Nonconformists being the most successful in impeding the inevitable. In due course even

⁷ Gilbert (1976 and 1980).

⁸ Bruce (1996) p38.

⁹ Hempton (1996a) p28.

¹⁰ Bruce (1996) pp96-8, Jenkins (1975).

they were unable to flourish in the godless industrial landscape, having been forsaken by the working classes.¹¹

Modern commentators still accept the validity of the theory that industrialisation caused secularisation.¹² However, those who have found that industrialisation after the 1840s actually encouraged church growth have contested this view in its detail. Wickham in his classic study of the church in Sheffield discovered an expansion in religion after 1850, which was due to economic prosperity.¹³ The study by Smith of Lancashire churches reveals the way that industrialisation benefited the religious institutions in the nineteenth century.¹⁴ Furthermore in the Black Country Robson found that churches in some industrial areas attracted greater support from the local population than those in some adjacent rural areas.¹⁵ Studies of other Western societies also seem to deny a direct connection between the processes of industrialisation and urbanization and church decline.¹⁶ As has already been mentioned many commentators have raised the case of the USA where a modern industrial society would seem to defy the spread of secularisation. Other critics of the industrialisation theory point to evidence that secularisation was present in the medieval era, if not before. Percy, in a spirited critique of secularisation theories, contends that the English have always had a 'semi-secular' spiritual identity.¹⁷ The change in the nature and balance of the spiritual and secular roles of the church, brought about by industrialisation, have led to the confusion over the place of

¹¹ However, Field (1977) argues that the Middle Class did not dominate Methodism until the twentieth century.

¹² Atherton (2000) p39.

¹³ Wickham (1957).

¹⁴ Smith (1994).

¹⁵ Robson (1979).

¹⁶ McLeod (2000).

¹⁷ Percy (2001).

religion in English society. In any case industrialisation and urbanisation provided an environment where new ideas and practices, including religious ones, could easily spread.¹⁸ It has been noted that manufacturing sometimes promoted a degree of paternalism, which can enhance church attendance, as found in the Potteries.¹⁹ This study will show that industrialisation and urbanisation had an important effect on the church, though not always in the same way nor to the same degree in each place.

Such changes have affected the role of the church. By the end of the nineteenth century the state had taken over most of the functions of the church, especially in education, a change that was detrimental to the Church of England most of all. Local government became secular and the geographical unit of the parish of little relevance outside ecclesiastical legislation. The church was losing its hold on many local activities, unable to adjust to communities with large populations. Smith's analysis of religious practice in the smaller communities of Saddleworth contrasts with the failure of the church to engage with the urban population of adjacent Manchester.²⁰ Where the urban community had a strong identity as in urban villages, which exist in some city suburbs, the church fared better.²¹ Generally, it was the growing complexity of society with a focus on a large scale that caused a decline in church influence, and this could be regarded as secularisation. Cox suggested that it was the last decade of the nineteenth century when this process brought about the change in society, as does Morris in his work on the church and local government in Croydon, and much of the evidence in this

¹⁸ Percy (2001) cites as examples the modern urban societies of Korea and Indonesia.

¹⁹ Briggs (1988), see also Page (1968) p313. Joyce (1980) pp140-141, sees paternalism as declining by the 1880s, while Yeo (1976) argues that was a common feature of many communities until the First World War.

²⁰ Smith (1994) and Ford (1997).

²¹ Wilson (1982) p154.

study would suggest that his timing is about right.²²

Durkheim's theory of 'structural differentiation' shows how when an economy develops there is a greater specialisation of roles. This would mean that many of the functions that were the preserve of the clergy are taken over by other agencies, which may be better equipped for the task. This leads to the reduction of the scope of the work of the clergy, who become more specialised at the religious tasks. A consequence is that the relationship of the clergy to the wider community is more clearly defined and narrower than before, a pattern that does emerge in this study. The parson whose roles are various and all encompassing gives way to the clergyman who functions as a religious professional.²³

The period of this study ends in 1960 because this marks the end of an era in the history of the Church of England. In some ways it is a high point with the post-war confirmation boom, and a degree of optimism that prosperity would encourage the working classes to join the church. In reality it was the point at about which the old system of church finance and deployment could no longer be sustained, and the inevitable reforms would significantly change the church. Up until 1960 the parson ministry based in a small parish was still conceivable, if a little unrealistic. By 1970, after many parish amalgamations, it would no longer be possible except where the old model persisted through the tenacity of clergy unwilling to be moved on. At about the same time Brown argues that secularisation made a breakthrough in society, and

²² Cox (1982); Morris (1992).

²³ Durkheim (1971).

his time scale is consistent with this thesis.²⁴ His focus on gender highlights the significance of women in the church, which, as this study shows, was increasing from the mid nineteenth century. By 1960 women were in such a position that the withdrawal of their support would seriously weaken the church.

Other factors that have been noted include the mobility of the population, how long a community has been established, the origin of immigrants, the nature of the local industry, and the local class structure. Some have referred to the influence of local crises and epidemics, though such an influence is usually short-lived and not easy to determine.²⁵ Some have focussed upon an intellectual cause, which can be traced back to the Enlightenment or the Reformation, when a crucial break was made with former dominant philosophies.²⁶ It is generally accepted that these new intellectual movements have been around for some considerable time, but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there were clashes in two particular areas.²⁷ The first was in the debate about creation and evolution, typified in the Darwinian controversies of the 1850s, although the fierceness and extent of this debate has been over emphasised. When Max Weber declared in 1919 “science today is irreligious” he was commenting on an acrimonious relationship that had lasted fifty years.²⁸ However, not all scientists were as antagonistic as Huxley, neither in his time nor since. Some have contended that science has encouraged religious expression since its development over the last two

²⁴ Brown (2001).

²⁵ Gilbert (1976) put forward the illness argument but Robson (1979) noted that the Cholera outbreaks in the Black Country did not seem to influence church attendance.

²⁶ Chadwick (1975).

²⁷ Habgood (1983) pp17-19.

²⁸ Weber (1948) p142.

centuries has been accompanied by religious freedom.²⁹ The second intellectual development centred on biblical criticism and the content of doctrinal belief. This led to some infamous conflicts within the church, but in time, most of what had been regarded as beyond the norm became accepted. The challenge of some art and literature towards the end of the nineteenth century was part of the intellectual attack upon the dignity of the church. Ernest Pontifex portrayed in Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* personifies in his religious doubt the secularisation of the nineteenth century. Popular authors, such as Trollope, Dickens and Shaw played their part in exposing the hypocrisy of ordained ministers and such were probably as important as Darwin in the process of the readjustment of the role of the church with middle class society.³⁰

At the same time there was a subtle challenge to the moral authority of the church. Committed members found it difficult to reconcile their personal views with the church pronouncements, increasingly so from the end of the nineteenth century. The widespread private acceptance of birth control, abortion and divorce in the face of strong ecclesiastical disapproval has been most damaging to those churches with a conservative ethical code. The impact on the Roman Catholic Church has been catastrophic and perhaps this was a major cause for its decline in the second half of the twentieth century.³¹ The role of the clergy as representatives of an institution and promoters of religious belief at the local level has been vital in this development. On the one hand they were expected to uphold traditional doctrines and on the

²⁹ Turner (1997) describes this theory as a sub-plot in his account of the relationship between science and liberty.

³⁰ Hempton (1996a) pp131-5.

³¹ Atherton (2000) p40.

other were often criticised and ridiculed for not adjusting to modern society. It is in the person of the clergy more than anywhere else that the impossibility of maintaining an institution and revealing truth is most painfully evident.

However, the persistence of supernatural belief even amongst the educated members of society discounts the power of the intellectual advance to banish all religious influences. Bruce argues that the decline in religion is primarily a sociological phenomenon and that people are essentially irrational: “There are too many examples of people believing the most dreadful nonsense”.³² What seems to have changed is not private belief, which in any case is very hard to monitor, but rather the validity of the collective expression of belief in its influence on the individual. This has led to a dichotomy between practice and theology, which in itself is damaging to the church.³³

It is hard to judge how the intellectual debate affected church attendance, although it has been shown that as the middle class became better educated they were less likely to attend, as observed by McLeod in his study of the wealthier suburbs in the late nineteenth century.³⁴ On the whole church going throughout the period remained a middle class activity, although fewer middle class families fulfilled their Sunday obligation particularly after 1890.³⁵ If the working class were never great attenders of church at any point in this period, an issue about which there is still much debate, it is difficult to assess the impact of the intellectual debate on

³² Bruce (1996) p38.

³³ Gill (1988) p5-7.

³⁴ McLeod (1974),

³⁵ McLeod (2000) p179.

the majority of the population.³⁶ Zweig in his study of factory workers in the 1950s found that the vast majority did not regularly attend church but did profess to have a faith in God and in many cases engaged in some form of prayer.³⁷

The fall in the educational standards of the clergy, as shall be reported later in chapter five, is perhaps one of the most obvious symptoms of the intellectual crisis, although it needs to be recognised that attending a university in the nineteenth century often had as much to do with social background as educational attainment. Indeed, the clergy have been the focus for contradictory theories about secularisation. On the one hand, the refusal of some clergy to take up advances in theological thought, and on the other, the eagerness of some to do so, are both considered signs of decline. Some have argued that although the different denominations of the church are witnesses to a rich theological, liturgical and institutional variety, it is precisely because the church cannot accept new ideas that secularisation has made headway. The narrowness of exclusive views weakened the structure of the church and its relationship to society, and has led to decline.³⁸

Another major change in society was the growth of ‘individualism’, which was made all the more possible in reality by the material advances of the Industrial Revolution. Bruce regards individualism as the main catalyst of secularisation, particularly in the two periods of the

³⁶ See McLeod (1993); there were many local variations, see Robson (1979).

³⁷ Zweig (1961) pp146-8.

³⁸ Avis (2001) p77, targets Evangelicalism as detrimental to church structure and fostering a dangerous sectarianism.

second half of the nineteenth century and the aftermath of the Second World War.³⁹ In a society with new opportunities and new wealth individual people could choose to break with convention without suffering serious personal consequences. The challenge to the collective belief and practice was insurmountable. Nonconformity benefited initially from the rise of individualism; socially it provided an alternative to the established conventional religion and added to the consumer choice of where to worship; theologically it enshrined individualism in the beliefs of personal holiness and personal salvation. Cox describes how the religious liberty of the individual was engendered by the voluntarist principle and created a boom for evangelical churches.⁴⁰ The Church of England in its traditional community role could not hope to compete, although the Anglican theological movements of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as Anglo-Catholicism and Liberal Evangelicalism, can be seen in part as a response to the growth of individualism.

In the way that individualism can lead to the privatisation of religion it was detrimental to all churches, because churches depend upon the collective life. It allowed individuals to break away from old mores and expectations. Paradoxically whole groups within society might enjoy this new freedom for the individual.⁴¹ The decline of the English Sunday, from its Sabbatarian heyday of the 1850s, with the introduction of Sunday sports and entertainment, was an expression of this new freedom. The church sought to control the expansion of leisure and to use it as a means of evangelism through the establishment of its own clubs and

³⁹ Bruce (1996).

⁴⁰ Cox (1997).

⁴¹ It is recognised that secularisation may have affected different groups within society in different ways, which can confuse the evidence of decline, see Green (1996) pp12-14.

societies.⁴² Some in the church had campaigned for the relaxation of Sunday regulations because the absence of wholesome activities was an excuse for laziness and drunkenness.⁴³ However, it is the competition of leisure activities, from the bicycle to the television, which has been cited as a reason for church decline.⁴⁴ Such activities need not indicate a lack of religious belief, any more than the low rates of church attendance, which was the feature of most working class communities throughout the period.

Brown highlights another example of individualism affecting the church, part of the fresh appraisal of the role of women in society.⁴⁵ The later secularisation of women has been accounted for by their late introduction to the Industrial revolution.⁴⁶ Brown suggests that the liberation of women from the role of the providers and sustainers of religion led to emancipation expressed forcibly in the popular culture of the 1960s. Whereas the working classes may have not attended church very frequently there was still adherence to the institution through the women's support of the Sunday schools, the use of the occasional offices and the enforcement of the moral influence of the church.

The emergence of class in this period may have had a significant influence on the role of clergy, particularly an Established Church such as the Church of England, which professes to relate to all people in every community. Where a new structure of society arises and communities become divided in terms of class the clergy face an impossible task in serving

⁴² See the study of Bristol in Meller (1976).

⁴³ Walvin (1978).

⁴⁴ A modern example is Drane (2000) pp2-7.

⁴⁵ Brown (2001), other important studies include Davidoff and Hall (1987), Prochaska (1980) and Harris (1999).

⁴⁶ For an example from France see Smith (1981).

and representing the whole population. Class consciousness was not necessarily stronger in urban areas, but where traditional forms of social control were no longer possible, where people lived and worked in more class defined localities, and where in certain industries where workers had a strong and organised identity, the relationship between classes was deeply affected. In such industrialised and urbanised areas the church would seem to have been less successful and the clergy found it more difficult to relate to the whole community.⁴⁷

The industrialisation of society and the rise of new ways of looking at the world and ourselves as individuals have led to the creation of a new society. It is a society marked by innovation and pluralism, both characteristics the church has found difficult to accommodate. As an institution with a long history, and legitimatised by certain key historical events, the church necessarily is the guardian of tradition. As such it is subject to a mausoleum tendency; in the popular mind its 'curates' have become 'curators'. This is a role the church finds both natural and inevitable. In the ever-changing world which society has experienced since the Industrial Revolution there is a need for a nostalgic institution that looks to the past. It need not be a vibrant body and certainly not one that tries to capture the spirit of the present age. For example, it is well known that church buildings have been more important to many people than clergy.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ For a fuller discussion of the class issue see Perkin (1969 and 1981), Best (1971), Hobsbawm (1975 and 1984) and Harrison (1991).

⁴⁸ Chapter five will show how it was easier to raise finance for the upkeep of church buildings rather than clergy stipends.

Furthermore, the church as the preserver of truth, as supremely revealed in an historical person whose revelation can never be improved upon, only better understood, can find it hard to accept the pluralism of modern society. Avis, as a committed ecumenist, claims that the church's inability to find reconciliation between the denominations has been detrimental to its mission in society and therefore hastened its decline.⁴⁹ Others have seen ecumenism as a symptom as well as a cause of decline.⁵⁰ Some would claim the need to withdraw from society in order to preserve the Christian truth, as shown in the studies of the tendency for churches to move from denomination to sect over the last century.⁵¹ Withdrawal of another form, that is the concentration upon internal church issues, is symptomatic of an institution that has lost its courage to speak to and on behalf of the nation. The primacy of Archbishop Fisher in the fifteen years after the Second World War was noted for its Church Assembly sessions dedicated to the review of canon law. When the leaders of the church did seek to address the nation it was more often than not on issues of personal morality. Gill makes a similar point when he says that by lobbying for certain causes the church has given up its important role of addressing the totality of human existence.⁵² Atherton claims that synodical government and diocesan centralisation, often celebrated as two of the great Victorian reforms of the church, have led to the exclusion of the ordinary people and therefore the marginalisation of the church.⁵³

The monopoly of the church, taken for granted in particular by the Church of England, was

⁴⁹ Avis (2001) p84-5.

⁵⁰ Wilson (1966) p176, and more recently Hastings (1991) pp669-670.

⁵¹ Gilbert (1980), Knight (1995) and Bruce (1996).

⁵² Gill (1988) pp20-1.

⁵³ Atherton (2000) p41.

comprehensively broken in the nineteenth century. In an era of competition the church can be accused of complacency.⁵⁴ Although most apparent within the Church of England, this tendency was encouraged by the relative success of the Methodist Church in the nineteenth century and the Romans Catholics in the twentieth century. A sense of security bolstered by occasional and localised revival and growth was proved to be false in the subsequent experience of decline. The church had to do more than simply provide more church buildings and wait for the people to flock in.⁵⁵

Pluralism gives credence to other faiths and philosophies so that the truth itself can be seriously compromised by relativism. What Durkheim termed 'differentiation' has become a major feature of society and the complexity of rival institutions has sapped away the strength of any who claim a unique and supreme role.⁵⁶ Rivals of practice and agency have mirrored the competing ideologies. Starting with the economic and the political, the church has steadily lost control of many areas of life. Bruce terms this process 'fragmentation'.⁵⁷ Most keenly felt by the Church of England has been the rise of both public and private providers of health, education and local administration. Some claim that the state control of schools has been detrimental to the influence of the church.⁵⁸ Others have noted the decline of all institutions in English society, particularly since World War Two.⁵⁹ If this were the case the church would need to see such institutions not as competitors or even usurpers of its position, but other bodies undergoing similar problems.

⁵⁴ McLeod (2000) p9-10.

⁵⁵ This point is stressed in Gill (1983).

⁵⁶ Durkheim (1971).

⁵⁷ Bruce (1996) p39.

⁵⁸ Drane (2000) pp2-7.

⁵⁹ Davie (1994).

Political movements would seem to have had less of an impact on church life in England than in other parts of Western Europe.⁶⁰ The Church of England suffered from a close association with the ruling elite, particularly in the agricultural disturbances of the 1830s and 1870s. The Anglican 'squire' as Justice of the Peace and leader of the local militia in times of revolt is a popular caricature. Methodist support for the workers in the 'The Revolt of the Field' in the 1870s was significant but as by that time most people lived in the towns and cities social unrest in the countryside had less of a national impact. The link between Methodist and political radicalism is not as straightforward as has been claimed.⁶¹

It has to be noted that many commentators have concentrated upon what might be termed the symptoms of change rather than the causes. There is a dialectic relationship between certain features of the life of the church over the last two centuries. For example, the fall in the educational standards of the clergy can be regarded as a symptom of a church being marginalized in a society where educational qualifications were increasingly highly valued. Some would claim it as a cause as it led to poorly served congregations and the deteriorating image of the clergy. In the same way church decline has been attributed to corrupt and incompetent clergy, as evidenced in the non-residency of the early nineteenth century, or the lack of faith of clergy in the twentieth century.⁶² The pew rents demanded by materialistic clergy and the poor standard of preaching that they gave in return are regarded as reasons for church decline.⁶³ Although a popular movement of anti-clericalism has never been apparent to any great extent in England, the clergy have been a target of blame for many

⁶⁰ McLeod (2000) pp190-191.

⁶¹ Hempton (1996a) p27.

⁶² Bruce (1996) and Drane (2000).

⁶³ Hempton (1996a) pp122-124.

commentators.⁶⁴ However, there is no evidence that the decline of the church is linked directly to the 'quality' of the clergy. There is a danger of giving the clergy a greater prominence in the changing of society than is justified and so ignoring the major themes upon which the development of secularisation depended.

In the ongoing debate about secularisation, its causes and consequences, and in particular the way it relates to the role of the clergy in the communities and thus the influence of the church, I would like to offer two particular aspects of nineteenth and twentieth society, one geographic and the other economic. Although neither alone nor together were these of paramount significance they are worth greater consideration than they have hitherto received. These factors will show that the structure of society and the place of the church within that structure determined the development of secularisation, and that the pivotal point was reached in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the decline of the institution meant that the parson ministry, which was a counterblast to secularisation, could no longer be sustained in most parishes. From 1830 and before other bodies and authorities took on roles that once belonged exclusively to the church but by 1900 the balance had manifestly tipped away from the Church of England. Durkheim's 'structural differentiation' and Bruce's theory of diversity provide important explanations for the development of secularisation. This study will show that the influence of the church was to continue, even just as a powerful memory as Davie contends, and the parson model endured, at least as an ideal, until the 1960s, when it seems that a significant burst of secularisation occurred, as Brown suggests. It was by then that the social and economic basis of the parson ministry was almost universally impractical.

⁶⁴ Aston and Cragoe (2001) and also Lee (2006) who particularly relates anti-clericalism to

This study supports the point of Jeffrey Cox and others that secularisation is not necessarily an inevitable historical process. Contrary to Gilbert, Atherton and others, industrialisation and urbanisation do not by themselves make a society more secular, as shown by the historical examples provided by Smith and Robson, and the modern instances referred to by Percy. Other factors have to be significant, chiefly the response of the church to the new societal structures. The Church of England, despite its periods of reform, seemed to be unable or unwilling to adjust to a new context for parish ministry because it was too wedded to the social and economic structures of the past. This was probably more significant than the intellectual crisis that it faced. Individualism, as suggested by Bruce and others, is an important factor particularly with regard to those churches, such as the Church of England, that depended upon the communal model.

This study highlights two particular issues, one geographic and one financial. The first is the population size of the community in relation to the deployment of resident clergy, and the second is the source of funding and the amount of wealth enjoyed by these clergy. Each of these aspects will be considered in detail and I hope to show how secularisation, in as much as it manifested itself in the decline of the institutional church, was reinforced and encouraged by these two features in the society that made Staffordshire, 1830-1960.

Chapter Four

PARISH POPULATION

The Anglican clergyman as minister of the Established Church had a responsibility for the people of a geographical area known as the ecclesiastical parish, and these parishes varied widely in size and population. Different observers have noted how the size of the parish had an effect upon the influence of the church, and thus the ministry of the clergy.¹ This chapter investigates the extent and the pattern of this effect.

At the one extreme, within a small community, whether urban or rural, the prime focus of life was the church. In many such parishes the clergyman was the benign presence living at the heart of the community, involved to some extent in most people's life. His function was not just to lead worship in the church and administer to the pastoral needs of the congregation. He recorded the births, marriages and deaths of the whole population. He was in some places a landlord and a farmer, with a social significance enhanced by family connections and by wealth. The parsonage may have been one of the largest houses in the community, sometimes the grandest in the parish. The tasks of the clergyman were many: he may have taught the children in the school, dispensed medicine to the sick, offered advice on legal matters, adjudicated in local disputes, and improved the land and the housing.² He was, in the old

¹ One of the most recent is Melinsky (1992) p215.

² A review of all of these roles can be found in Russell (1980).

expression, 'the parson of the parish'.³

At the other extreme the clergyman lived in a large urban area or sparsely populated rural district where many of the local people were estranged from the church. In such places it was impossible for the clergyman to be in personal contact with most of the local people and so the scope of the ordained ministry was necessarily limited. They might also contain significant population of poor miners or potters, particularly in the north of the county.⁴ In the large parish the church could not rely on the paternalism present in many small communities. The social and economic structure of large parishes, particularly in the new urban areas, prevented the informal parson model from functioning much beyond the congregation, despite the deployment of curates in some of these parishes. New expressions of ministry were necessary, which involved the formalisation of lay assistance and parish organisation. District visitors were the substitute for the impossible task of the parson calling on every household. The myriad of church groups such as youth clubs, uniform brigades, football teams and women's groups were part of an organisational response in a large community where social interaction needed to be formalised. In the large parish the concept of church membership, however alien it was to Anglican ecclesiology, was more relevant. The clergyman spent more time with the church community rather than the wider community if only because his contact with the whole population was necessarily tenuous. The clergyman was engaged in more clearly defined church activities, if only because his former functions, such as registration, teaching, and the offering of basic medical and legal advice, had been taken over by the new

³ For the definition of the word 'parson' see chapter six.

professions. In the urban and industrial parishes that became the norm after 1850 the very size of the community meant that these functions had to be shared with others. The clergyman could not minister in the way that he could before.

To test the theory of this development of ministry due to geographical factors the role of clergymen in Staffordshire has been assessed at different stages during the period 1830 to 1960. Over this time the county provides a rich variety of contexts ranging from thinly populated rural districts, estate villages, market towns, industrial areas, and suburbs to crowded town centres and inner cities. Statistical data is available for most places throughout the period in the form of worship service registers, parochial returns and censuses. Information about ministerial models has been gleaned from parish magazines, newspaper reports, correspondence, diaries, and personal files.

The Staffordshire Parishes

The base geographical context for this study is the ecclesiastical parish; these were not uniform in area or population, and differed greatly in landscape, economic and social makeup, and political significance. In 1830 there were 169 parishes in Staffordshire, although only 136 of these were under the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon of Stafford. The remaining parishes were under other authority, most notably the peculiars of Wolverhampton, where the incumbent was the Dean of Windsor, Penkridge and Tettenhall. In 1846 following ecclesiastical reform the independence of the vast majority of the peculiars had been dissolved

⁴ Mills (1980) p134.

and virtually all the parishes in Staffordshire were brought under the archdeacon's control. The very few that remained were small 'donative' parishes of little significance.

Ecclesiastical reform also led to the steady process of the subdivision of parishes, made necessary by the rise in population. From 1830 the number of parishes increased in three distinct periods. The first from 1830 to 1860 was a time of rapid expansion when on average nearly nine new parishes came into being every two years. In the second period between 1860 and 1900 the increase was much lower at just over one a year. The third period from 1900 to 1960 saw only a slight increase when the total number of parishes rose by only thirteen in sixty years. 1900 marked the end of the period of parish growth. By 1960 a reverse process had begun whereby many parishes, although not amalgamated, were united into single benefices and in terms of ministerial oversight were considered as one unit. ⁵

The other variable, the number of parish clergy, also underwent a similar pattern of three phases, though within different time periods. Between 1830 and 1880 nearly five new clergy posts were established in the county on average every year, which was a significantly higher rate of growth than the number of parishes. Many of the new clerical positions were those of assistant clergy in the urban parishes. Indeed the increase in the number of assistant clergy or curates, in real terms and as a proportion of all clergy, was a marked feature of the second half of the nineteenth century. ⁶ Growth in the number of clergy continued from 1880 to 1900 but

⁵ Taking into account amalgamations – 169 in 1830, 302 in 1861, 345 in 1900, and 358 in 1960.

⁶ The numbers of curates in Staffordshire increased until the early years of the twentieth

at half the previous rate at around five new posts every two years. In the third phase from 1900 to 1960 the number of clergy steadily declined at an average of more than three every year. Although there were 100 more clergy in Staffordshire in 1960 than in 1830 they served a population that was over four times larger.⁷

It has to be recognised that parish boundaries did not always relate directly to community boundaries. Ecclesiastical cartography has been slow to respond to the changing local scene because of the traditional nature of the church and the complicated legal process required to alter parish boundaries. For historical reasons a parish boundary may have divided a community into two separate ecclesiastical areas, and in another place very separate communities may have been included in the same parish. Furthermore the foci of the ecclesiastical parish, the church as the worship centre, the church hall as the venue of many activities, and the parsonage as the residence of the clergyman, were sometimes located on the margin of the community. However, parish boundaries delineate an important geographical unit because it is the legally defined sphere of the work of the Anglican clergyman. He had obligations to the people of the parish and they had rights to his ministrations. It is this relationship defined by geography between the ordained minister and his parish that is the focus of this study.

The need for local data is crucial to the study of the clergy in the community. Some research

century and then dramatically fell.

⁷ In 1830 265 clergy served 409,000, in 1880 514 served 981,000, in 1900 561 served 1,234,000 and in 1960 366 served 1,733, 000. Sources: Archdeacon Hodson *Visitations, Church Calendar and General Almanac*, from 1856, later *Lichfield Diocese Church Calendar*, and *Staffordshire Population Since 1660*.

has relied on very general statements about clerical deployment, and the wide spectrum at the local level has been ignored. For instance, the Population Census of 1851 recorded 403 Anglican clergy in Staffordshire, and although not all of these were active in parish ministry, in a population of over 609,000 there was one clergyman to every 1,511 people. This was significantly above the national average of 1:1,043, and is an indication of the wide range that existed within England. In Oxfordshire it was 1:417, in Cambridgeshire 1:600, while in Cheshire the ratio rose to 1:1,451 and in the West Riding 1:1,845.⁸ Staffordshire, in common with the counties of northern England, had fewer clergy to serve its population. However, it is important to note that also at the local level the clergy were not deployed according to the density of population and there was an uneven distribution within the county. The range of ratios at a national level was far exceeded by the range at the local level. In Staffordshire in 1861 the ratio extended from 1:43 in a rural parish near Cheadle to 1:12,000 in an urban parish in Tipton.⁹

It is interesting to note that the wide range of ratios was still apparent a century later. In 1960 there were 366 Anglican clergy in Staffordshire serving a population of 1,733,000, a ratio of 1:4,736. This was below the national ratio of 1:4,956, but much higher than that in the rural counties of the south. In Suffolk the ratio was 1:1,655, in Somerset 1:1,427, and in Herefordshire and south Shropshire 1:1,045. As before the local range was wider than the national. In Staffordshire in 1960 it extended from 1:197 in a rural united benefice near

⁸ Paul (1964) p21, and *The Census of Great Britain in 1851*, p187.

⁹ The perpetual curate of Bradley-le-Moors served a population of 43 and the perpetual curate of St. Martins Church Tipton estimated his parish population at about 12,000, as recorded in *Church Calendar and General Almanac*, 1862

Tamworth to 1:14,779 in an urban parish in West Bromwich. ¹⁰

Patterns of deployment relate to urban or rural character of the parish, and because Staffordshire has a good range from sparsely populated moor land districts to densely populated town centres the county will always fall somewhere between the extremes of other counties that are more homogeneous. However, Staffordshire can be regarded as one of those counties that bridge the gap that is the difference between northern dioceses where population ratios are high and southern dioceses where they are low. Ratios in the south of the county are lower than in the north, in line with the national pattern.

Throughout the county and during the whole period there were areas where Anglican clergy were relatively common and areas where they were scarce. It is only by studying the data at the local level where the ministry was actually practiced that the wide spectrum becomes apparent and its consequences on models of ministry most telling.

Small, Medium, Large and Very Large Parishes

Statistics on parish populations and the deployment of clergy are the basic material, and since the archdeacon's visitations of 1829 a growing number of sources are available. ¹¹ However, not all parishes before 1900 made population returns and so government census records are necessary to complement the ecclesiastical statistics. Information on the residence of the

¹⁰ *Lichfield Diocese Church Calendar*, 1960

¹¹ Data from visitations, local and national censuses, clergy lists, church and trade directories, and local histories.

clergy is available from ecclesiastical records, censuses and local directories.

From this material it is possible to present the evidence in several different ways. One of the most useful is to show what percentage of the population of the county lived in parishes with a certain clergy to population ratio. This provides an accurate measure of the influence of the clergy in society, as experienced in the local communities across the county.

Four basic types of parishes have been devised. The small parish had a ratio of less than 1:2,000, and included some parishes where the ratio fell to below 1:50. The medium parish had a ratio of 1:2,000 to 1:4,000, and the large parish had a ratio of 1:4,001 to 1:8,000. The fourth type or very large parish with a ratio over 1:8,000 included a few parishes where the ratio exceeded 1:15,000 or more.

In 1830 the population of Staffordshire could be divided into three fairly equal portions. Around one third lived in small parishes where there was one clergyman to less than 2,000 people. In some cases the ratio was much lower: a fifth of the population lived in parishes where the ratio was 1:1,000 or less. Another third of the population were living in moderate parishes where the ratio was between 1:2,000 and 1:4,000. Another third were living in large parishes and very large parishes where the ratio was more than 1:4,000. Only one in twenty of people lived in the very large parishes with the ratios of over 1:8,000. Therefore the experience of most people was to live in a community where the presence of the clergyman and his relationship to the inhabitants was comparatively strong. Only in a few places at this stage was it apparent that the Church of England clergy had lost touch with the population,

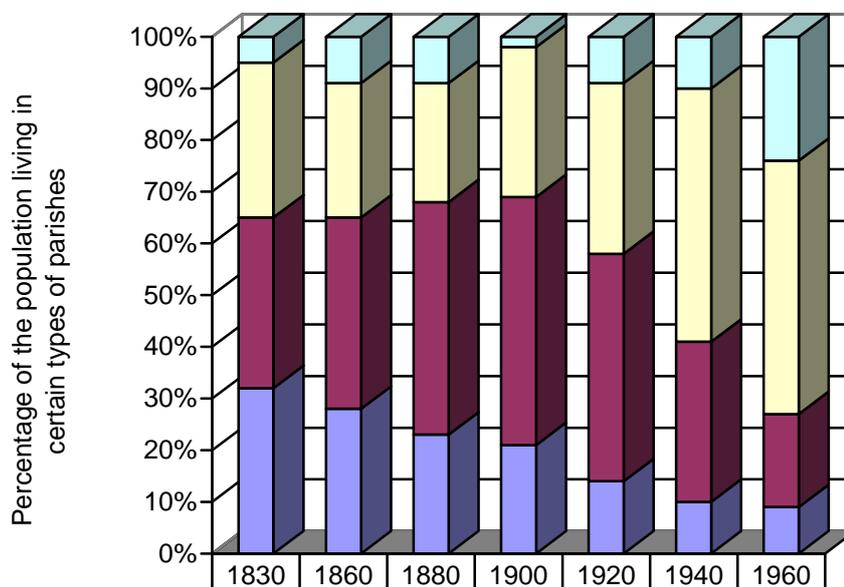
and although some of these places were well publicised they were as yet very much the exception.

By 1860 the proportions had not changed greatly although more people were living in the medium sized parishes and fewer in the small parishes. The proportion of the population in the large and very large parishes remained at about one third. The effects of the increase in population had been mitigated by the reforms of the parochial system: many new parishes had been created and more clergy deployed in the growing areas, particularly curates in the large urban parishes, although there was criticism that the multiplication of curacies over and above incumbencies was detrimental to the need to recruit more clergy.¹² For the next forty years up until 1900 this policy would seem to be succeeding. Indeed at the turn of the century the proportion of people living in the very large parishes had fallen to only one in fifty, while those living in the small and medium parishes had increased to seven out of ten. For seventy years from 1830 to 1900 the Church of England maintained its clerical presence in the parishes in a remarkable way in the face of large increases and redistributions of the population.

However 1900 marks the beginning of a new trend. From this point the proportion of people living in parishes with high ratios rose steadily. Those living in the large and very large parishes became a majority after 1920 and thereafter continued to rise. The change from 1830 to 1960 is a complete reversal: living in a large parish, which had been the experience of the minority, became the experience of the vast majority, as shown in graph 4.1.

¹² *Report of Committee of Diocesan Conference on the Supply of Candidates for Holy Orders,*

4.1 Staffordshire Parish Population and Anglican Clergy



| | | | | | | | |
|---------------------|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| Very Large Parishes | 5 | 9 | 9 | 2 | 9 | 10 | 24 |
| Large Parishes | 30 | 26 | 23 | 29 | 33 | 49 | 49 |
| Medium Parishes | 33 | 37 | 45 | 48 | 44 | 31 | 18 |
| Small Parishes | 32 | 28 | 23 | 21 | 14 | 10 | 9 |

Sources: Archdeacon Hodson's Visitation Records 1829-1841, *Church Calendar and General Almanac*, from 1856, later *Lichfield Diocese Church Calendar* and *Crockford Clerical Directory* 1954-1960

Measuring Clerical Influence

All Christian ministry, with the exception of that of hermits and members of enclosed orders, depends upon contact with people. In secular professional occupations this is sometimes termed the client-relationship and is regulated: doctors have their lists of patients, social workers their caseloads, and teachers their classes of pupils. With the ordained ministry, which never fully adopted the professionalism of other occupations, it has been unclear who

the clients are and how many there should be. Anglican clergymen, as ministers of the Established Church, relate to their 'parishioners', but the word has different meanings. It can refer to the worshippers at a church or to the people who live in a parish.¹³ Canon law enshrines the prerogative of parishioners, that is those who live in the parish. They have a right to baptism, to be married in their parish church, and to be buried in the churchyard.¹⁴ Such rights carry the assumption, which was not unreasonable when they were first formulated, that the clergyman will know his parishioners and they will know him. The parson model is built upon this understanding of the relationship between the clergy and the people, but it can only effectively function when the number of parishioners is not excessive.

In the larger parishes, with populations of more than 4,000, the personal contact between the clergy and the people is more limited. Generally, the percentage of the community directly involved in the life of the church decreases the larger the parish becomes. Evidence for this pattern is available in four kinds of material: attendance at services, participation in the Holy Communion, the take-up of the rite of confirmation, and membership of the communicant or electoral roll.

It can be argued that reliance on such data is wholly misleading because involvement in the church is determined by social class. Glock maintained that higher social classes expressed their faith through institutional means, such as membership and communicant status, whereas lower social classes were more likely to relate faith to less tangible practices, such as prayer

¹³ A parishioner is "an inhabitant or member of a parish", *The New Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, 4th Edition 1993.

¹⁴ Ecclesiastical Canons B22, B34 and B38.

and belief.¹⁵ Recognising that this tendency did exist this chapter will show that institutional expressions were often more prevalent in smaller parishes regardless of the social makeup.

Church Attendance 1851

Considering how important information on attendance at worship has now become it is remarkable that the Church of England in the period 1830-1960 did not produce a significant number of such records. There are the occasional references in correspondence and diaries to churches being ‘full’ or ‘empty’ and the congregation being ‘poor’ or ‘good’, but these are too few and too inexact. The archdeacons’ articles of enquiry, which were sent to every parish systematically by the end of the nineteenth century, are concerned with population, benefice income and seating capacity and do not record attendance nor communicant figures. Only in 1851 is there substantial material available for all the churches across the county, and in 1881 for two specific urban areas.

The Religious Census of 1851 was the first attempt to make a systematic record of church attendance across the nation, and the returns for Staffordshire are largely complete.¹⁶ The declared aim was to discover “how far the means of Religious Instruction provided in Great Britain during the last fifty years have kept pace with the population during the same period, and to what extent those means are adequate to meet the spiritual wants of the increased

¹⁵ See Green (1996) p12-p13.

¹⁶ The author is editing the Staffordshire Returns in preparation for publication. A full review of the national census can be found in Snell and Ell (2000).

population of 1851".¹⁷ It is important to note that the census recorded attendance, that is the number of people present at morning, afternoon and evening services on 30 March. It did not take into account whether some people attended twice or more, although the compilers of the statistics reckoned that one half of the afternoon worshippers and two thirds of the evening worshippers had already attended earlier in the day. This rough calculation reveals something of the bias of the chief census officer, Horace Mann, and it certainly favoured the Anglicans because more of them tended to go to church in the morning rather than at other times.¹⁸ In rural areas, which would include much of Staffordshire, double counting was less of an issue because many churches only had one service.

In Staffordshire there were the usual reasons given for poor attendance as elsewhere in the country. It was the wet weather, families visiting each other on Midlent or Mothering Sunday, the prevalence of influenza, and the need for farmers and their new staff, hired on Lady Day in the previous week, to be engaged in lambing, that meant that congregations were smaller than normal.

Very few clergy objected on grounds of unlawful imposition. James Spry, Perpetual Curate of All Saints Church, West Bromwich wrote: "These particulars [are] not being required by the Census Act, [so I] beg to decline answering them unless desired to do so by my diocesan".¹⁹ In the view of some the government did not have the authority to seek the information, and this was a fatal flaw. Lord Harrowby, a significant Staffordshire landowner, declared in the

¹⁷ Horace Mann, *Circular to the Clergy*, 14 March 1851.

¹⁸ In Norfolk it was found that Anglican attendance was higher in the afternoon, Ede and Virgoe (1998) p19.

House of Lords: “Questions which could not be legally enforced would only be partially answered, and had better therefore not be put at all, otherwise the public would be led astray. The only value of these accounts was their completeness, and the only security for completeness was enforcement by legal means”.²⁰

Clergy argued that regardless of the legality, the task was impossible which meant that the accuracy of the figures would always be in doubt. F. S. Bolton, Perpetual Curate of St. James’ Church, Salt, wrote: “Average attendance has never (as far as I am aware) been calculated. I give it as near as I can guess”.²¹ Francis Theophilus Blackburne, Minister of St. Luke’s Church, Cannock, was “not willing to give other than ‘a true and correct return’” and so had to “beg to decline answering the queries in No.VII [attendance] as it w’d be next to impossible ... to state the number of the ‘general congregation’ either on Mar. 30th or any other Lords day”.²² “The attendance is so uncertain that the precise number of persons cannot be stated,” wrote John Evans, Minister of Edengale, who went on to reveal the Anglican concern that there was enough seating for everyone in the parish should the need arise: “The church is large enough to contain the whole population”.²³ Provision of seating was the crucial issue for some, and the lack of it considered to be a reason for poor attendance. As the census revealed that on average churches were less than half full this reason for non-attendance had little foundation. W. E. Coldwell, Rector of St. Mary’s Church, Stafford was unwilling to give any estimate and commented rather curtly: “always full morning and

¹⁹ HO/129/381/4 /1/1.

²⁰ Hansard 3rd Series cxiv 14 March 1851

²¹ HO/129/367/1/12.

²² HO/129/378/3/5/2.

²³ HO/129/376/1/3/2.

evening, not full in the afternoons”.²⁴ Henry Wynter, Incumbent of Etruria, wrote “full” for the morning and the evening and added “I cannot pretend to give the exact number of attendants at Public Worship”.²⁵ John H. Dickenson, Minister of Blymhill, just scribbled, “not known” across the census attendance columns.²⁶

It is significant that many Anglican clergy did not regard the recording of attendance at worship as necessary or fitting. Edward Hinchliffe, Rector of Mucklestone, wrote: “I can give no correct estimate of the attendance at Divine Service not being in the habit of counting the congregation generally”.²⁷ J. W. Daltry, Vicar of All Saints’ Church, Madeley, explained that he “had no data on which to found an average for past months”, and therefore such a statistic “must to a great degree be arbitrary”.²⁸ The concept of church allegiance defined by regular attendance was alien to the minister of the Established Church whose role was to serve the whole community, a responsibility not diminished by the fact that most may have rarely attended.

It is important not to attribute all the unease of Anglicans with the census to the fear of unfavourable statistics, although there are examples. G. F. Whilborne, Perpetual Curate of St. John’s Church, Hanley, an area where Nonconformity was strong, was sure that others would inflate their figures: “I am convinced that this mode of obtaining the number of the various congregations will be most fallacious & unsatisfactory. I am informed by persons well able to

²⁴ HO/129/367/1/9

²⁵ HO/129/371/2/1/3.

²⁶ HO/129/357/2/2.

²⁷ HO/129/364/1/9/10.

²⁸ HO/129/369/2/3/16.

observe that my own congregation is equal if not superior to any in the town but I should not be surprised if some others are represented as greater congregations”.²⁹ Horace Mann claimed that there was little deliberate inflation of the figures.³⁰

Not all the Anglican clergy objected or thought the task too difficult: “If any point of importance has been omitted I shall be happy to supply it” wrote Samuel Stead, Vicar in Burton on Trent.³¹ Furthermore, not all the complaints came from the Anglicans. Some Roman Catholics saw it as an unnecessary imposition, whereas Nonconformists, who were more used to the practice of counting their worshippers, argued that taking the total for one particular Sunday was liable to inaccuracy due to such factors as the weather, local customs, and special services in other chapels.³²

For many Anglicans the census was an impossible, unnecessary and inaccurate way of measuring Sunday attendance, which in any case was not an indication of the state of the church, and in particular the Established Church as compared to the more congregation based Nonconformist churches. For a century after 1851 most parish clergy did not systematically collect data on general attendance at worship services. However, by 1960, when the Church of England could no longer function as the Established Church and had adopted many of the traits of a denomination, the recording of church attendance was recognised as necessary and widely practised.

Graph 4.2 shows the relationship between parish size and attendance in 1851. The small

²⁹ HO/371/1/1/1.

³⁰ *Journal of Statistical Society*, vol.18 (1855) pp142-3.

³¹ HO/371/4/2/4.

parishes with a population of less than 2,000 have the highest attendance, the vast majority recording 10% or greater, a third more than 30%. The medium sized parishes with a population of between 2,000 and 4,000 vary from 5% to 30%, mostly around 10% to 20%. Beyond the 4,000 population level it does not seem to make a difference, with percentages not rising above 10%.

It would appear that parish size was a factor affecting attendance, although it was not the only determinant. Some moderate parishes score higher percentages than small parishes, as do a few of the large and very parish parishes. An examination of the circumstances in some of the low scoring small parishes may explain these exceptions. Examples of thinly populated parishes and badly sited churches include Alstonefield, Biddulph, Cheddleton, Ellastone, Meerbrook, Swynnerton and Weeford. At Lapley where the Anglican attendance was only 7%, the Vicar, John Rate, complained of “the constant endeavours of the dissenters to entice and draw the children away by their influence in other ways”.³³ The previous vicar had been non-resident. Thomas Chambers, Minister of Zion, the Independent Chapel in the parish, referred to “much disposition persisting in the village”.³⁴ Attendances at the Independent and Primitive Methodist chapels were each higher than at the parish church. At Milwich, where the Anglican attendance was also around 7%, the previous Anglican minister had been a non-resident and lived in Denbighshire, and the present one received a low income of less than £100.³⁵ Fulford, another poor living with the relatively low Anglican attendance of 9%, had a non-resident clergyman. In the parish the Zion Chapel of the Methodist New Connexion did

³² For instance HO/129/368/1/3, HO/129/378/2/4.

³³ HO/129/378/2/2/4

³⁴ HO/129/378/2/1/3

much better.³⁶ At Pelsall, where there was a similar Anglican attendance percentage, William Jesse, who had been in post 40 years, had recently died.³⁷

Fourteen Non-resident Licences, that gave permission from the bishop for the clergy to live away from their parish, were current at the time of the census. The reasons given were mainly ill health, although in five cases it was the inadequate parsonage and with one clergyman there were “special circumstances”.³⁸ It would seem that the absence of the clergy did not necessarily affect attendance, perhaps because a curate would in most cases provide cover. The low attendance at Milwich may have been because William Wilson had to live outside the parish because there was no house, and a similarly low attendance at Arlewas may have been due to the absence of the minister due to alterations on the house. However, the infirmity of the absent Thomas Grove of Mavesyn Ridware did not prevent an attendance of 20% nor did the ill health of the absent Henry Turton of Betley where attendance was just as high. Connected to the absence of the clergy is their competence, but this in all but the most extreme case is so subjective that it cannot be assessed as a factor.

Industrialisation has been cited as having a detrimental effect upon religious activity.³⁹ The reliance upon the church attendance data to prove this thesis is too dependent on the assumption that religious feeling and activity is adequately expressed through Sunday

³⁵ www.theclergydatabase.org.uk

³⁶ HO/129/368/1/3

³⁷ HO/129/380/2/1/1

³⁸ LRO B/A/9/1842-1869, 3 vols.

³⁹ Gilbert (1976) argued that industrialisation led to a society where the strength of the religious institutions diminished. Others, such as Smith (1994), have argued that urbanisation as a consequence of industrialisation encouraged some religious activity.

attendance at worship.⁴⁰ Comparison of industrial and non-industrial parishes is difficult because there are other factors such as size and urbanisation that need to be accounted for. However a simple comparison between industrial and non-industrial does reveal that the former do tend to have lower attendance. Typical rural villages and small towns such as Marston, Whitgreave, Tixall, Gnosall, Dilhorne, Caverswall, Ingestry, Sandon, Hamstall Ridware, Thorpe Constantine, Enville and Weeford all displayed attendances of 30% or more.

Heavily industrialised areas, which are not part of larger long established large towns, tended to display lower attendance percentages than other urban areas. Audley, Bilston, Darlaston and Wednesbury recorded 9% or less. Cannock, which was one of the fastest growing industrial areas in Staffordshire, recorded a low attendance. However, there were exceptions to this pattern in the Black Country, and the range between industrial and non-industrial parishes of similar sizes is not as great as it is between parishes of different populations.⁴¹

The distance between the church and the main area of housing was an issue. There are examples of rural populations living some miles away and this discouraged attendance. George Marks, Incumbent of Freehay, reported on the difficulties of a wide parish: "Many of the houses are at a considerable distance from the church".⁴² Even in some urban parishes churches were badly sited. "My church is apart from the people," wrote Philip Brabazon Ellis, Incumbent of St. Paul's Church, Burslem, "thus causes lessening [of] my congregation".⁴³

⁴⁰ Many have made this point, for example Williams (1999).

⁴¹ Robson (1979) found that there was higher overall church attendance in some industrial and urban areas in the Black Country than in nearby rural areas.

⁴² HO/129/373/4/1/3.

⁴³ HO/129/370/3/1

Having to travel a distance to church was all the more difficult when the weather was bad as it was on census Sunday: “The parish being agricultural population and scattered remote from the church is much affected by the weather” reported T. G. M. Luckock, Officiating Minister at Great Barr Church.⁴⁴ Edward Thornton Cubb, Perpetual Curate of Cotes Heath, wrote a long explanation of the five townships in his parish and the distances from the church.⁴⁵ And if it was not the weather it was the flu: William D. Lamb Incumbent of Cobridge wrote, “Many living at distance were prevented by the unfavourable state of the weather and many more through indisposition – the influenza being very prevalent in the district”.⁴⁶ Francis Leigh, Curate of Caverswall explained how his parish church was further from the people than neighbouring ones: “The church is situated at the S.E. extremities of the parish which operates unfavourably upon the attendance of the Parishioners at church. There have also been built within a few years three churches in the adjoining parishes, one being a mile distant and another is 1½ mile from Caverswall Church”.⁴⁷

It would be reasonable to assume that the presence of other churches in the parish will have had an effect upon attendance. Did other churches attract worshippers who would otherwise have been Anglican? Did churches tend to do well in districts with particular features, and these features benefited all the denominations? Did some denominations do better in certain areas? The ecumenical dynamic has been discussed elsewhere.⁴⁸ It has been shown in some places such as Oxfordshire that where only an Anglican church was present attendances were

⁴⁴ HO/129/380/4/4/9

⁴⁵ HO/129/368/2/12

⁴⁶ HO129/370/3/1/14

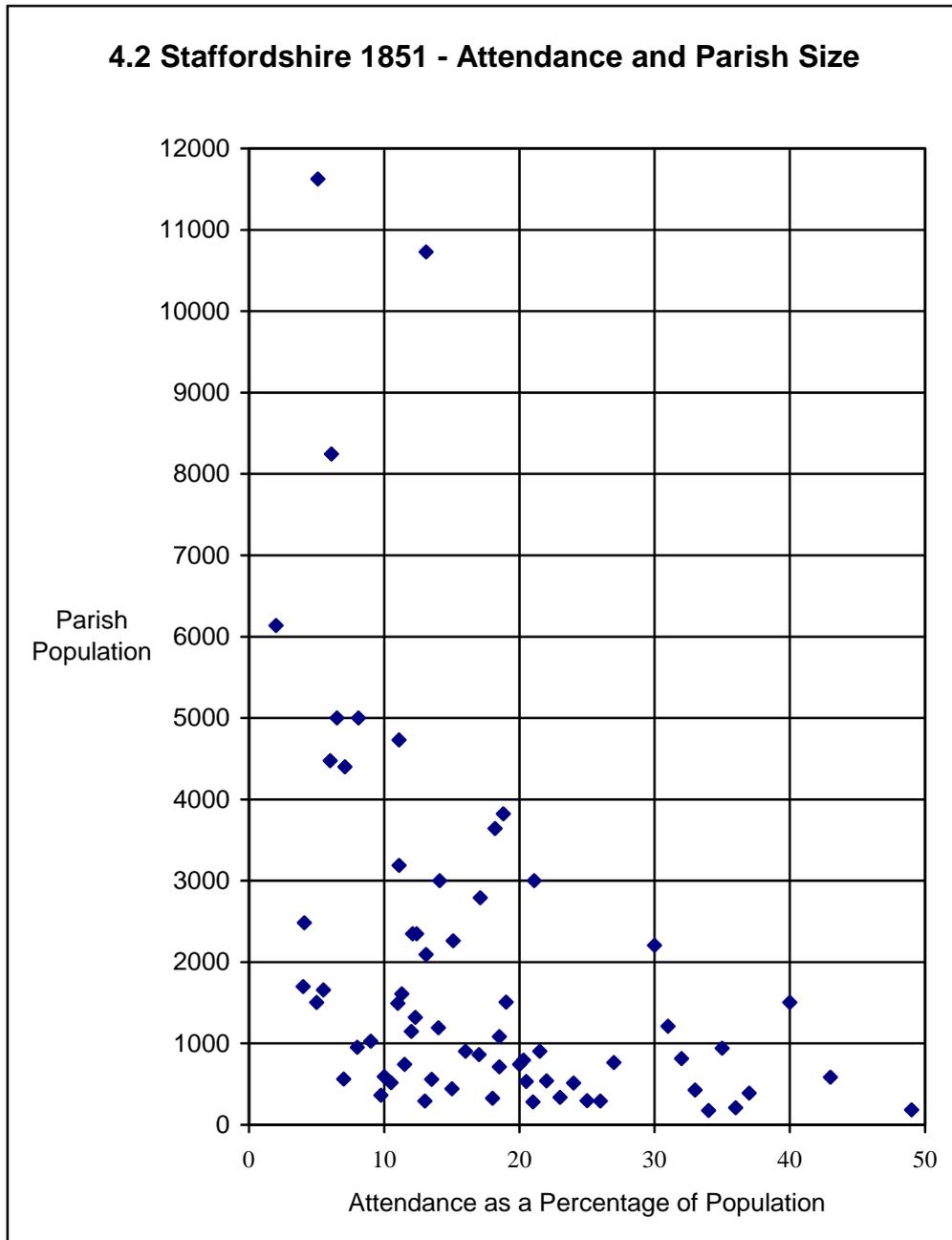
⁴⁷ HO129/373/3/1/1

⁴⁸ Gill (1992).

lower, whereas in Norfolk there seemed to be no great affect.⁴⁹ Staffordshire would appear to be closer to Norfolk in this respect

⁴⁹ Tiller (1987) pxxxi, and Ede and Virgoe (1998) p17.

4.2 Staffordshire 1851 - Attendance and Parish Size



Sources: 1851 Census Returns HO129 - Small Parishes (47) - Abbots Bromley, Arlewas, Barlaston, Betley, Bramshall, Bushbury, Caverswall, Chebsey, Church Eaton, Clifton Campville, Cotes Heath, Croxden Dilhorne, Draycott-le-Moors, Ellenhall, Enville, Forton, Fulford, Gayton, Gentleshaw, Gnosall, Hamstall Ridware, Haughton, Ingestry, Keele, Kings Bromley, Kingstone, Lapley, Madeley, Marston, Mavesyn Ridware, Maer, Milwich, Newborough, Pattingham w Patshull, Pelsall, Penn, Rocester, Rolleston, Rushall, Sandon, Seighford, Standon, Thorpe Constantine, Tixall, Weston-under-Lizard, Weeford, Whitgreave, Yoxall. Medium Parishes (10) - Aldridge, Brewood w Coven, Colwich w Fradswell, Burton on Trent St. Modwena, Hanbury, Kinver, Rugeley, Stone, Wednesfield, Wombourn w Trysull. Large Parishes (5) - Audley, Cheadle, Newcastle St. George, Eccleshall, Handsworth. Very Large Parishes (7) - Bilston, Darlaston, Stafford, Stoke on Trent, Walsall, Wednesbury, Willenhall.

However, other churches were certainly perceived as rival concerns by the contemporary clergy. Observations of ecumenical rivalry in the urban parish of Hanley and the rural parish of Lapley have already been cited. Charles William Stocker DD, Rector of Draycott-le-Moors, protested, “the majority of the parishioners are Roman Catholic”, because this was the denominational allegiance of the major landowner.⁵⁰ Philip Brabazon Ellis, Incumbent of Longport, Bilston, commented on the fickleness of his congregation who on Census Sunday were drawn to hear the “Beaumont preacher at the chapel”.⁵¹ William Chawner, Perpetual Curate at Hollinsclough, reported “many churches and chapels have been erected in the neighbourhood of Flash Church since it has been built. This will account for the comparatively small amount of attendance”.⁵² In such an upland parish where the population was relatively sparsely distributed the presence of Methodist chapels scattered across the area would have posed as serious competition. In an urban parish with a large population, and in particular the town centre parishes that probably attracted worshippers from a wide area, the threat was less real.⁵³

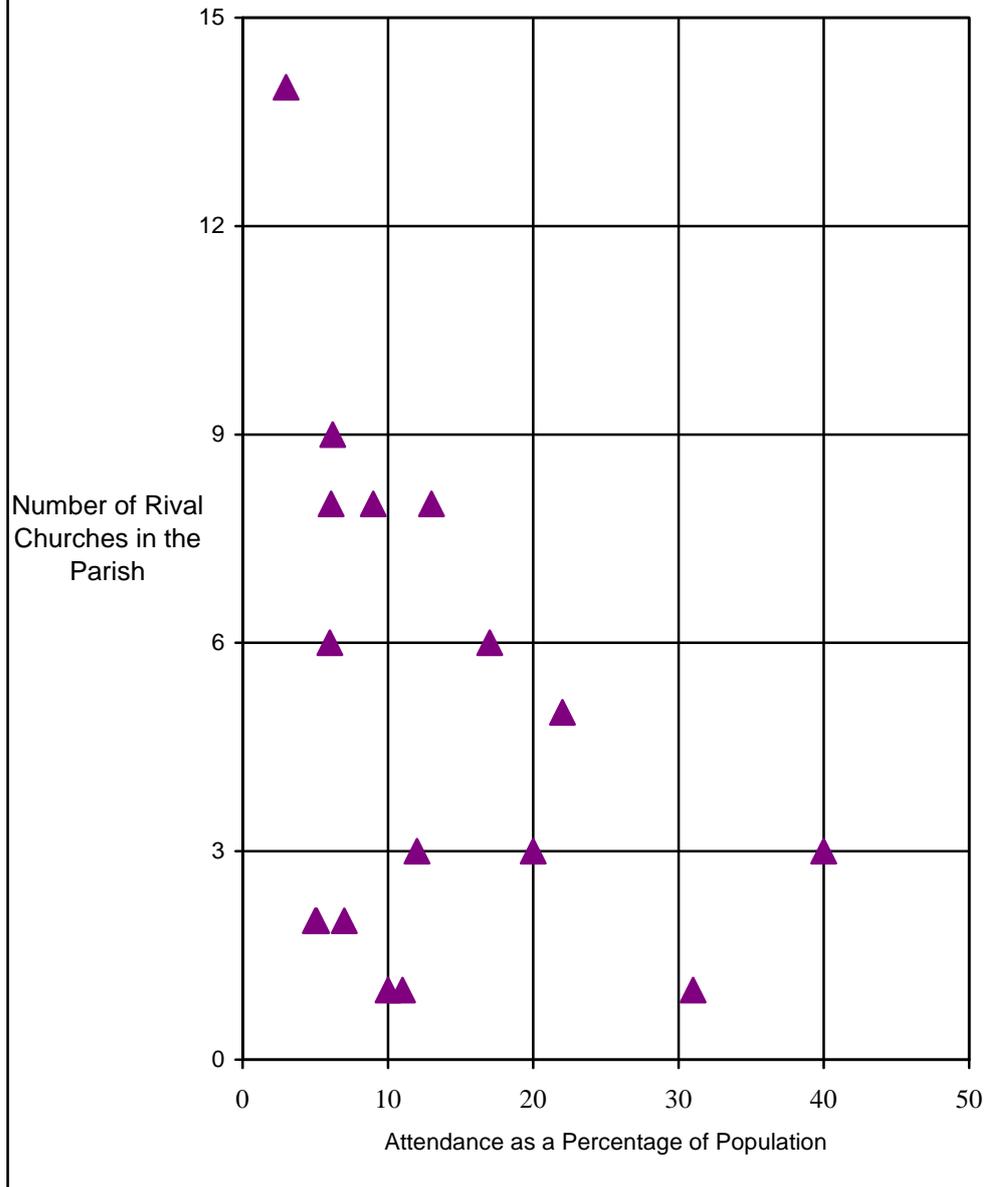
⁵⁰ HO129/373/3/3/10

⁵¹ HO129/370/3/1

⁵² HO/129/372/4/2/3

⁵³ However, there is some evidence that non-Anglicans did receive some strong opposition to building churches in urban areas earlier in the century. See Pratt (1891) p43.

4.3 Staffordshire 1851 - Anglican Attendance and Rival Churches



Sources: 1851 Census Returns HO129 - Parishes (17) - Abbots Bromley, Arlewas, Ashley, Audley, Bilston, Burslem, Caverswall, Darlaston, Draycott-le-Moors, Gnosall, Lapley, Rocester, Rolleston Rugeley, Stafford, Willenhall. Yoxall.

Graph 4.3 shows the relationship between attendance and the presence of other churches. There is a correlation between high attendance and fewer rival churches but this is not wholly determinative. For example, attendance at the two Anglican churches in Bilston was relatively high for an urban and industrial area at over 9%, even though there were at least eight other churches in the town. In Darlaston, a similar kind of town, the Anglican attendance was low at 6%, and there were fewer other churches. However, in Burslem the low Anglican attendance of 3% may well have been due to the strong presence of 14 other churches. Other factors are at play. Because the Nonconformist churches were largely free enterprises they were unlikely to be established in areas where the church would not thrive; their very presence was an indication of receptivity by the local population. Some parishes had low percentages across the denominational spectrum, such as Lapley with 8%, Arlewas with 7%, and Abbots Bromley with 6%. It is difficult to determine how much the presence of other churches affected the attendance at Anglican churches.

The social composition of a parish was an important factor. The highest percentages of attendance were in estate or closed villages where landownership was limited to a single individual.⁵⁴ In other counties it has been noted that Nonconformists did better in the towns and in villages with multiple ownership, although there was no correlation between

⁵⁴ See Mills (1980) pp64-97; information about land ownership is available in the Tithe Apportionment Schedules of the 1830s and 1840s at the SRO: Amblecote D356/x1-6, Whiston D590/587, Freeford D661/8/5/6. Stafford D834/14/15, Colwich D874/9/1, Armitage D805/11/1, Hanbury and Marchington D1528/2/23, Coppenhall D912/5, Weston upon Trent D975/3, Standon D1026/3/1, Cannock D1054/4/1-2, Darlaston D1194/3/3, Cheadle D1278/1+2, Milwich D917/11/5-6, Longdon D1390, Thorpe Constantine D1263/9, Pelsall D1208/32/1, Mayfield D959/1-2, Elford D3094/3/7-8, Acton Trussell D1121/E/2/76, Castlechurch D3389/1, Mucklestone D3433/3/1-2.

landownership and attendance except in small parishes where Anglicans did well.⁵⁵ However, the landownership criterion is insufficient and other factors to do with social, political and economic circumstances should be taken into account.⁵⁶ In Staffordshire some of the highest attendances were in villages where the incumbent enjoyed a high benefice income derived from the land and was either the patron or a member of the patron's family. In Clifton Campville the annual benefice income was over £750 and the patron-rector recorded an attendance of 18%. In Haughton, where the Royds family had controlled the ecclesiastical and secular affairs of the parish for generations, the attendance was 25%. At Rolleston, Paget Mosley had been appointed as rector by Sir Oswald Mosley, to the living worth over £600 a year, and the attendance was 20%. At Sandon, home of the family of the Earls of Harrowby, who included a previous bishop of Lichfield, the living was valued at nearly £600 and the attendance was 18%.⁵⁷

In these parishes the community was closely knit by an economic and social identity, and the clergy had an important role to play in maintaining this establishment. As parson the clergyman, usually though not always in cooperation with the landowner, was able to relate to the whole population. There are examples of where the landowners were supported by the clergy and where they were not. In the village of Keele, the Sneyd family, who had significant clerical connections in other parts of the county, sought to use the church as a means of social control in the 1850s, and Henry Sutcliffe, the vicar, resisted them.⁵⁸ The focus of the disagreement was the establishment of the school and the opening of a reading room that

⁵⁵ Everitt (1972).

⁵⁶ Lee (2006) p178.

⁵⁷ Census Returns HO/129 held at SRO.

might provide “radical publications”. In other places the parson and squire were united. It was important that the landowner was resident, and indeed any absence was noted in the 1851 census. Oswald Feilden, Rector of Weston under Lizard, reported, “The Earl of Bradford’s family being in London the congregation is reduced by 26 Attendants”.⁵⁹ At Dilhorne, the Curate A. F. Boucher regretted that “the squire of the Parish with all his family and servants were away from home”.⁶⁰

If the landowner was not Anglican there was detrimental affect upon Anglican attendance at the parish church. As already noted the Draycotts at Draycott-le-Moor were Roman Catholic and not surprisingly their staff and tenants were expected to be Roman Catholics as well. Similarly there was the Simeon family of Stone and the Fitzherberts of Swynnerton. One of the most famous Romans Catholic landed dynasties in Staffordshire was the Gifford family of Chillington in Breewood, who provided the house for the first Vicars Apostolic of the Midlands in the early nineteenth century. The influence of the Gifford family spread well beyond the village and may partly account for the significant number of Roman Catholics in Wolverhampton, sometimes popularly known as ‘little Rome’.⁶¹ The Earls of Shrewsbury with their family seat at Alton Towers were Roman Catholic until 1852.

Mann identified the working-class as the non-attenders, so any parish with a larger proportion of such people would have a lower attendance. Mann did challenge the common belief that people were put off coming to church because there was not enough free seating: “Teeming

⁵⁸ Phillips (1982), and Harrison (1986) p119-120.

⁵⁹ HO/129/357/1/2/1

⁶⁰ HO/129/373/3/3/5

populations often surround half empty churches, which would probably remain half empty if the sittings were all free".⁶² He cited the lack of concern for the poor within the churches, a distrust of the clergy, and poor social conditions as other important factors. Despite his conclusions the view that appropriated seats prohibited attendance persisted for another generation or so. At Wednesbury it was reported "the parishioners consist almost exclusively of miners and colliers and labourers – too many of whom are compelled to Sunday labour".⁶³ However, such theories are hard to test since some parishes are categorised as poorer by the very fact of a lower attendance. An estate village with a majority poor population can present a very high attendance. Thus parish size has a greater impact than social composition. Robson found in the Black Country that there were large variations between working class parishes, although those with a high attendance did have a strong Methodist presence.⁶⁴

Attendance was also high in town centre parishes where churches were apparently attracting worshippers from a wide area. Some of these parishes had comparatively low populations, such as the three town centre parishes of Stafford with a combined population of 10,730 and an attendance of 13%. The identity of the church as the long established parish church of a town, and mother church of surrounding newer parish churches, along with some civic associations gave these churches a status that may have made them in social terms more attractive places to attend. Some of these churches had extra financial resources because of their historic wealth and could employ more clergy. They were in some cases centres of excellence such as St Peter's Church, Stoke on Trent. There are examples of such churches

⁶¹ Bence-Jones (1992) pp32-60; Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p63.

⁶² Mann (1854) ppclviii

⁶³ Greenslade (1970) p75.

across the denominational spectrum. It is very likely that the town centre parish churches did draw people away from attending their local parish church, which may account for lower attendances in some more recently established parishes situated away from town centres. Examples include Audley with 6%, Darlaston with 6% and outlying parishes of Wolverhampton, Walsall and Stoke on Trent, with attendances between 3 and 5 %.

Several factors have an effect on attendance, including the economic and social composition of the parish, the historic and civic standing of the church, the absence and competency of the clergy, and the presence of other churches. Each of these factors could have an influence in any parish. Other factors will remain unrecognised. The census relied on the clergy to declare any special circumstances and some did. William Buckwell, Incumbent of Longnor: “The number attending divine service morning and afternoon includes a boarding school consisting of 36 young Gentlemen”.⁶⁵ This influence helped to double the congregation.

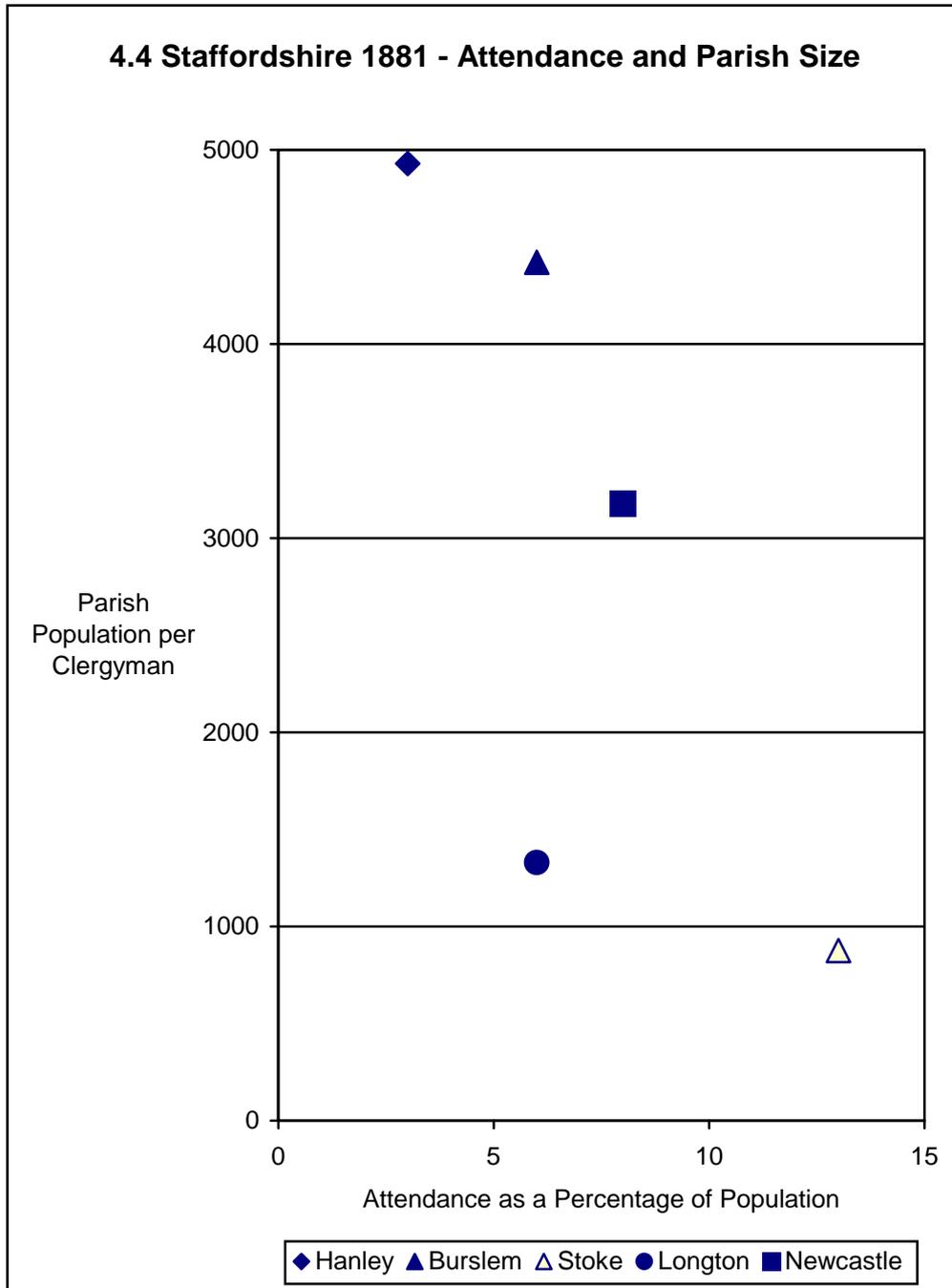
Church Attendance 1881

In the Potteries in 1881, as in several other urban areas in Britain at about that time, a church attendance census was taken by the local newspaper, as shown in graph 4.4.⁶⁶ The *Staffordshire Sentinel* conducted a count of congregations in Newcastle and the Potteries area, and although very limited in scope it provides some information to compare with the 1851

⁶⁴ Robson (2002).

⁶⁵ HO/129/372/4/4/7

⁶⁶ For some of the other censuses see Yates (1979).



Source: *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 24 December 1881.

⁶⁷ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 24 December 1881, Stoke on Trent Record Office

As before there were critics of the census. It only recorded attendance, and there was no adjustment for those who attended more than once. It was also unclear whether Sunday School scholars in some places were included or not. Mr. Craig, the senior Member of Parliament for North Staffordshire, wrote a letter to the paper asserting that the census was nonsense, because attendance was no indication of true allegiance. He concluded that many clergy were good, more were learned, but few were inspired, and they aligned themselves too closely with the powerful: “they favour the rich man’s view”.⁶⁸

Although this was a fairly limited census that included only a handful of urban and industrial parishes, none of which were medium or small in terms of population, the material does suggest, as before, that parish size was important. With the exception of Longton, which the *Sentinel* raised as a special case where church attendance was low, there was a direct correlation between church attendance and parish size.

It is interesting to note that there were areas where none of the churches did very well. In Hanley no denomination was strong. In Longton the Anglicans had a strong presence, providing almost half of the total church capacity, but 70% of churchgoers went elsewhere. If Longton was more of a working class area, as suggested by the *Sentinel* because the people preferred the ‘self-indulgent tendency’ of attending later in the day, then this may account for a bias towards to the Nonconformist churches and a lower overall church attendance. There was the tendency for historic town centre churches to do better as in 1851. Stoke and Newcastle, the two established centres of the Potteries conurbation, had the largest Anglican

⁶⁸ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 13 May 1882, Stoke on Trent Record Office

attendances, even though other churches were well represented. In the newer area of Burslem, Methodism was strong while Anglican capacity and attendance was only around a quarter of the ecumenical total. Roman Catholic churches were fuller than any of the others, as noted in 1851.

The presence of other churches did have some effect upon Anglican attendance. Where Anglican attendance was strongest, in the extensive Parish of Stoke, the Church of England provided almost half the seating capacity, and the number of other churches was less than twice the number of Anglican ones. Where Anglican capacity dropped and the relative number of other churches increased, as in Newcastle where only four out of fifteen churches were Anglican, and in Hanley where only eight out of nineteen churches were Anglican, a lower percentage attended Anglican churches. Other churches had an influence upon Anglican attendance, in a greater way than they did in 1851. Nonconformity had a strong base in Longton, a newer community with a larger proportion of the poor, where 70% of attendance was non-Anglican. Non-conformist attendance was stronger in Burslem (76%) and in Hanley (79%), but in these parishes there was less Anglican capacity and relatively more non-Anglican churches. The strengthening of this factor, which would merit further investigation, may have been a consequence of the changing role of the Church of England. Whereas in 1851 the Established Church was unassailable, although the extent of the threat of the Nonconformist was emerging, by 1881 the Church of England was less secure in such its position.

The *Sentinel* was concerned about the issue of seating, referring to the discovery that in

Hanley and Burslem there was room for only one third of the population, while in Stoke and Newcastle there was seating for half. Longton, paradoxically because of its poor attendance had more spare seats than the other boroughs. However, The *Sentinel* did not conclude that seating was therefore of little relevance to attendance.⁶⁹

The 1881 Staffordshire censuses were rather limited in scope and as such provides much less material than the census of 1851. However, the patterns of attendance are in line with those revealed in the previous census, suggesting that parish size, in conjunction with other factors, does have a bearing on attendance.

Apart from these two censuses there is very little other material. From the 1870s worship registers were introduced. Initially the main purpose of these was to record the name of the preacher and the scriptural text of the sermon. This purpose had changed by the end of the century when greater emphasis was put on the recording of the number taking Holy Communion and the amount raised in the offertory. The earliest of these books were typically called 'Preachers Books', but as the prime use altered they were often entitled 'Parochial Register' or 'Church Services Register'. Rarely and never for a sustained period of years in any one parish were the worship registers used to record the number actually attending services. Thus material on church attendance in the registers in the period up to 1960 is very sporadic.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ For many years pew rents were given as a reason for the poor staying away from church, see Hempton (1996a) pp122-125.

⁷⁰ There are about 3000 Anglican worship registers deposited at the Stafford Record Office.

Several factors have a bearing on church attendance in 1851 and 1881, and one of the most important of these that has been identified is the size of the parish. Industrialisation and urbanisation are factors, although the town centre parishes with a well-defined civic role that related to a wide area, did attract larger congregations. Where the community was less well established as in some of the recently industrialised parishes then attendance was lower. The presence of other churches would seem to be a factor of growing importance, particularly where Non-conformists, and to some extent the Roman Catholics, were able to attract more people in some of the poorer areas. Anglican attendance was also low in thinly populated parishes, and where the parish church was badly sited. Anglican attendance was higher in small communities, where the parson's role was integrated into that of the economic and social well being of the parish. Typically this was seen in two types of parishes, the estate village dominated by a resident landowner, and the town church, where the paternalism could be expressed through the care of a congregation. The representatives of other churches in the town parishes may have encouraged the clergy to develop a more congregational ministry where the Anglican identity was more energetically nurtured. In some parishes, particularly in the town centres, the clergy took on a prominent civic role as well.

Church attendance as a measure of church influence raises an apparent irony. The smaller the parish the less necessary it was to attend church in order to be influenced by the church. In a large parish, where clerical visiting could only touch a small proportion of the population, the most likely way to encounter the clergy was through church activities such as worship, which therefore took on a greater importance. The country parson who lived at the centre of the village would meet most of his parishioners on his daily round. Ironically they did not need

to go to church to see him, and yet it is because he was so much a part of the life of the community, in social and economic terms as well as in any religious way, that attendance in such places was higher.

Communicants 1830-1960

In contrast to the scarcity of attendance material there is a rich resource of communicant figures in all types of parishes throughout the period. The numbers taking Holy Communion has been regularly recorded by the clergy in the parishes and the statistics have been collected by the church authorities. At the beginning of the period Archdeacon Hodson undertook an extensive visitation of the Staffordshire parishes in his jurisdiction around 1830.⁷¹ From the 1870s parish worship registers were becoming common and they provide a large and invaluable source of material. In the course of this study it has been possible to refer to over one thousand of such registers.

One of the important changes over the period was the increased frequency of Holy Communion, due to the influence of liturgical reform and the growth of the Parish Communion Movement.⁷² In 1830 the non-communion services of matins and evensong were the standard worship diet of the Church of England and there were no churches in the archdeacon's area in Staffordshire that provided a weekly Holy Communion, and only six parishes where the frequency was once a month. The usual pattern was Holy Communion three or four times a year to fulfil the Anglican requirement of receiving the sacrament at

⁷¹ The visitations have been reprinted in Robinson (1980).

Easter, at Christmas and on Whitsunday.

The liturgical changes in the following decades were far reaching. By 1880 most parishes had a monthly communion service and by 1900 most had a weekly one, as discussed in chapter seven. At this stage some parishes of the catholic tradition had established a daily communion service, usually termed the ‘mass’, and the broad church parishes of the liberal tradition had weekday communion services on saints days. A few evangelical and Low Church parishes were still resisting such innovations. Generally matins and evensong were still regarded as important, and were probably attended by large congregations, although there are very few records to show this.⁷² By 1900 the Sunday pattern of an early communion at 7 am or 8 am followed by a major service such as parish communion or matins at around 10.30 am, was common. Typically the clergy had encouraged the members of their congregations to take Holy Communion much more frequently. When Otho Steele retired from St. Michael’s Church in Lichfield in 1913 he wrote, “At the beginning of New Year, let me urge upon you a stricter rule as to the regularity of your communications. Determine upon at least a monthly, better still a fortnightly or even a weekly Communion, and keep the rule as strictly as you keep the rule of your daily prayers”.⁷⁴ The weekly frequency of Holy Communion was maintained until the end of the period in most places. In 1960 virtually all parishes still had a communion service every Sunday.

It is important to note that this liturgical development over the period meant that the clergy

⁷² The classic work on this subject is Hebert (1937).

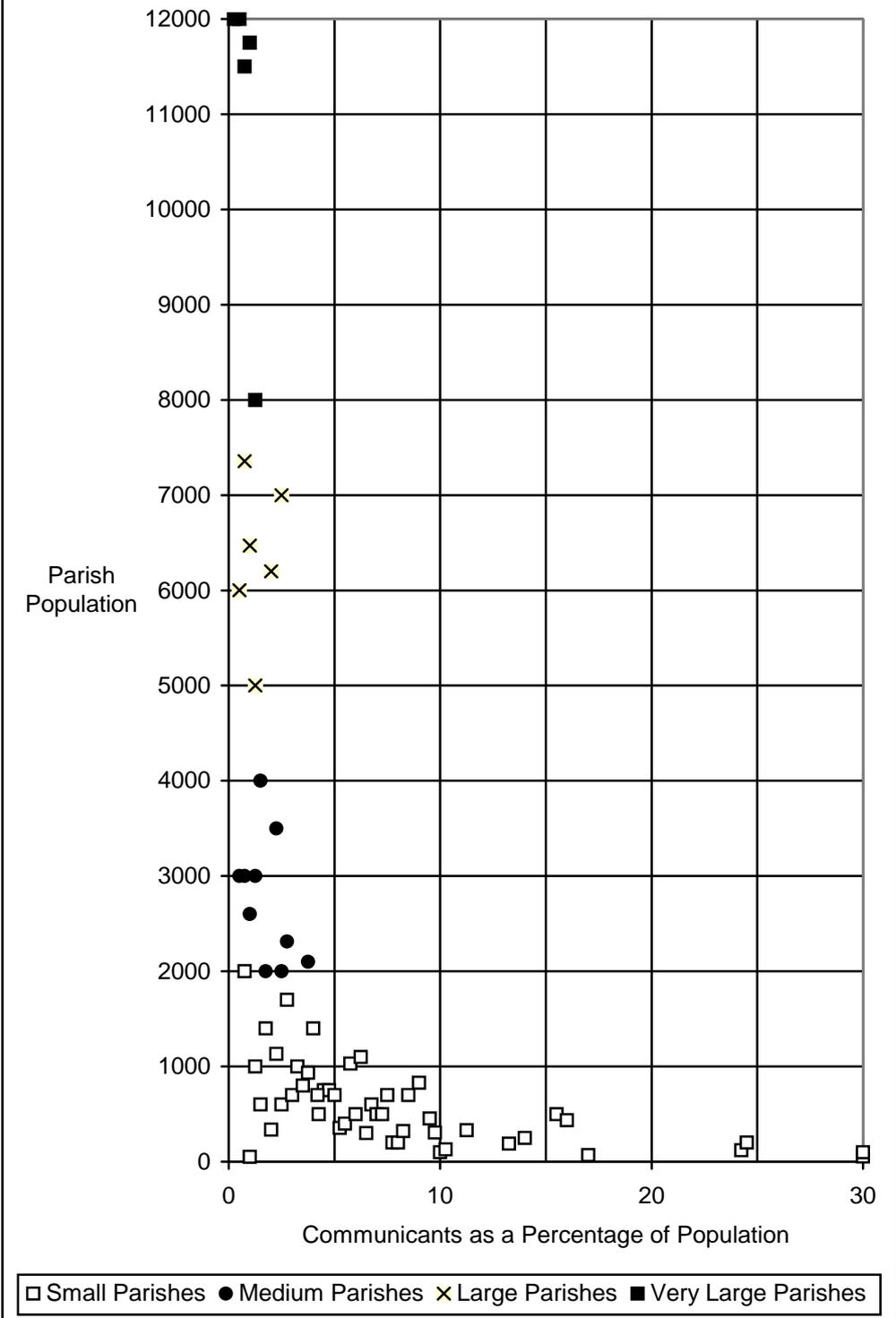
⁷³ There are records of where matins and evensong were well attended but it is not possible to determine how common this was.

became involved in more communion services. They spent a greater proportion of their worship time with the core members of the church who took Holy Communion and less time with the fringe members who attended non-communion services. Thus not only were the clergy concentrating more on worship and its associated activities, such as the refinement of church music and the reordering of church buildings, but the nature of the worship was more exclusive.

The communicant figures reveal the extent of the core membership of the local church. As Easter is the prime festival of the Christian year when virtually all Anglican churches have a Holy Communion service, it is possible to identify from this record a suggestion of the strength of the local church. This can be related to the four different sizes of parishes at various stages from 1830 to 1960. Communicant numbers at Christmas and on a normal Sunday have also been researched. The extensive material available from the visitation and parochial returns and the worship registers provides a coverage that exceeds a third of all parishes in the later years. Graphs 4.5 to 4.10 show the relationship between communicant numbers and parish size over 130 years.

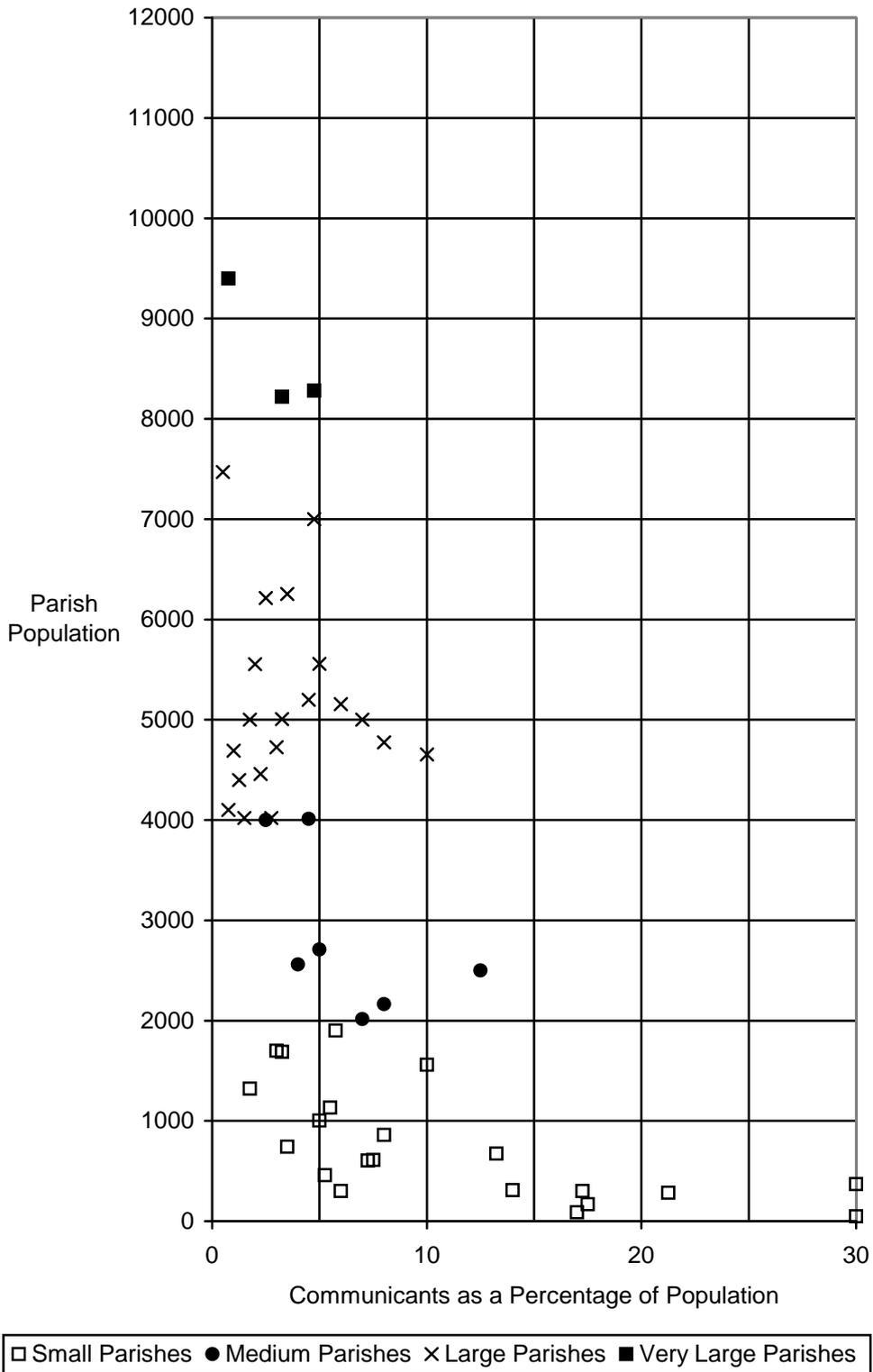
⁷⁴ *St. Michael's Lichfield Parish Magazine*, January 1913, SRO D27/9/7.

4.5 Staffordshire 1830 - Easter Communicants and Parish Size



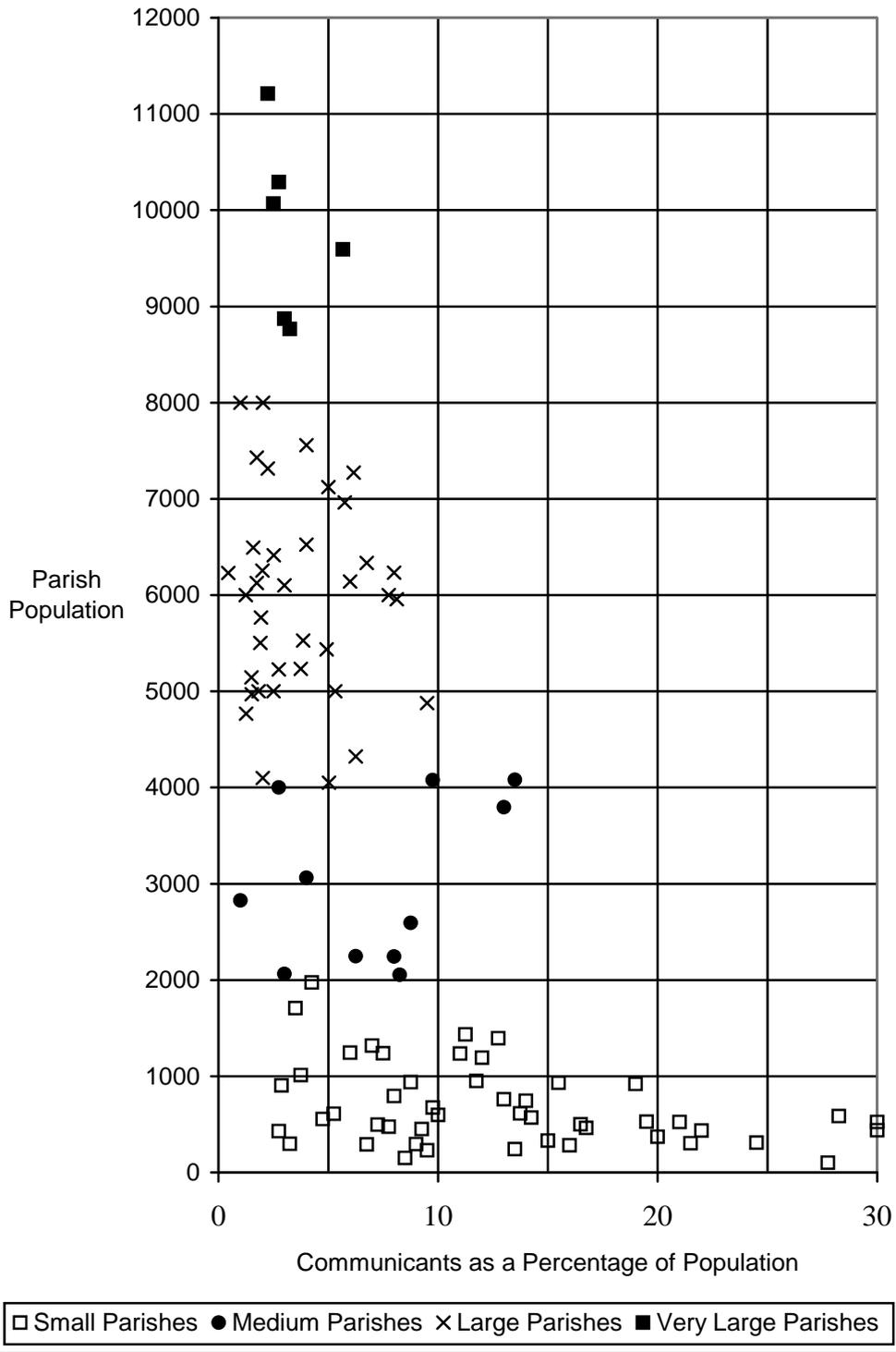
Source: Archdeacons Visitation Returns 1829-1830, Lichfield Record Office Small Parishes (91) - Abbots Bromley, Aldridge, Alton, Ashley, Bagnall w Bucknall, Barlaston, Barton under Needwood, Betley, Blore, Blurton, Blymhill, Bradley, Bradley in the Moors, Bramshall, Butterton St Bartholomew, Castle Church, Caulden, Caverswall, Chebsey, Cheddleton, Church Eaton, Clifton Campville, Colton, Cotton, Croxden, Dilhorne, Draycott, Drayton Bassett, Elford, Elkstone, Ellastone, Ellenhall, Endon, Enville, Fazeley, Forton, Gayton, Gratwich, Grindon, Hamstall Ridware, Hanford, Haughton, Himley, Horton, Ilam, Ingestre, Ipstones, Keele, Kingstone, Lapley, Madeley, Maer, Marchington, Marston, Mayfield, Meerbrook, Milwich, Mucklestone, Newborough, Norbury, Onecote, Pattingham w Patshull, Penn, Quarnford, Quatt, Ranton, Rocester, Rolleston, Rushall, Rushton Spencer, Sandon, Seighford, Sheen, Shenstone, Standon, Stonnall, Stowe, Tatenhill, Thorpe Constantine, Trysull, Tutbury, Warslow, Waterfall, Weston-under-Lizard, Weston-upon-Trent, Wetton, Whitmore, Wigginton, Wilnecote, Worfield, Wychnor. Medium Parishes (15) - Audley, Biddulph, Bloxwich, Cheadle, Checkley, Gornall, Kniver, Longnor, Newchapel, Norton in the Moors, Stone, Swynnerton, Tamworth, Tixall, Trentham. Large Parishes (7) - Brierley Hill, Burton on Trent, Kingswinford, Leek, Wednesbury, Stafford, Uttoxeter. Very Large Parishes (8) - Burslem, Hanley, Sedgley, Walsall, West Bromwich, Lane End, Newcastle, Stoke on Trent.

4.6 Staffordshire 1880 - Easter Communicants and Parish Size



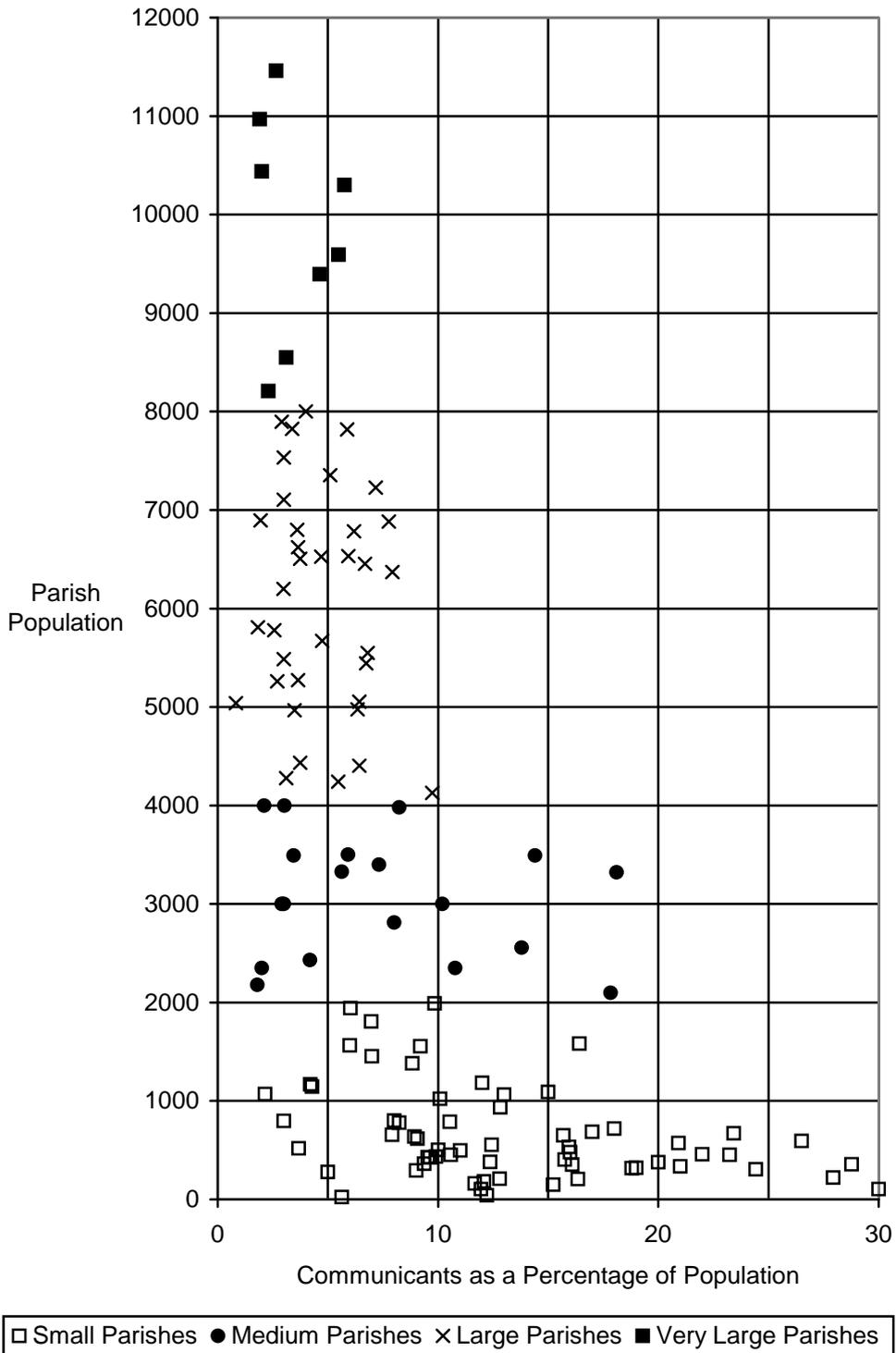
Sources: Visitation Returns, Preachers Books and Service Registers, Stafford Record Office. Small Parishes (21) - Abbots Bromley 1888-1891, Alrewas w Fradley 1877-1884, Bucknall 1878-1882, Burntwood 1886-1888, Checkley 1883-1886, Colwich 1879, Coppenhall 1880, Cotes Heath 1887-1888, Coven 1878-1880, Dunston 1879, Ellastone w Stanton 1878-1882, Hoar Cross 1879-1882, Knutton 1878-1882, Lapley w Wheaton Aston 1881-1885, Little Aston 1875-1885, Stafford St Chad 1878-1882, Thorpe Constantine 1882-1885, Trysull 1878-1882, Weston-under-Lizard 1878-1882, Whitmore 1885-1887, Wombourn 1877-1880. Medium Parishes (7) - Alton 1885-1890, Armitage 1875-1885, Forebridge St Paul 1878-1882, Penkridge 1883-1885, Tettenhall Wood 1882-1885, Walsall St George 1878-1882, Wolverhampton St Luke 1883-1885. Large Parishes (25) - Blakenhall Heath 1875-1885, Bloxwich 1884-1887, Cannock St Luke 1881-1885, Golden Hill Stoke on Trent 1877, Hanley St John 1878-1882, Heath Town 1885, Kidsgrove 1879-1882, Stafford St Mary 1878-1882, Stone Christ Church 1883-1885, Tipton St Matthew 1880-1883, Tividale 1884-1889, Tunstall St Mary 1884-1886, Wednesbury St John 1878-1879, Wednesbury St Paul 1879-1881, Wednesfield St Thomas 1881-1883, West Bromwich Holy Trinity 1888-1889, West Bromwich St Peter 1878-1882, Willenhall St Anne 1885, Wolverhampton Christ Church 1885, Wolverhampton St Andrew 1885, Wolverhampton St James 1885, Wolverhampton St John 1885, Wolverhampton St Matthew 1885, Wolverhampton St Paul 1878-1882, Wolverhampton St Peter 1878-1881. Very Large Parishes (3) - Burslem St Paul 1878-1883, Wolverhampton St Mark 1885, Wolverhampton St Mary 1885.

4.7 Staffordshire 1900 - Easter Communicants and Parish Size



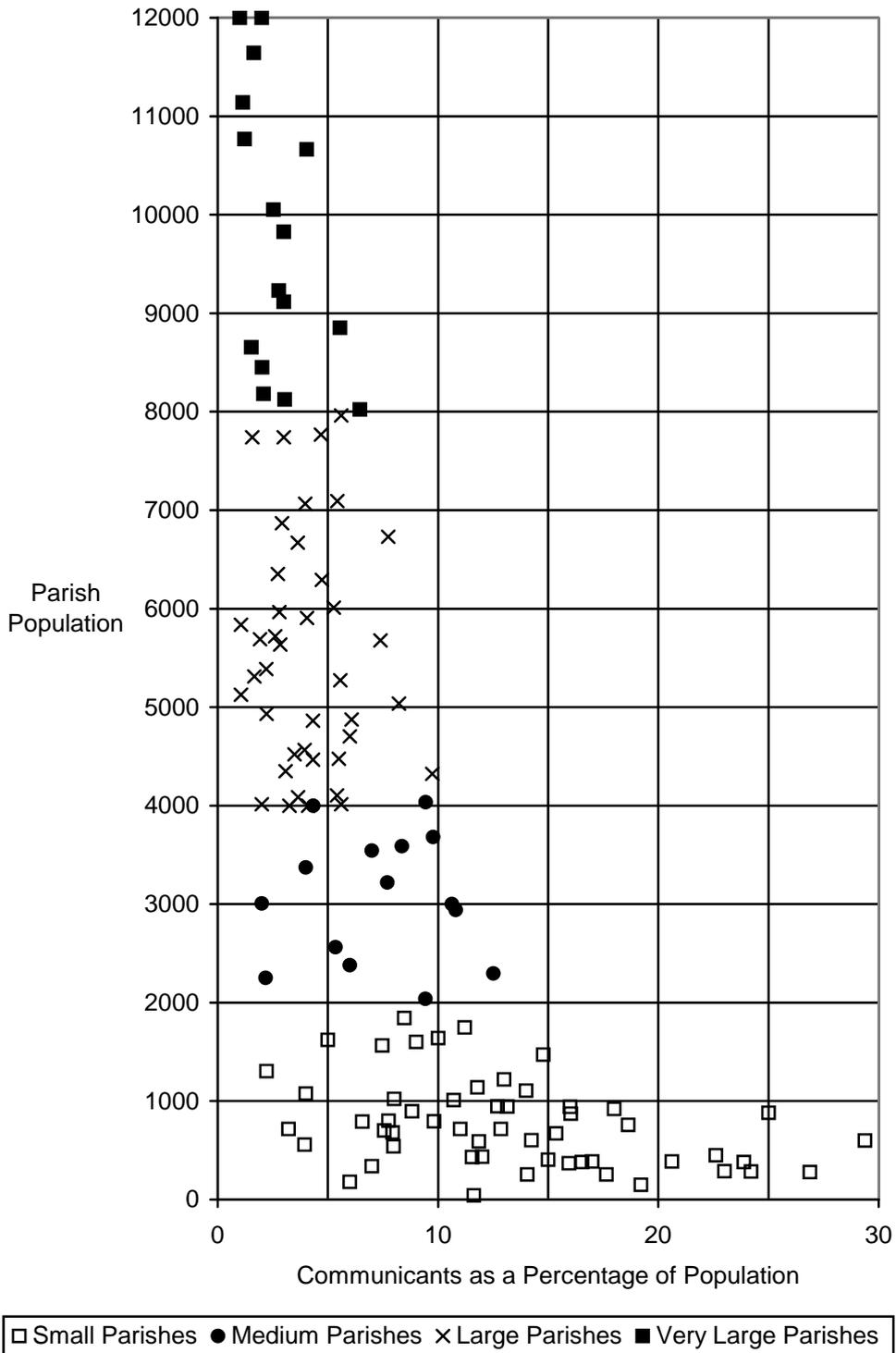
Sources: Visitation Returns, Preachers Books and Service Registers, Stafford Record Office. Small Parishes (49) - Abbots Bromley 1895-1905, Aldridge 1894-1906, Alrewas w Fradley 1995-1905, Anslow 1905-1906, Armitage 1895-1905, Little Aston 1895-1905, Barlaston 1902-1905, Baswich w Walton 1899-1905, Bishops Wood 1895-1905, Blymhill 1902-1905, Bobbington 1906-1909, Broughton 1904-1905, Carlton 1896-1902, Castle Church 1898-1902, Cauldon 1898-1902, Cheddleton 1899-1903, Church Eaton 1897-1902, Codsall 1898-1902, Colwich 1905-1906, Cotes Heath 1902-1903, Coven 1899-1901, Drayton Bassett 1899-1902, Enville 1898-1902, Farewell 1900-1903, Hammerwich 1898-1902, Hixon 1903, Hoar Cross 1904-1906, Keele 1898-1902, Kings Bromley 1905, Longdon St James 1898-1902, Longnor 1898-1902, Milwich 1903-1905, Mow Cop 1898-1902, Onecote w Bradnop 1903-1905, Oulton 1898-1900, Rushton Spencer 1898-1902, Stafford St Chad 1898-1901, Stafford St Thomas 1898-1902, Swynnerton 1899-1901, Thorpe Constantine 1898-1901, Trysull 1898-1902, Tutbury 1898-1902, Waterfall 1897-1902, Weston-under-Lizard 1898-1902, Wetton 1903-1904, Whitgreave 1906-1908, Whitmore 1898-1900, Wigginton 1902-1905, Wychnor 1902-1903. Medium Parishes (11) - Alton 1895-1904, Bagnall 1895-1905, Brereton 1898-1900, Bucknall 1898-1903, Burntwood 1896-1900, Hanley St John 1898-1902, Leek All Saints 1898-1902, Meir 1899-1903, Tettenhall Wood 1898-1902, Tunstall St Aidan 1907-1909, Wolverhampton St Peter 1898-1900. Large Parishes (37) - Blakenhall Heath 1895-1905, Bloxwich 1894, Bradley Bilston 1900-1903, Burton on Trent All Saints 1898-1905, Caverswall 1903-1905, Darlaston St Lawrence 1898-1902, Ettingshall 1906-1907, Hanley All Saints 1903-1905, Kidsgrove 1898-1902, Leek St Edward 1898-1902, Longton St James 1898-1902, Newcastle St Giles 1898-1902, Newchapel 1905-1907, Normacot 1898-1901, Stafford St Mary 1898-1901, Stone Christ Church 1898-1902, Talke 1898-1906, Tamworth 1898-1902, Tipton St Matthew 1898-1902, Tividale 1898-1902, Tunstall St Mary 1898-1900, Uttoxeter 1900-1905, Walsall St George 1898-1902, Walsall St Mary 1898-1902, Walsall Wood 1989-1901, Wednesbury St Bartholomew 1903-1905, Wednesbury St Paul 1895, Wednesfield St Thomas 1898-1905, West Bromwich Holy Trinity 1898-1902, West Bromwich St Peter 1898-1902, West Bromwich St Philip 1898-1902, Willenhall St Giles 1899-1902, Wolverhampton St James 1898-1902, Wolverhampton St John 1901-1903, Wolverhampton St Jude 1901-1903, Wolverhampton St Luke 1899-1901, Wolverhampton St Paul 1899-1902. Very Large Parishes (6) - Bilston St Leonard 1896-1904, Burslem St Paul 1898-1903, Cannock St Luke 1898-1902, Hednesford 1901-1904, Walsall St Peter 1896, Wolverhampton St Andrew 1898-1902.

4.8 Staffordshire 1920 - Easter Communicants and Parish Size



Sources: Visitation Returns and Service Registers, Stafford Record Office. Small Parishes (63) - Abbots Bromley 1915-1925, Alrewas w Fradley 1915-1925, Alstonefield 1915-1925, Armitage 1915-1925, Anslow 1915-1924, Barlaston 1915-1922, Baswich w Walton 1915-1925, Bishopswood 1915-1925, Blithfield 1917-1918, Blurton 1919-1925, Blymhill 1915-1923, Bobbington 1915-1925, Bradley All Saints 1918-1922, Branstone 1917-1925, Brereton 1918-1920, Broughton 1915-1925, Brown Edge 1919-1923, Butterton St Bartholomew 1915-1924, Carlton 1917-1920, Church Eaton 1918-1922, Codsall 1916-1918, Chapel Chorlton 1921-1925, Cheddleton 1918-1922, Colton 1920, Colwich 1918-1921, Cotes Heath 1918-1921, Coven 1920-1922, Draycott-le-Moors 1921-1924, Elford 1920-1923, Endon-w-Stanley 1920-1922, Enville 1920-1922, Farewell 1918-1921, Gnosall 1918-1922, Grindon 1921-1924, Hammerwich 1918-1922, Hanbury 1918-1922, Himley 1919-1922, Hixon 1920, Hoar Cross 1918-1922, Ipstones 1917-1925, Kings Bromley 1920, Lapley-w-Wheaton Aston 1919-1922, Little Aston 1915-1925, Longdon St James 1918-1922, Longnor 1918-1922, Milwich 1921-1924, Muckleston 1925-1926, Onecote 1915-1925, Stafford St Chad 1918-1922, Stafford St Thomas 1918-1922, Swynnerton 1918-1919, Thorpe Constantine 1919-1921, Tittensor 1919-1922, Tixall 1920-1924, Trysull 1918-1922, Tutbury 1919-1922, Waterfall 1919-1922, Weston-under-Lizard 1918-1922, Wetley Rocks 1918-1922, Wetton 1918-1920, Whitgreave 1918-1922, Wigginton 1918-1922, Wychnor 1918-1920. Medium Parishes (19) - Aldridge 1915-1925, Alsagers Bank 1918-1925, Bagnall 1915-1925, Bucknall 1917-1922, Burntwood 1918-1922, Chasetown 1918-1920, Hanley St John 1918-1922, Mow Cop 1917-1921, Norton 1918-1922, Pelsall 1918, Penkridge 1919-1922, Tettenhall Wood 1921-1923, Trent Vale 1918-1922, Tunstall St Aiden 1920-1922, Tunstall St Chad 1918-1921, Walsall St Mark 1918-1922, Walsall St Paul 1921-1923, Wolverhampton St Jude 1918-1921, Wolverhampton St Peter 1918-1922. Large Parishes (37) - Basford 1915-1925, Blakenhall Heath 1915-1925, Bloxwich 1918-1925, Bradley St Martin 1917-1923, Caverswall 1918-1922, Darlaston St Lawrence 1918-1922, Ettingshall 1924-1925, Great Wyrley 1919-1922, Hanley All Saints 1918-1922, Hanley St Jude 1919-1922, Hope 1921-1924, Kidsgrove 1981-1922, Leek St Edward 1918-1922, Longton St James 1918-1922, Newcastle St Giles 1920-1923, Rugeley 1919-1922, Stafford St Mary 1918-1922, Stafford St Paul 1918-1922, Stone Christ Church 1918-1921, Talke 1918-1922, Tipton St Matthew 1919-1920, Tipton St Paul 1921-1924, Tunstall St Mary 1921-1924, Uttoxeter 1918-1920, Walsall St George 1918-1922, Walsall St Mary 1918-1921, Walsall Wood 1918-1920, Wednesbury St Bartholomew 1923-1924, Wednesbury St Paul 1919-1921, Wednesfield St Thomas 1927-1929, West Bromwich Holy Trinity 1921-1923, West Bromwich St Peter 1918-1922, West Bromwich St Philip 1919-1922, Willenhall St Giles 1918-1921, Wolverhampton St John 1918-1922, Wolverhampton St Paul 1917-1922, Wolverhampton St Stephen 1918-1922. Very Large Parishes (10) - Bilston St Leonard 1916-1924, Burton on Trent All Saints 1915-1921, Burslem St Paul 1918-1922, Cannock St Luke 1919-1923, Fenton 1918-1922, Tamworth 1918-1926, Walsall St Andrew 1921-1924, Wolverhampton St Andrew 1918-1922, Wolverhampton St Luke 1918-1922, Wolstanton 1919-1922.

4.9 Staffordshire 1940 - Easter Communicants and Parish Size



Sources: Visitation Returns and Service Registers, Stafford Record Office. Small Parishes (60) - Abbots Bromley 1935-1945, Alrewas w Fradley 1935-1937, Alstonefield 1935-1945, Anslow 1935-1945, Armitage 1935-1945, Ashley 1937-1945, Barlaston 1935-1940, Baswich-w-Walton 1936-1937, Betley 1935-1945, Bishops Wood 1935-1945, Blithfield 1935-1940, Blore Ray 1935-1945, Blurton 1935-1945, Bobbington 1935-1945, Bradley All Saints 1938-1942, Branstone 1935-1945, Broughton 1935-1944, Brown Edge 1938-1942, Burton on Trent St Modwen 1935-1945, Butterton St Bartholomew 1935-1939, Carlton 1936-1940, Caudon 1938-1942, Chapel Chorlton 1938-1941, Church Eaton 1939-1942, Colton 1940, Colwich 1938-1942, Cotes Heath 1939-1941, Coven 1938-1942, Dilhorne 1941, Edingdale 1936-1940, Elford 1938-1939, Endon-w-Stanley 1938-1942, Enville 1938-1942, Gnosall 1939-1942, Grindon 1938-1942, Hammerwich 1938-1940, Hanbury 1939-1941, Himley 1938-1942, Ipstones 1935-1945, Keele 1938-1942, Lapley-w-Wheaton Aston 1938-1942, Little Aston 1935-45, Longdon St James 1938-1942, Longnor 1941-1944, Mucklestone 1938-1942, Onecote 1935-1945, Sharesill 1938-1942, Stafford St Chad 1938-1942, Stafford St Thomas 1938-1942, Stonnal 1939, Swynnerton 1938-1942, Tittensor 1935-1936, Tutbury 1939-1942, Waterfall 1935, Wetley Rocks 1938-1942, Whitgreave 1938-1942, Whitmore 1938-1942, Wigginton 1940-1943, Wychnor 1938-1942, Yoxall 1938-1942. Medium Parishes (15) - Aldridge 1935-1945, Alsagers Bank 1935-1941, Bilston St Luke 1940-1945, Brereton 1937-1940, Burton on Trent Holy Trinity 1943-1945, Eccleshall 1938-1942, Forsbrook 1946-1947, Hanley St John 1938-1942, Kinver 1938-1942, Leek All Saints 1938-1941, Meir 1937-1940, Norton 1940, Penkridge 1939-1941, Tettenhall Wood 1938-1942, Walsall St George 1938-1942. Large Parishes (40) - Bagnall 1935-1945, Basford 1935-1945, Bradley St Martin 1939-1943, Bucknall 1938-1941, Burton on Trent All Saints 1939-1945, Chasetown 1939-1942, Darlaston St Lawrence 1939-1941, Essington 1939-1941, Ettingshall 1938-1942, Great Wyrley 1940-1943, Hanley St Jude 1938-1942, Kidsgrove 1938-1942, Longton St James 1938-1942, Moxley 1938-1942, Newcastle St Giles 1940-1942, Newchapel 1938-1942, Pelsall 1939-1941, Rugeley 1939-1942, Stafford St Mary 1939-1942, Stafford St Paul 1938-1940, Stone Christ Church 1939-1941, Talke 1938-1942, Tipton St Matthew 1938-1942, Tipton St Paul 1938-1942, Tividale 1938-1942, Trent Vale 1939-1940, Tunstall St Aiden 1938-1942, Tunstall St Chad 1937-1940, Uttoxeter 1938-1942, Walsall St Mark 1938-1940, Walsall St Paul 1938-1941, West Bromwich Holy Trinity 1938-1942, West Bromwich St Philip 1938-1942, Willenhall St Anne 1939-1942, Willenhall St Giles 1938-1942, Wolverhampton All Saints 1938-1942, Wolverhampton St John 1940-1942, Wolverhampton St Jude 1938-1941, Wolverhampton St Paul 1938-1942, Wolverhampton St Stephen 1938-1941. Very Large Parishes (22) - Bilston St Leonard 1936-1945, Blakenhall Heath 1935-1945, Bloxwich 1935-1943, Burslem St Paul 1938-1942, Cannock St Luke 1938-1942, Fenton 1938-1942, Hednesford 1938-1942, Leek St Edward 1938-1941, Tamworth 1938-1942, Tunstall St Mary 1937-1940, Walsall St Andrew 1949, Walsall St Mary 1938-1942, Walsall St John 1938-1940, Walsall Wood 1938-1940, Wednesbury St Bartholomew 1938-1940, Wednesbury St Paul 1937-1938, Wednesfield St Thomas 1938-1942, West Bromwich Christ Church 1938-1942, West Bromwich St Peter 1944-1946, Wolverhampton St Andrew 1936-1939, Wolverhampton St Luke 1938-1942, Wolverhampton St Mark 1936-1938.

Sources: Visitation Returns and Service Registers, Stafford Record Office. Small Parishes (43) - Abbots Bromley 1955-1965, Alstonefield 1950, Armitage 1955-1962, Ashley 1955-1963, Aston 1955-1962, Betley 1955-1963, Bishops Wood 1955-1965, Blore Ray 1955-1959, Blymhill 1960, Bobbington 1955-1965, Bradley All Saints 1958-1962, Branstone 1955-1965, Broughton 1955-1963, Brown Edge 1958-1962, Burton on Trent Holy Trinity 1955-1959, Burton on Trent St Modwen 1955-1957, Chapel Chorlton 1958-1962, Church Eaton 1958-1962, Colwich 1958-1962, Cotes Heath 1959-1961, Coven 1958-1962, Draycott-le-Moors 1958-1962, Gnosall 1959-1962, Grindon 1958-1962, Hammerwich 1958-1961, Himley 1958-1962, Hoar Cross 1958-1962, Ipstones 1955-1963, Keele 1958-1962, Little Aston 1955-1962, Longnor 1958-1962, Mucklestone 1958-1962, Onecote 1955-1965, Oulton 1959-1960, Sheen 1958-1962, Stafford St Chad 1958-1962, Stonnall 1958-1962, Tittensor 1958-1962, Weston-under-Lizard 1960, Wetley Rocks 1966, Whitgreave 1958-1960, Whitmore 1958-1962, Wigginton 1958-1962. Medium Parishes (19) - Baswich w Walton 1955-1961, Bilston St Luke 1955-1965, Bradley St Martin 1956-1959, Brereton 1954-1959, Eccleshall 1958-1962, Endon 1958-1959, Forsbrook 1957-1959, Hanley St Luke 1959-1960, Longton St James 1958-1962, Penkridge 1958-1961, Shareshill 1958-1962, Stafford St Thomas 1958-1962, Swynnerton 1958-1962, Tipton St Matthew 1958-1962, Walsall St George 1958-1961, Walsall St Mark 1958-1962, Walsall St Paul 1957-1959, Wolverhampton 1960-1962, Wolverhampton St Paul 1958-1962. Large Parishes (34) - Aldridge 1952-1955, Basford 1956-1963, Bucknall 1959-1962, Burntwood 1956-1962, Burslem St Paul 1954-1960, Burton on Trent All Saints 1955-1960, Chasetown 1958-1960, Darlaston St Lawrence 1958-1962, Essington 1958-1960, Ettingshall 1958-1960, Great Wyrley 1958-1962, Hanley St John 1958-1962, Hartshill 1958-1962, Kidsgrove 1958-1962, Leek All Saints 1958-1962, Leek St Edward 1958-1960, Normacot 1959-1962, Stafford Christ Church 1961, Talke 1958-1962, Tettenhall Wood 1958-1961, Tipton St Paul 1958-1960, Tunstall St Chad 1958-1962, Tunstall St Mary 1958-1960, Uttoxeter 1958-1961, Walsall St Mary 1958-1961, West Bromwich Christ Church 1958-1962, West Bromwich Holy Trinity 1960, West Bromwich St Peter 1955-1957, Willenhall St Anne 1958-1962, Wolverhampton All Saints 1958-1962, Wolverhampton St Chad 1958-1962, Wolverhampton St Jude 1958-1960, Wolverhampton St Mark 1959-1962, Wolverhampton St Matthew 1958-1962. Very Large Parishes (19) - Bagnall 1955-1963, Blakenhall Heath 1955-1962, Bloxwich 1957-1962, Cannock St Luke 1958-1960, Fenton 1958-1962, Hednesford 1961-1963, Meir 1960-1963, Moxley 1958-1961, Newcastle St Giles 1956-1959, Rugeley 1958-1961, Tamworth 1958-1961, Tividale 1958-1960, Trent Vale 1959-1962, Walsall St Andrew 1957-1958, Walsall St Michael 1957-1962, Walsall Wood 1959-1961, Wednesbury St Bartholomew 1955-1959, Wednesfield St Thomas 1958-1960, Willenhall St Giles 1958-1962.

The research reveals that from 1830 to 1960 the percentage of those taking Holy Communion in all types of parishes at first increased and then decreased. This percentage peaked in the period 1900-1920 in the medium, large and very large parishes, after which the percentages begin to fall. In small parishes the peak came later around 1940. Graph and table 4.11 show an overview of these changes.

The percentage taking Holy Communion was always much higher in the small parishes. In 1830 the difference between the small parishes and other types is greater than in any other period. In some small parishes a third of the adult population received Holy Communion. For example this occurred in Ingestre, Thorpe Constantine and Wychnor, three estate villages with small populations, no other churches and a clergyman related to the patron and the local landowner. In such a situation the parson model predominated, with a resident clergyman ministering to the close-knit community in social and economic as well as spiritual terms. However, it is important to note that in none of these villages did communicants actually outnumber non-communicants: most people did not take Holy Communion at Easter even in the most Christian of all communities. A few small or thinly populated parishes had low percentages. The scattered rural parish of Alstonefield, which stretched over several square miles in the Staffordshire moor lands, was such an example. Here the presence of other denominations, such as the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodists may have been a determining factor. It was in the low populated parishes that the presence of another church was most likely to create a rivalry.

In the medium and larger parishes in 1830 the percentages were relatively low. In the new

industrial areas the Church of England was failing to touch all but a few of the population. In Sedgley, a large industrial parish, the vicar and curate struggled to minister to a population of 20,000. It was a similar situation in Hanley, Audley, Gornall, Bloxwich, Coseley and Brierley Hill where new industry was transforming scattered villages and hamlets into urban sprawl. These parishes also had other denominations, which were to some extent rival concerns. In Sedgley several denominations had churches, and there were non-Anglican schools and a Roman Catholic seminary. The parson model was ineffectual where the population was large or spread thinly over a large area.

By 1880 the medium and larger parishes were experiencing higher percentages, in some cases exceeding those of some small parishes. The ecclesiastical reforms after 1830, and in particular the release of revenue for new churches and parishes, the recruitment of more clergy and the improved diocesan management, had enabled the Church of England to adapt itself better to industrial and urban communities. The few large unmanageable parishes of the 1830, such as Sedgley, had been divided up.⁷⁵

An important factor in this development was the increase in the number of the clergy, particularly curates assisting in parishes. In large parishes the presence of a large clerical team must have contributed to the increased percentage of communicants. In 1880 Wolverhampton St Peter had three curates working with the rector, and the twelve daughter parishes that had been created from St Peter's Parish were served in all but two cases by a vicar and one curate or more. In Stoke on Trent St Peter the rector-archdeacon headed a team of six curates.

⁷⁵ Roper (1952) p85.

Staffordshire at this time had an army of 200 curates, mostly serving in urban parishes.⁷⁶

Some of these curates would have had responsibility for a daughter church. A parish, however large, which had extra Anglican places of worship and thus more opportunities for people to attend worship, usually had a higher percentage of communicants. In Wolverhampton St Peter 10% took Holy Communion, a high percentage for an urban area, although, as discovered in the 1851 and 1881 censuses, the established conurbation centre churches tended to have higher levels of attendance. At Wolverhampton Christ Church and Wolverhampton St. Andrew both incumbents worked with a curate in urban parishes with populations of less than 5000 and had relatively high percentages of around 8%. In contrast at Willenhall St Ann there was no curate to assist in the work and the communicants were only 2% of the population. The lowest percentages recorded, at less than one half of one percent, were at Tipton St Matthew and West Bromwich St Peter where the clergy sought to serve large populations on their own. Apparently curates did seem to have a beneficial effect because they brought down the clergy-population ratio. In some ways this was the application of the parson model in an urban setting: a large parish that could be divided up into pastoral units of 2,000-4,000 people each under the care of a clergyman so that each in many ways operate as a small parish.

By 1900 the high percentages were still maintained in the medium and larger parishes, because a ready supply of 230 curates in the county helped to enable the continuation of the parson model.⁷⁷ Wolverhampton St Peter with its high percentage of 13% had three curates working with the rector, and in the rest of the town there were 15 others. At Hanley St John,

⁷⁶ *Church Calendar and General Almanac*, 1882.

in the Potteries where Anglicans did not always do very well, the percentage was even higher, perhaps because the rector and curate served a relatively small urban parish of just over 4,000. The Church of England was drawing people into active participation in those parishes where the clergy had at most 2,000 people to whom they had to minister. This was all dependent upon the continued increase in clergy numbers, which by this stage was beginning to be reversed.

By 1920 the large and very large parishes were showing signs of decline. Despite the increase in population the number of curates had fallen to 120, and this had caused a staff shortage in some of the larger parishes and made them difficult to minister as a parson. The curates were not available to oversee the daughter churches and mission halls. The medium parish, as with the small parish, was still able to maintain a high percentage, for at this stage because they were less reliant on curates they were less affected by the reduction in clergy numbers. The average communicant attendance in the small parishes was over 11%, reaching 28% in Elford and in Tixall, and 31% in Thorpe Constantine. In the large and very large parishes where teams of curates still operated the percentages were maintained at relatively high levels. In Cannock the vicar and four curates served nearly 19,000 people and the communicant rate was around 5%. Similarly at Fenton the vicar and three curates served 14,000 people and the communicant rate was over 6%.⁷⁸

The fall in clergy numbers, which meant that the supply of curates was reducing and they were being deployed more sparingly, had its greatest effect upon the medium and large

⁷⁷ *Church Calendar and General Almanac*, 1902.

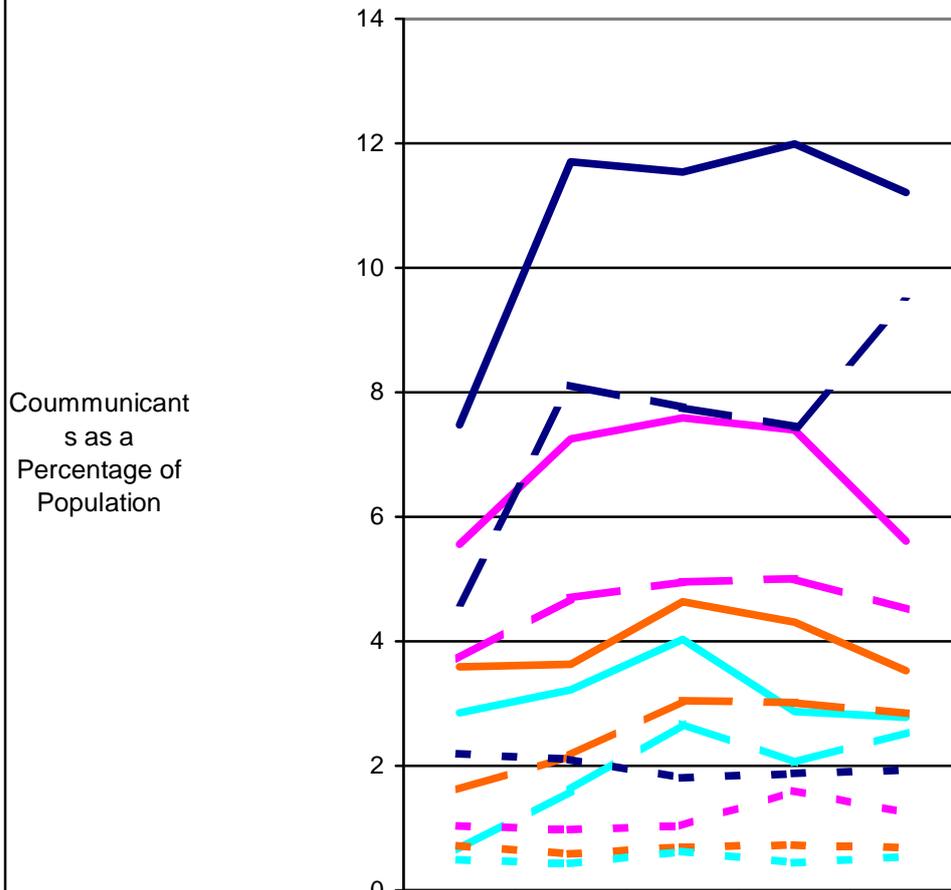
parishes that had depended upon them. The small parishes that could afford a clergyman and in many cases had not had a curate for years if at all were less affected by the reduction.⁷⁹ In 1940 small parishes were still experiencing high communicant percentages and were actually reaching their all time high. However, there were fewer small parishes with very high or very low percentages, because almost all such parishes were close to 12%. The average communicant percentages for all other types of parishes had declined. As before where there were curates the percentages were higher than in otherwise similar parishes. Wednesbury St Bartholomew with a vicar and two curates served in an urban parish of less than 9,000 people and had the relatively high communicant percentage of 4%, and in Tamworth the vicar and three curates served 13,000 people and over 5% of the population attended Holy Communion. The larger single staffed urban parishes experienced the lowest communicant percentages, such as Walsall St John, Walsall St Mary, Wolverhampton St Luke and Burslem St Paul.

By 1960 all types of parishes were undergoing decline. In the last twenty years of the period it is the medium parish that experienced the greatest decline. This may be because they were considered too small to justify more than one clergyman and too large for one clergyman to operate the parson model effectively. Conversely the larger parishes underwent less of a decline perhaps benefiting from a different approach to ministry. By 1960 the parson model could not operate in most of the Church of England. The combination of a reduced number of clergy and a still growing population had necessitated the adoption, whether consciously or not, of the professional model.

⁷⁸ Statistics from worship registers, SRO D3094, D3380, D1263, D3783 and D5882.

⁷⁹ *Lichfield Diocese Church Calendar*, 1940.

4.11 Staffordshire Communicant Percentages 1880-1960



Communicants as a Percentage of Population

| | 1880 | 1900 | 1920 | 1940 | 1960 |
|----------------------|------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Small - Easter | 7.48 | 11.7 | 11.54 | 11.99 | 11.21 |
| Medium - Easter | 5.56 | 7.25 | 7.59 | 7.39 | 5.61 |
| Large - Easter | 3.59 | 3.63 | 4.64 | 4.31 | 3.53 |
| V Large - Easter | 2.85 | 3.22 | 4.03 | 2.87 | 2.78 |
| Small - Christmas | 4.63 | 8.11 | 7.75 | 7.45 | 9.45 |
| Medium - Christmas | 3.72 | 4.7 | 4.95 | 5.01 | 4.51 |
| Large - Christmas | 1.62 | 2.16 | 3.05 | 3.02 | 2.84 |
| V Large - Christmas | 0.66 | 1.61 | 2.68 | 2.05 | 2.53 |
| Small - av. Sunday | 2.19 | 2.1 | 1.81 | 1.88 | 1.93 |
| Medium - av. Sunday | 1.04 | 0.97 | 1.04 | 1.6 | 1.24 |
| Large - av. Sunday | 0.72 | 0.58 | 0.7 | 0.73 | 0.69 |
| V Large - av. Sunday | 0.49 | 0.43 | 0.63 | 0.44 | 0.54 |

Statistics taken from the visitation returns and confirmation registers as listed in the Bibliography.

In the comparison of communicant percentages at the different occasions important conclusions can be drawn. In all but one or two parishes the number of Easter communicants always exceeds the number at Christmas. However, the correlation between the two is different according to the size of the parish and the era. Christmas would appear to have significance close to that of Easter in the larger parishes. It is only in the small parishes that Easter has a much greater attendance than Christmas. This may be because the traditional pattern of attendance at Easter, which is the main festival of Christianity emphasising the crucifixion and resurrection, had been eroded in favour of attendance at Christmas in the large parishes because by their very urban and industrial nature they are places most susceptible to social change. In the larger parish where the congregation and the community are less connected, the essence of the Christian faith, primary expressed at Easter, finds less resonance in the wider population. Where the congregation and the community are more fully integrated Easter is likely to be better understood and supported as an event. It may be that agricultural communities, which had made up most of the smaller parishes, have a greater appreciation of the cycle of the season and in particular the qualities of new growth and new life expressed at Easter. Another more mundane reason may be that Christmas takes place in the coldest and darkest time of the year when in the small parishes, which were mainly rural, travel was less easy.

By 1940 in all types of parishes Easter has lost the predominance that it had. This may reflect the social changes, at first apparent in the larger parishes, that by then have affected most

parishes. It might be supposed that the growth of a secular attitude, which is less comfortable with the Easter themes of crucifixion and resurrection and more aligned to the child-centred story of the incarnation at Christmas, might have helped to bring about this change. However, the very reverse could have occurred, in that the change in emphasis from Easter to Christmas is due to a population divorced from the church and its teachings by circumstance of work and livelihood. The change may be due to more mundane reasons; the innovation of Midnight Mass was an apparently very popular and certainly helped to increase communicant numbers at Christmas.

The most notable feature of the communicant records is the steady attendance at ordinary Sundays across the period. When other evidence would seem to point to a declining church the number of the core of members who attended weekly remained the same. It is the people on the margins, who took the Holy Communion at Easter and Christmas and those who attended worship but were not recorded because they did not take Holy Communion, who were ceasing to come to church.

A detailed study of one parish, St Leonard's Church, Ipstones, a rural moorland community that has maintained approximately the same population of between 1,200 and 1,500 people over the last 150 years, reveals this trend. The Easter communicant numbers have fallen from 150 in the later nineteenth century to around 90 in 1960, and Christmas communicant numbers fell sharply from 70 to 25 over the same period. This is consistent with the general pattern in moorland parishes where the appealing innovation of Midnight Mass was not introduced. The average numbers taking Holy Communion on an ordinary Sunday stayed

fairly constant at around 12.⁸⁰ The oral evidence collected on a visit in 2002, and relating back to 1930s was of a full church at special occasions until the 1960s. Latterly the church, with its small but stable and committed membership, has been unable to attract the wider community to major celebrations.⁸¹

This change had an impact on the role of the clergy. They were relating to fewer people so that the core of the church was becoming relatively more important. At the same time the gap, in terms of religious expression at least, between the core and the wider population was becoming wider because with regard to the experience of church going they had less in common. Ironically, as the core became more likely to take the Holy Communion those on and beyond the margins of the church were less likely to attend, not least because a smaller proportion of services were non-Eucharistic and open to their full participation. This development eroded the parson's role since this depends upon the ability to relate to as much as the population as possible.

Another pattern, not expressed in the summary statistics, is the effect of individual clergymen. It can be shown by examination of the records of some parishes that when a clergyman is appointed to a parish the number of communicants will change, sometimes fairly significantly up or down. By increasing the number of Holy Communion, a common innovation in the early twentieth century as the parish communion movement became more widely established, the number of communicants would rise. In the absence of a priest, where a visiting priest

⁸⁰ St. Leonard's Church, Ipstones, *Register of Services*, 4 volumes, 1897-1970, SRO D5617/1/1-4.

⁸¹ The author spent some time at Ipstones collecting reminiscences from parishioners in

serves a parish, the number of Holy Communion services usually fell and the number of communicants reduced.

Confirmations 1840-1960

The service of confirmation, as expressed in the tradition of the Church of England, was the rite of reception into full membership, in as much as such a concept was accepted. It was certainly seen as a rite of passage, to occur “just before the boy or girl leaves school, that they might be provided with greater strength for the difficulties and temptations of the new experiences that lie before them” wrote the vicar of Bradley in 1920.⁸² People were presented to the bishop for confirmation usually at the age of 12 or so although the record show a significant number of adults being confirmed as well. Almost always more females than males were confirmed.

In the earlier part of the period the bishop would travel the diocese over a period of two weeks in the summer months when he presided at about twelve services at which two to three hundred people would be confirmed. These were large events attracting people from a wide area and they must have had a large impact on the local community, and such a service might not take place for another four years or so. Later after the 1860s the services were held more frequently. These were smaller services involving much fewer confirmations and held in more parishes. This may have had the effect of increasing the number who could be confirmed.

November 2002.

The character of the bishop, his energy and enthusiasm to confirm, and the organisational skills necessary to arrange confirmations, will have had an affect upon the number of services, where they were held and how many attended for confirmation. Bishop Ryder in the 1820s and 1830s was noted for his attempts to reform confirmations. Bishop Selwyn in the 1860s and 1870s, following on from his zeal as a missionary bishop in New Zealand, was very keen to increase the number of confirmations in the diocese and worked tirelessly to fulfil a rigorous schedule of confirmation services all over Staffordshire. His successors, partly aided by the improvements in transportation, were able to exceed his goals.

Notwithstanding the fact that it was a general rite of passage marking the transition from childhood to adulthood confirmation is a measure of commitment to the church. Some clergy were adamant in not presenting for confirmation any parishioners who were not going to attend church. “There are a number of people, children and adults, in Marston and Whitgreave, who would like to be confirmed, but never attend church. I have refused to prepare them unless they do”, wrote one vicar of a small rural benefice in the 1950s.⁸³ The number confirmed in any parish, recorded as a percentage of the total population, is an indication of the influence of the church in that place, recognising that in a younger population, as when the population is growing, the percentage will be higher. However, despite the efforts of the clergy only a small proportion of those who were confirmed went on to be regular communicants. Indeed, this was a concern expressed by the clergy throughout

⁸² *Bradley and Church Eaton Parish Magazine*, January 1920, SRO D3379/42.

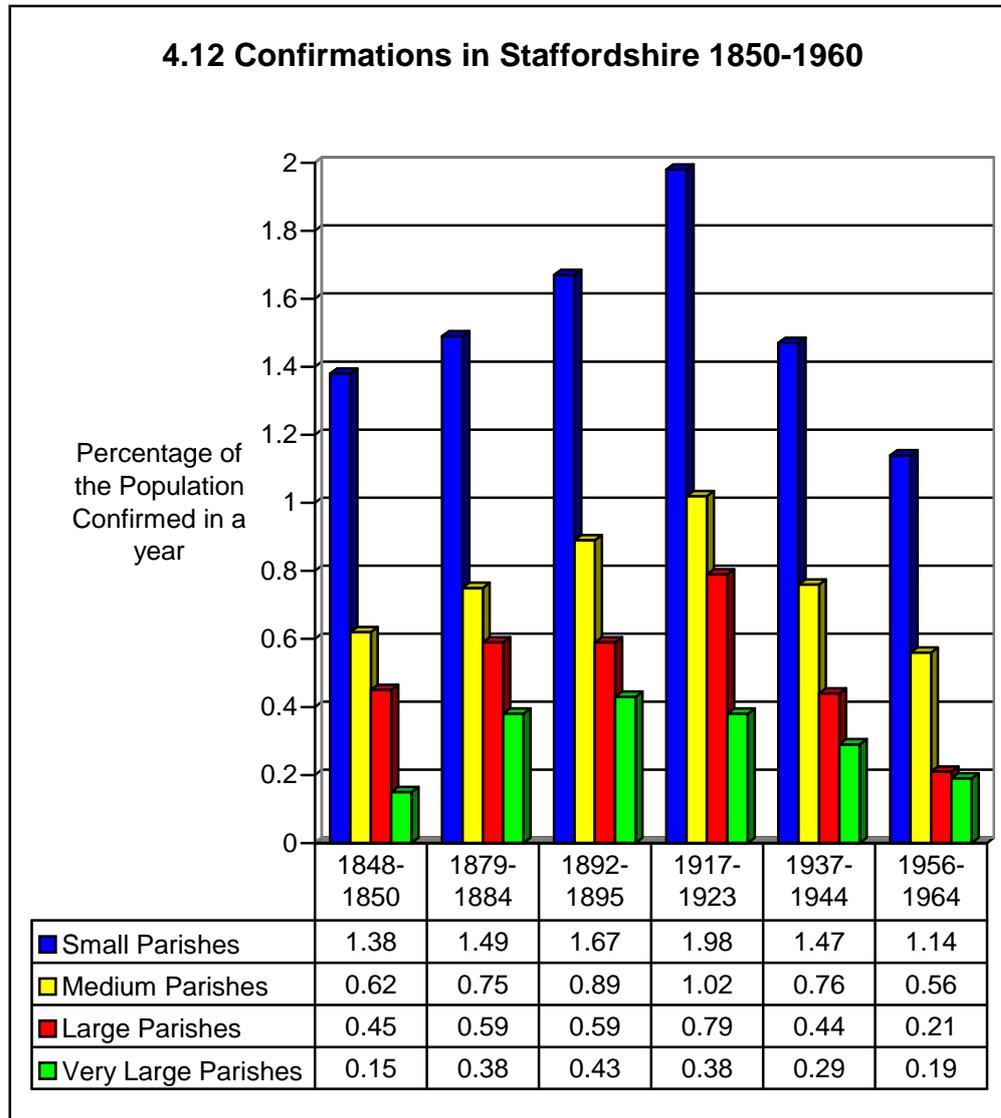
⁸³ Marston with Whitgreave confidential notebook prepared for successor, 1951, SRO D4781/2.

the period.⁸⁴

Graph 4.12 shows the relationship between confirmation rates and parish size in six periods over 110 years. It is apparent that confirmation rates do not vary greatly over the years, with a rise in most parishes around the turn of the century, due to an increase in the number of younger people as a proportion of the population because young people between the ages of 11 and 20 made up the vast majority of candidates. Of more importance than the number of young people in the population was the size of the parish. Consistently, small parishes have the higher rate of confirmations, and the very large parishes the lowest.

⁸⁴ For the mid nineteenth century see *Minutes of the Stone Ruridecanal Association 1843-1860*, LRO B/A/25/2/1, and for the twentieth century see *St. Michael's Lichfield Parish Magazine*, June 1918, SRO D27/9/7.

4.12 Confirmations in Staffordshire 1850-1960



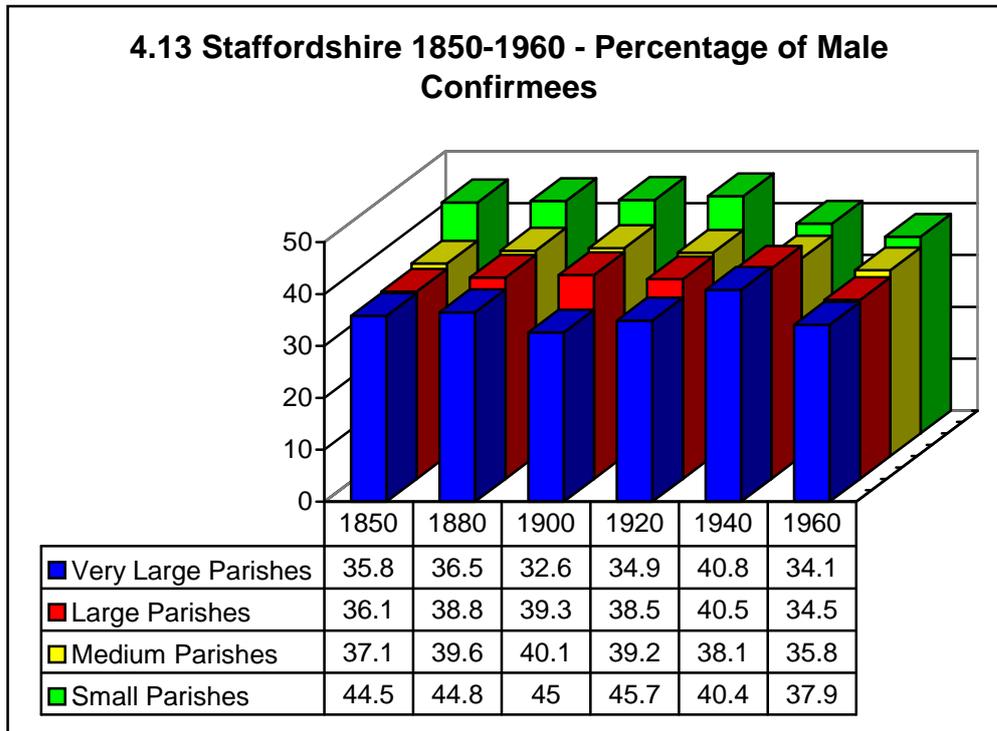
Sources: Confirmation Registers, Lichfield Record Office. 1848-1850 inclusive, 8,124 confirmees from 176 parishes over three years. 1879-1884 inclusive, 41,214 confirmees from 335 parishes over six years. 1892-1895 inclusive, 22,184 confirmees from 337 parishes over three years. 1917-1923 inclusive, 5,668 confirmees from 56 parishes over seven years. 1937-1944 inclusive, 8,035 confirmees from 88 parishes over eight years. 1957-1964 inclusive, 4,764 confirmees from 54 parishes over nine years

Unlike other records confirmation schedules nearly always indicate the gender of the candidates, as shown in graph 4.13. Interestingly, more males are confirmed in smaller parishes than in larger ones, at least until 1940. This may be due to the fact that in rural

parishes, which make the majority of the small parishes, there is a slight majority of men due to the nature of agricultural employment. However, as confirmations usually take place at an adolescent age when the gender balance in the population is more even, there may be other factors at play.

If the clergy of the small parishes were involved in all the aspects of community life, including the economic sphere where men would have played a full part, then it would seem natural for the church to attract more men to its core activities. When the parson was a landowner, a farmer and an employer, as he often was in the rural parish, then he would have had everyday contact with the men of his parish. This contact may have been antagonistic at times, but at least there was some degree of interaction. Conversely in the larger parish where the clergyman's work centred upon the life of the congregation and where the church could not relate to the factory, workshop or office in any significant way, then the clergymen was excluded from the everyday life of the men in such places and they would be less inclined to be involved in the life of the church. The fact that the male imbalance at confirmations in small parishes had all but been eroded by 1960 may indicate the way that the church had become an organisation largely supported by women, domestic and spiritual in focus, and unrelated to the workplace. The parson model works best when the church can fully relate to the whole community and where very part of human life has a relevance to the ministry of the clergyman.

4.13 Staffordshire 1850-1960 - Percentage of Male Confirmees



Sources: Confirmation Registers, Lichfield Record Office. 1848-1850 inclusive, 8,124 confirmees from 176 parishes over three years. 1879-1884 inclusive, 41,214 confirmees from 335 parishes over six years. 1892-1895 inclusive, 22,184 confirmees from 337 parishes over three years. 1917-1923 inclusive, 5,668 confirmees from 56 parishes over seven years. 1937-1944 inclusive, 8,035 confirmees from 88 parishes over eight years. 1957-1964 inclusive, 4,764 confirmees from 54 parishes over nine years.

Communicant and Electoral Rolls 1920-1960

During the period the Church of England developed a way of assessing its membership, although it remained a concept that many in the church found hard to accept. As ministers of an established church Anglican clergy could consider all their parishioners, except those who had specially opted out, as associated with the church in some way or other. The view was

that everyone belonged, whether they attended services or not.⁸⁵ A distinction was made by registering those who had been confirmed by the bishop and by recording the number, but not usually the names, of those who took Holy Communion. In the first half of the period neither the confirmation list nor the communicant list, in as much as they existed, were seen as defining the complete membership of the church. In the latter half of the period from the turn of the century, the concept of membership was beginning to be accepted more widely with the Church of England. Material from parish communicant rolls for the years before the First World War for Staffordshire is scarce, with records found only for 18 parishes. From 1930 when the 1919 Enabling Act had been in force for ten years the records are virtually complete for the whole county and are shown in graph 4.14. In a few parishes the gender of the members is also noted.

The Act required the parish to publish a roll of electors who had rights of representation within the new parochial church councils and the higher synodical structures of church government. The Electoral Roll developed out of the communicant roll, for indeed in some parishes for some years the terms were interchangeable. Electors had to apply to be listed, had to be over 16 years of age and confirmed. They were expected to take Holy Communion at least on the three major festivals of the year, Easter, Christmas and Whitsunday. It was a list available for public scrutiny.

There was strong opposition to the Electoral Rolls being regarded as membership lists, if only

⁸⁵ See for instance the Bishop's Campaign Letter of 1939, addressed to the population of every parish in Staffordshire: "You belong to the Church of England... whether you attend its regular services or not", SRO D5993/1/6/1.

because they showed such a low allegiance. “The results of the formation of these rolls has not been so far very satisfactory; in fact, I think it may be called distinctly disappointing”, commented the Venerable Hugh Bright, Archdeacon of Stafford.⁸⁶ He said that it was impossible to know the connection between the rolls and actual attendance, and a census, which would answer this question, should be avoided because it would probably be “discouraging”. The archdeacon predicted that the numbers on the rolls would rise as the ‘English mind’ came to appreciate the need for the laity and clergy to work together. Within a few years of this prediction the roll numbers across all sizes of parish began to fall. At the same time they were more and more recognised as an indication of the membership of the Church of England, a church amongst other denominations. By 1960 one mentor commented on how “in many a parish the true strength of the church is disguised by the Roll rather than reflected in it”.⁸⁷

Total electoral rolls numbers across all sizes of parish except the very large ones show an increase between 1920 and 1940 before decreasing after that date. This may be accounted for by the slow introduction of the rolls in the ten years after 1920. By 1940 after three roll revisions in every parish, as required every six years, and numerous council and synodical elections, the importance of being on the roll would have been better understood.

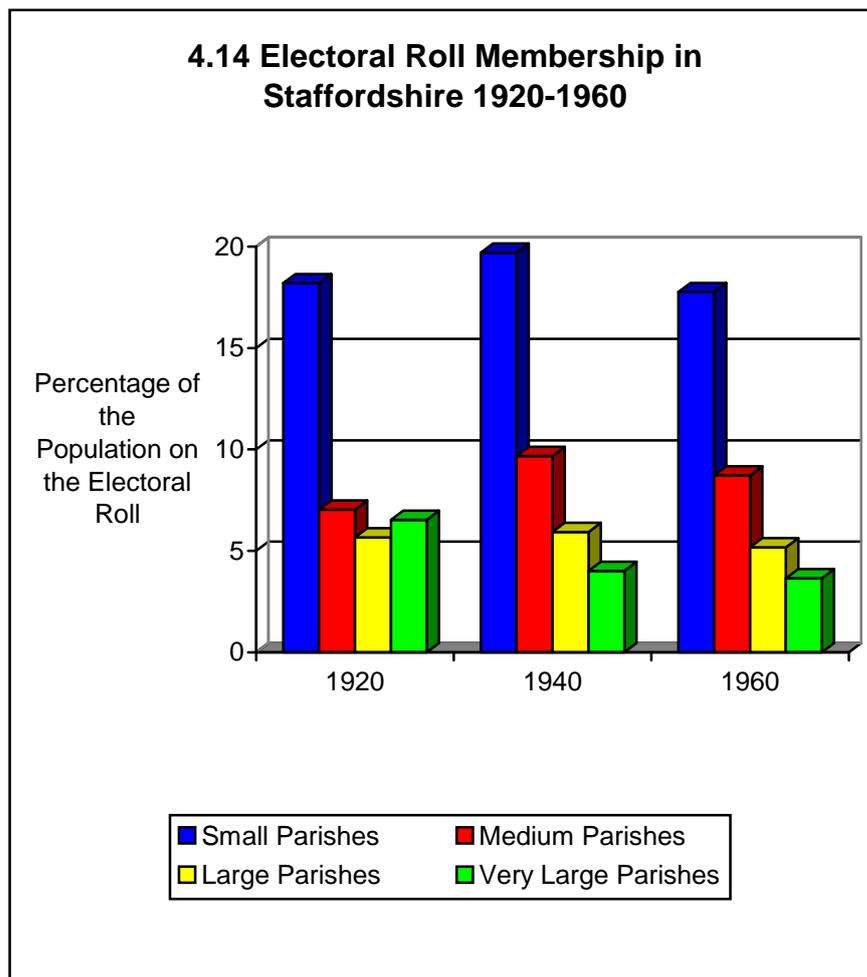
As with other indicators of involvement there is a direct correlation between parish size and electoral roll numbers. From 1920 to 1960 small parishes had on average an electoral membership that equated to between 17 and 20% of the population. This figure is much

⁸⁶ *Archdeacon’s Charge* 1932 LRO A3/v/3/11

higher than communicant percentages, which were around 11.5% at Easter and less than 2% on the average Sunday in small parishes over the same period. This is an indication that many people considered themselves to be members without partaking in the Holy Communion service. The existence of a fairly large body of non-communicant members reveals the importance of the place of the church beyond that of a congregation, and the clergy as having a much wider role than just that of worship leader. Such a role was more likely to occur in the smaller parishes, and it was precisely in these parishes that the differential between communicant numbers and electoral roll numbers was greatest. The differential for small parishes between Easter communicant figures and electoral roll totals was 5% or more. In other size parishes it is much less at around 1.5%. It is in the small parishes that the church still had a role that supported the ministry of the parson working with a significant number beyond the 'regular' membership.

⁸⁷ Barry (1960) p47.

4.14 Electoral Roll Membership in Staffordshire 1920-1960



Sources: Electoral Roll numbers from parish returns and the diocesan yearbooks. 1920 - 59 small, 16 medium, 38 large and 12 very large parishes. 1940 - 143 small, 32 medium, 91 large and 42 very large parishes. 1960 - 146 small, 46 medium, 76 large and 61 very large parishes

Where there is evidence females predominated in all electoral rolls after 1920, although the strength of the male membership was different in the various sizes of parishes. In the small parishes around 45% of the roll was male, in medium parishes it was around 40% and in the large and very large parishes it dropped to 37% or less. As has been noted elsewhere this may be due, although only in part, to the higher percentage of males in rural areas. In the statistics, where the gender differential has been recorded, there was nearly always a stronger bias to

female involvement in the larger parishes.

Conclusions

Population size does matter when assessing the influence of the church in a parish, if the indicators of this influence are the attendance at worship, the number who take Holy Communion, get confirmed and have their names put on the Electoral Roll. The influence of the church falls as the population grows.

There are exceptions to this general rule, where some small parishes have low influence indicators and larger parishes have high ones. These can be explained by the presence of other factors that weakened the connections between the church and the population, as occurs in new and quickly growing parishes where the community identity was not yet established, and in sparsely populated areas and parishes with poorly sited church buildings that make access to the church's ministrations more difficult. The presence of other churches sometimes had a detrimental effect on Anglican influence, although there were parishes where none of the churches did particularly well. Factors that enhanced influence included a long established relationship with the community, such as occurred in the older towns and in the estate villages. Here the church was important in a range of aspects of life, social and economic as well as religious.

The role of the clergy had some effect upon the influence of the church. Incompetence, in as much as it can be assessed and only then in extreme cases, would seem to have some detrimental effect. However, it has been accepted that clerical incompetence was not an

important factor in any one area.⁸⁸ Of more significance is clerical absence, since most reviews of worship registers show that during interregna, when the parish was without a priest, attendance nearly always dropped.

Similarly the use of curates, particularly in the large urban areas, helped to make the task of ministry more manageable. Their deployment with responsibility for daughter churches created sub-parishes within large parishes, and it was this extra manpower in the second half of the nineteenth century that helped to sustain such larger parishes as viable units.

From the material it becomes apparent that the smaller parishes had a greater involvement of men, and that women were a larger majority in the larger parishes. Over the period this difference diminished indicating a possible change in society and a feminisation of the church. This would accord with the theory that because women became directly involved in the industrial revolution after men their support of the church lingered beyond that of the men.

In the larger parishes the membership was more clearly defined. By comparing the attendance, and seasonal communicant records, it would seem that there are fewer marginal members and more committed ones. With the increase in the frequency of Holy Communion and reduction in the number of non-Eucharistic services those on the margins would have had less opportunity to be fully involved in worship. In the smaller parishes membership was less defined, since the greater deferential between communicants and electors indicates that a sizeable number of people considered themselves as belonging to the church even if they did

⁸⁸ See Robson (1979) for an account of the effect of incompetent clergy on attendance in the

not ever take Holy Communion.

The kind of ministry that the clergy can exercise would seem to change at certain levels of population size. In a parish with 2,000 or less it was possible to operate as a parson in contact in some way or other with the vast majority of the population. In the close-knit community the parson was inevitably involved in people's lives because he had the time and the opportunity to do this. In any parish with more than 2,000 it was difficult to engage with the whole population. The clergyman became less of a parson and more of a professional as the parish population increased. He spent more time with a smaller proportion of the population, relating to the congregation rather than the whole community. This meant a significant narrowing of his social contacts. Furthermore, as the congregation identity was strengthened the relationship with those outside was weakened. This was all the more so as church worship became more exclusive, and church membership more defined. As a consequence and a cause the clergyman became more specialised in his activities, leaving some of the old roles to the emerging new professionals, particularly in the urban parishes. As the population increased the parson became the professional.

In 1932 the Venerable Hugh Bright, Archdeacon of Stafford, summarised the mammoth task that lay before the clergy: "Whether in big industrial centres, or in mining districts, or in scattered country areas, the call of the Church is one and needs all our efforts in response. If our country is to be kept true to the destiny which God has ordained; our homes pure and loving; our children brought up in the fear of God; our sports and amusements clean and

Black Country.

wholesome; and, above all, our people to love the worship of the Church – how immense, how crushing is the sense of what should be and what actually is!”⁸⁹

As one brought up in the second half of the nineteenth century, and whose formation as a clergyman was during the height of clerical deployment, it is understandable that the archdeacon remonstrated that it is those parishes where the parson model of ministry could not work that were the places where the church was failing. It was an assumption that only in small parish could ministry be performed adequately and successfully. A diocesan report made this clear thirty years before: “It is usually considered that 2,000 is the utmost that each clergyman can properly minister to.”⁹⁰ Fifty years before that even this figure was considered too high; at Blurton in the 1850s the population of 1,800 was thought too large for one clergyman and an appeal went out for a new parish to be created.⁹¹ About the same time one clergyman wrote about the parish he wanted and probably expressed a common desire of clergy: “a healthy situation is my first concern ... I must have it to myself with no colleague above me or resident incumbent ... I should like a residence and as much over a hundred and twenty pounds a year as I could get ... a pleasant neighbourhood would be desirable and a large pauper population I should decline.”⁹² The ideal was a parish away from the polluting factories and the teeming population, a parish where the population was small enough to receive the ministry of a parson.

⁸⁹ *Archdeacon’s Charge*, 1932 LRO A3/V/3/11

⁹⁰ *Report of Committee of Diocesan Conference on the Supply of Candidates for Holy Orders*, 1900, LRO A3/A/1/5.

⁹¹ Draft letter from the incumbent of Blurton, John Hutchinson, c1855, SRO D3366/3/1.

⁹² Letter from H.R. Slade dated 3 January 1845, Records of the Provincial Grand Secretary,

Throughout the period 1830-1960 the ideal parish population, in the minds of the clergy and the laity, was 2,000 or below. Had this ideal been maintained in the older parishes and secured for the newer ones the ministry of the Church of England would not have developed in the way it did. Clergy would have been able to retain the features of a parson to a much greater extent. However, parish populations rose relentlessly, a necessity that was brought on by financial restraints. It is to this aspect of ministry I will now turn.

Chapter Five

CLERICAL FUNDING

In 1824 Parliament voted for a state subsidy of £500,000 for Anglican church buildings, the last such grant to be made. ¹ It would not have been realised at the time but this was a turning point in Anglican history. Public finance would no longer be made available ever again in such a way to the Church of England. Along with the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts four years later and the gradual increase in the rights of other denominations, such as Roman Catholic emancipation in 1829, these legislative acts marked the beginning of the end of the Anglican monopoly. In a similar way the Municipal Reform Act of 1835 by allowing non-Anglicans to sit on councils, lessened the Anglican political foothold at the local level. The church itself looked to be released from state control, perhaps most typified by Keble's famous sermon in 1833, but few realised what it would mean for the financial well-being of the church, and as a consequence the nature of parish ministry. In short Anglicans were ceasing to be part of an Established Church and were becoming members of a denomination like any other. ² This development was to starve the Church of England of state aid, forcing it to rely more upon its heritage of land wealth, and create new ways to finance the clergy.

¹ Port (1961) p93.

² This is the central theme of Knight (1995).

Ironically, it was in the 1830s when state aid for the Church of England was still a possibility that a thorough reform of the payment of the clergy might have been possible. Only with state financial compensation could the endowments of the church have been re-directed and tithes abolished. However, the Church of England was left to reform itself, which made the prospect of radical change less likely. Thus it can be argued that a reduction of state aid was far more significant than just the withdrawal of money because it took away the ability to create a fair and sustainable system of funding.

Without such innovation the church, quite naturally, relied on tradition. The Church of England inherited the financial structure of the medieval church, based upon land investment and local taxation. The rural clergy survived on the endowments of land made to the parish, known as the glebe, and the tithes or tenth part of the produce of the land. These tithes were carefully calculated according to the source of the produce and belonged to the rector of the parish, whether lay or clerical, an individual or a corporate body, and to the vicar who was more directly responsible for the pastoral work of the church.

The 'great tithes' belonging to the rector were usually a tax on corn and hay. The 'small tithes' of the vicar were a tax on things such as cows, chickens, onions, apples and bees. In some parishes tithes were raised on gardens and chimneys. Also, the

clergy had the legal power to raise personal tithes from the profits and wages of the lay people, and these would have been an important source of income for town clergy had they not been so difficult to collect. The vicar of Uttoxeter in 1839 estimated that most of his income came from personal tithes.³ At Abbots Bromley in the early nineteenth century the vicar was entitled to a penny for each house, garden, person over 16, cow, and servant in the parish. He got four pence for a foal and two for a hive of bees. Seed, hemp, eggs, pigs, and geese were to be given in kind. There was charge of a penny in the pound for the rent landlords levied. The grand total for the clergyman was around £50 a year.⁴ Tithes in kind were still being taken in the mid nineteenth century, such as the geese at Michaelmas and the cattle at Martinmas at Alstonefield.⁵ Basically it was a local asset and income tax. Over the course of time the tithes were commuted to cash payments, sometimes through a complicated system of calculation. These arrangements although increasingly archaic survived in some places until the mid twentieth century.

As the importance of the tithe diminished other sources of income became necessary. Where the tithe was commuted the proceeds were invested, often under the auspices of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, a government body set up in the wake of ecclesiastical reforms in the 1830s. An older institution, Queen Anne's Bounty empowered through the 1776 Gilbert Acts, administered grants to poor parishes and

³ Evans (1976) p18.

⁴ *Tithes Belonging to the Vicar of Abbots Bromley*, c1820, SRO D5362/1/64.

⁵ *Terrier of Glebe and Tithe*, Alstonefield, 1841, SRO D922/20.

assisted with the building of parsonages. These two bodies were merged into the Church Commissioners in 1948 and continued to support parish ministry, campaigning for equal and fair clerical incomes and adequate clerical housing.

A traditional way that the clergy were supported, and indeed a method of supporting themselves, was the glebe, or land owned by the church and sometimes actually farmed by the clergy. Although significant in a few parishes, over the period the glebe became increasingly anachronistic, either let out to be farmed by others or sold off. It had little relevance to urban parishes.

Parish appeals were made from time to time, more commonly after 1900, for financial support. The focus of these fund-raising efforts was usually the whole parish, since this reflected the responsibilities of the clergy. Right up until the end of the period clergymen of most parishes would still assume that all the residents of the parish were entitled to his ministry and therefore could be asked to help finance it. In the twentieth century, every two decades or so, the diocese would launch an appeal for funds, and every parish would be encouraged to take part.

Another source of financial support was the fees paid for performing rites of passage. These depended on the number of services performed as determined by the population size of the parish. The Church of England began to lose some valuable income from this source after civil registration was established in 1836, a drift that was noted in

parish registers in the following decades.⁶ Further loss of income was a consequence of the enforced closure of overcrowded urban churchyards prescribed by the Burial Act 1853. There was usually no charge for baptisms, although those attending the service might make a gift to the church.

Funding from the offertory collected during worship became increasingly important. The Easter offering traditionally reserved for the clergy was in some places a significant part of the income of the clergyman, although the evidence is that it was the already well-endowed parishes that had higher Easter offerings. The Whitsunday offering was sometimes reserved for the junior clergy of the parish. Reliance on the offertory grew over the period and particularly after 1900, when in some parishes it became the major source of income.

The practice of pew rents was long standing, originating as a development of the tithe, with each family contributing according to where they sat in church. It was necessary for town churches to raise funds through pew rents when there was no tithe. It was very much criticised as a system by Anglicans because it was thought to discourage attendance and tended to emphasise a ministry to the congregation rather than to the wider community. Anglicans had a great concern to provide free seating in their churches and charitable societies were founded in order to promote this. In fashionable churches with a popular preacher the pew rents could bring in a good

⁶ Such as at Bilston, where the clergy made this comment in 1863, SRO D3338/21 A&B. The proportion of marriages solemnised in the Church of England fell from 90% in 1844 to 68% in 1894, and 58% in 1924.

income, and has been shown in one Staffordshire parish, lead to the exclusion of the poor.

This chapter will also consider parish charities, so often used to support the ministry of the clergy, and local fund-raising through the ubiquitous bazaar, so loved and hated by clergy. The personal wealth of the clergy was an important source of support, at least until the first decades of the twentieth century, although because of its private nature it is difficult to assess. There is also recognition of the less obvious benefits of being a clergyman, such as status, autonomy and the provision of a house.

Tithe as an Advantage

Inheriting an ecclesiastical system from the medieval era, with only minor reforms, was to provide the Church of England with an important economic advantage in the second half of the eighteenth century. With enclosure, improved agricultural techniques and the restricted markets in time of war, income from the land increased. Because enclosure was only possible when the tithe owners were compensated the Anglican clergy received parcels of land, as did their patrons. This made many of the clergy by virtue of their office significant landowners. In the same period the profitability of farming increased through better yields, helped in part by enclosure, and the growing national population requiring more food. A further boost to agricultural incomes occurred because of the restriction of competition during the Napoleonic Wars and legislation such as the Corn Laws. What was good for the farmer and the landowner was good for clergy.⁷ From around 1760 parish incomes steadily rose with a direct benefit for the rector, lay or clerical, and the vicar, as those entitled to the tithe.⁸ In Staffordshire the Sneyd family, the major landowners in Keele and Wolstanton, and the Elde family in Seighford particularly benefited.⁹

The Tithe Commutation Acts (1836–1860) regularized the payments of tithe, based

⁷ A point outlined in Virgin (1989) p7.

⁸ Enclosure and commutation of tithe were beneficial to the laity as well as the clergy, see Jones (2000) p161.

⁹ Evans (1976) p9.

upon the fluctuating price of tithed produce. There were numerous exemptions but generally the system was beneficial to the clergy, and up until 1870 led to a significant enriching of the Anglican parish system, in a way that has not been experienced since. In the majority of Staffordshire parishes commutation increased tithe income because the small tithe was included, perhaps for the first time, and long standing exemptions, such as the 'modus', could be broken. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners oversaw the transition and they were concerned to protect ecclesiastical wealth.¹⁰ Ironically, the commutation was the beginning of the end of the tithe system for it proved that the system could be reformed and ultimately abolished. Staffordshire led the way in enacting the commutation legislation because Sir Robert Peel pushed through the first commutation settlement in the country at his estates in the parishes of Drayton Bassett and Whittington.

The most visible evidence of this increase in wealth can be seen in the development of parish buildings. Old churches were improved or restored and new churches were built at an unprecedented rate. In Staffordshire in the first three decades of the period, that is 1830 to 1860, there was a church building spree unlike any other. It was led by Archdeacon Hodson who oversaw the building of 118 new churches between 1831 and 1851, compared to 11 in the previous 30 years.¹¹ It is remarkable to note that in this period the number of seats in Staffordshire Anglican churches increased at the same rate as the population, which was a considerable achievement. Also, parsonages

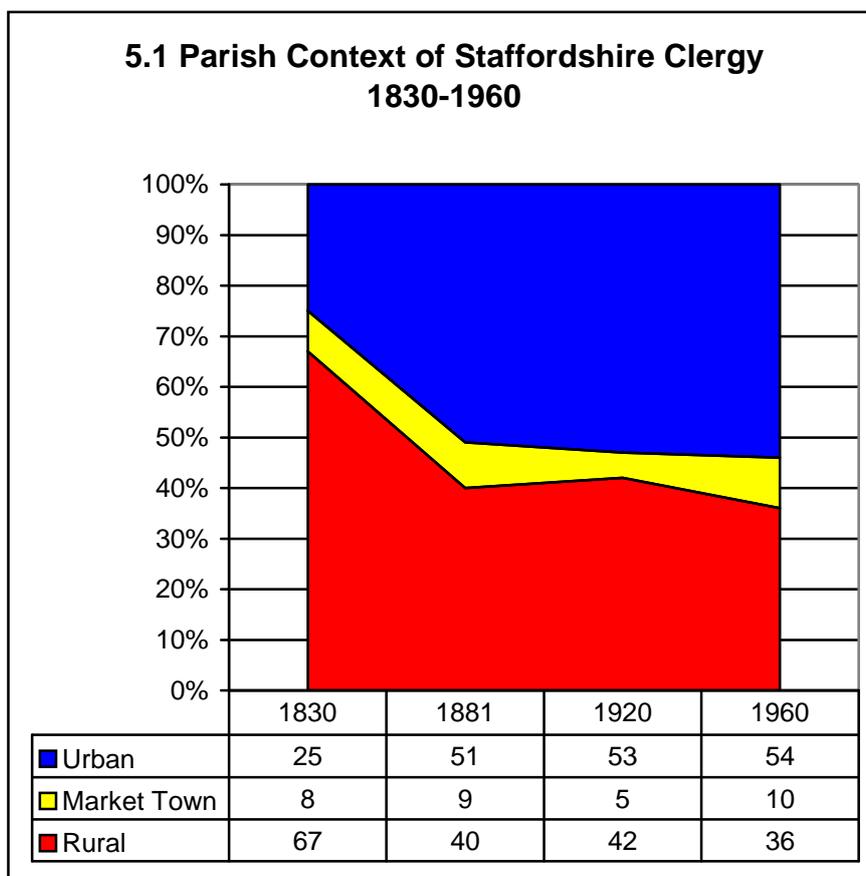
¹⁰ Evans (1976) p155.

were improved, enlarged or rebuilt, often in new and better locations outside of the village. After 1850 many other parish buildings, such as school and halls were built or improved.

The benefits of the increase in land wealth in this period affected most parishes, because the majority were small and rural, with a traditional dependency on the agricultural tithe. Of the churches under the jurisdiction of the Archdeacon of Stafford in 1830 only one quarter had a population exceeding 3,000, and this proportion only grew in the whole of Staffordshire to half by 1882. Throughout the nineteenth century most Anglican clergy in Staffordshire worked in rural or small town parishes. The urban clergy remained a minority until the First World War, as shown in graph 5.1.

¹¹ Robinson (1980) p.xviii.

5.1 Parish Context of Staffordshire Clergy 1830-1960



Sources: Archdeacon Hodson's *Visitation Returns* 1829-1841, Lichfield Record Office; *The Clergy List*, 1846; *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, 1856 onwards

The source of Anglican wealth is significant in the way it determined the social position of the clergy. The increase in the value of parish livings was to raise the social level of many Anglican clergy to that of the minor gentry. As members of the landed class, they would be entitled to the same lifestyle and privileges as the local squire. In Oxfordshire in the mid nineteenth century McClatchey found that only in what they did on Sundays were many clergy different from their land-owning

neighbours.¹² The well-endowed small parishes were very comfortable places. In Staffordshire Charles Royds of Haughton had married well, was presented to the living by his grandfather in 1830, and once inducted as rector “was fond of society and gave a dinner party once a week in the winter”, and his sons learned to hunt and shoot and were educated at a public school.¹³ With the potential for such a lifestyle the sons of the wealthy were choosing to be ordained in the early nineteenth century in greater numbers than ever before or since.

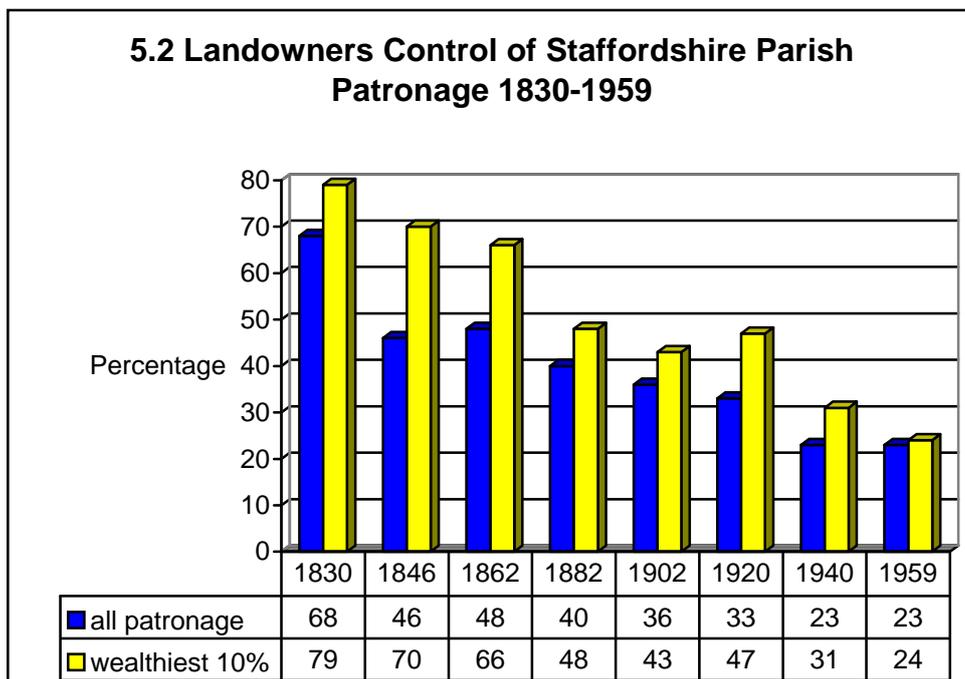
Furthermore, the Church of England, in common with most historic institutions, depended upon patronage, and most patrons in the early nineteenth century were landowners.¹⁴ In Staffordshire in 1830 most clergy were appointed by such patrons. In the following 130 years there was a gradual change in the types of patrons as clerical, and in particular Episcopal influence, grew and gentry interest waned. However, the connection with land-owning patrons remained a significant influence up until the end of the period. Other denominations had fewer links with landed interest, either through a direct policy of disassociation, as with the Roman Catholics, who in Staffordshire distanced themselves from the Catholic landed families and built a power base in the towns, notably Wolverhampton, and the Nonconformists, whose support came from those involved in industry and commerce.¹⁵ In the Church of England landowning patronage remained significant in the small parishes, with the

¹² McCLatchey (1960) p231.

¹³ Royds (1953) p57-66.

¹⁴ Soloway (1969) p17.

majority of rural Staffordshire parishes having landowning patrons even in 1960. The significance is all the more marked when the wealthiest parishes are considered, as shown in graph 5.2. This tendency is stronger in Staffordshire than in some other counties, perhaps because of the strong presence of landowning families.



Sources: Archdeacon Hodson's *Visitation Returns* 1829-1841, Lichfield Record Office; *The Clergy List*, 1846; *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, 1856 onwards

Not unnaturally clerical connections with landed families were strong, although aristocratic titles amongst the clergy were never commonplace. In Staffordshire, from 1830 to 1900 there was a fairly constant number of around six clergy with an aristocratic title at any one time, but several others whose relatives had one. In the early nineteenth century those in the wealthiest parishes were particularly well

¹⁵ Bence-Jones (1992) p112.

connected, such as Henry Harding of Aldridge who married Lady Emily, daughter of Viscount Feilding, later Lord Denbigh, Francis Paget of Elford, cousin of Lady Howard, Arthur Talbot of Ingestry who was the third son of an earl, the Bridgemans who served at Weston-under-Lizard and at Blymhill who were also sons of an earl, Douglas Murray of Blithfield, married to an earl's daughter, and Edward Cooper of Hamstall Ridware, son of a wealthy goldsmith and cousin to Jane Austen. Between them these well connected clergy brought in a sizeable proportion of the total clerical wealth of Staffordshire. In a society dominated by patronage the clergy had important access to power and influence. ¹⁶ If they themselves did not actually own and dominate a rural community they were often related to or married into those families that did. ¹⁷

The association with the landed families brought social, economic and political influence, crucial to the role of the parson. ¹⁸ There is much evidence that the link between clergy and landed families helped in the financing of the parish church and its organisations through donations in money or in kind. ¹⁹ Some support was rather unusual, such as the donations of Lord Leigh to the parish school at Hamstall

¹⁶ The study of the careers of clergy in the nineteenth century is a study of whom they knew or to whom they were related, rather than a study of skill and merit. This point is made strongly in Dewey (1991).

¹⁷ See Paul (1964) p282-5.

¹⁸ The 'squarson' image was to persist, see Wordie (2000). Lee suggests that the sometimes the association brought disadvantages, see Lee (2006) p165-p166.

¹⁹ Trainor (1982) p102.

Ridware, which came directly from the profits of his gaming rights.²⁰ For much of the period the Church of England benefited from the benefaction of landed families, perhaps reaching a peak in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. It is hard to judge how important this support was, although the financial gifts themselves were not insignificant.²¹ The time when the landed families were giving the most in terms of money was also the time they were most encouraging of their sons to become clergymen.

The landed interest was not confined to rural areas since some of the larger landowners had connections with the industrial and urban areas. The Legge family, Earls of Dartmouth, benefited from the coalmines of the Black Country and had significant influence in West Bromwich at least until the 1850s and were able to finance new churches and parishes from their wealth.²² This support was sustained because the mining interests of the Legges protected them from the agricultural depression. Of the 4th Earl it was said “Few persons have generously given away so much money, and rendered such substantial benefit to the cause of religion and philanthropy, yet with so little noise and ostentation”.²³ Similarly, the Leveson-Gower family, Dukes of Sutherland, were noted for their support of the church in the

²⁰ Hamstall Ridware Game Fund, SRO D5926/2/1.

²¹ The landed families gave around 4-7% of their income to charitable causes, including churches, see Thompson (1963) p210; the period 1860-1885 was when “the Church’s influence among the wealthier classes was greater than ever”, Soloway (1969) p445.

²² Trainor (1982).

²³ From *The Birmingham Mercury*, quoted in Trainor (1982) p80.

urban areas of the Potteries.²⁴ However, the power of landed interest was beginning to wane, and in Staffordshire its first sign came early when the Leveson-Gower family starting selling up their Newcastle properties in the first part of the nineteenth century.

²⁵ By the middle of the nineteenth century the landed interest in urban areas had to share power with the burgeoning middle classes who had gained a foothold in local government.²⁶ This was the beginning of the end of the landed interest involvement in urban areas, and was typified by the removal of the family home out of the town and into the countryside. The Legges moved their main residence from urban Sandwell to rural Patshull in 1853, and for the rest of the century and beyond took the role of local civic celebrities with a sense of duty to the Black Country expressed in their support for philanthropy and the church.

After 1870 the value of land fell but the image of the landed gentleman as something to which many aspired lingered into the twentieth century.²⁷ It was significant that when Selwyn became Bishop of Lichfield in 1867 he moved the bishop's house from rural Staffordshire to the cathedral city of Lichfield, and in so doing said, "The country-house heresy is losing ground".²⁸ It was a symbolic move more than anyone could have known at the time.

²⁴ Richards (1981).

²⁵ Briggs (1980) p112.

²⁶ Landed interest lost their domination of the parliamentary seats after the 1867 Reform Act, see Page (1968) pp272-273.

²⁷ 1870 marks a watershed in the structure of the British Establishment, Reid (1992) p17.

²⁸ Tucker (1879) ii p241.

Some of those who made their fortune in trade and industry aspired to become country gentlemen, just as the clergy had in the eighteenth century, even though the land itself was no longer the economic benefit it once was and the estate no longer provided a good income. Interestingly many of the nouveau riche did not purchase great amounts of land, but preferred to rent a country house, keeping their wealth in other investments.²⁹ The Anglican clergy continued to remain strongly associated with the landed interest partly because it harked back to the era when the Church of England had flourished, but also because land remained their major source of income, through the tithe. Ironically, this clinging to the past financial arrangements became all the more desperate as the economic state of the clergy worsened.

However, the advantage of the tithe to the clergy was not just in the increase in wealth and the associations with landed interest. The tithe system also brought an advantage in ministry. Where the clergy received land in return for commuted tithes and enclosure rights they became landlords who could be directly involved in the economy of the parish. They would have had tenants, and thus be involved in another aspect of their parishioners' lives. For some the ideal clergyman of the nineteenth century was a landlord.³⁰ F. P. Parker, who died in 1921 as Rector of the rural parish of Colton after a forty-seven year incumbency, was one such example. It was recorded after his death that "throughout the long period of his incumbency his poorer parishioners, and indeed the whole parish, received constant proof of his open-handed

²⁹ Rubinstein (1981) p213-4.

kindness. He built some model cottages, and was a most considerate landlord. He mended common ways, reconstructed foot paths etc. for the benefit of the public".³¹

Thus, such a clergyman had an economic relationship with a cross section of the rural community and his responsibilities extended far beyond the confines of the church. The very controversial nature of the tithe is testimony to the way it brought the clergy into contact with people throughout the community.³²

The tithe gave the clergy a source of income not directly connected to their tasks and duties, unlike other sources such as fees, pew rents, and the offertory, connected to their religious role. Tithes were a consequence of the clergyman's central position in the local community, and helped to confirm him in that role. While the tithe was the basis of clerical finance it would always be harder to link the performance of the clergy, either in terms of scope or competence, to their financial reward. This is an important principle of the parson's role. He is not paid to do tasks but rather to minister in any way appropriate to the whole community.

Tithe gave the clergy an independence necessary for the individual interpretation of the clergyman's role. Most clergy once inducted and licensed were free from the management of ecclesiastical superiors or the interference of the laity. The tithe,

³⁰ McClatchey (1960) p97.

³¹ Salt (1923) pxviiiif.

³² Tithe gave clergy access to all levels of society, see Evans (1976) p86.

which was theirs by virtue of their office, helped to give them an almost unique autonomy. Generally the clergy could only be removed if they had committed some great offence, and then only by legal action which was considered difficult. In 1838 Archdeacon Hodson reported that Richard Thursfield of Patshull and Pattingham “was brought home drunk in a cart last Saturday night - is frequently seen lying in the roads in a state of intoxication - lives like a pig, in a poor house, with a pauper as his companion, in one room of a large vicarage house which is sadly out of repairs ... The parish registers have not been filled up for the last two or three years, and are lying about in all directions. ... Your lordship will judge how the duties are performed by a drunkard of sixty-seven.”³³ As with other cases the clergyman was not removed, much to the frustration of the archdeacon and the bishop.³⁴ Autonomy remained one of the distinctive features of the clerical role, differentiating them from the newer professions such as doctors and lawyers. The tithe as the basis of finance helped clergy to preserve their autonomy, and in so doing prevented the full professionalisation of the clerical role.

Most significant is the way the tithe cemented a link between the people of the parish and the parish church, a connection that lingered even after the tithe ceased to be collected. Many would look to the parish church as their church. This created problems when the clergy tried to be innovative, as in the introduction of new liturgy.

³³ Robinson (1980) pxxvi.

³⁴ Both Hodson and Lonsdale lamented their inability to get rid of drunken clergy, see Denison (1868).

For example in the 1870s in Wolverhampton the churchwardens were very angry and issued a letter to all 16,000 parishioners asking why they were paying for clergy who denied them their true religion: “Free Churchmen have been driven from their parish churches by men who, to speak plainly, are doing Rome’s proselytizing work while receiving Protestant pay.”³⁵

Tithe brought definite advantages to the clergy in the way it created many well endowed parishes, a strong link with the local agricultural economy and involvement in the spectrum of parish life, association with the powerful landed interest, and an autonomy that gave the clerical role a distinctive characteristic that would remain wedded to tradition. The parson role, which fitted so well with these aspects of the clerical life, was to remain the ideal to which most clergy would aspire. In Staffordshire support for the small and rural parishes, where the parson role works best, over and above the need to deploy in the urban areas, was maintained for the rest of the twentieth century.³⁶

³⁵ *Address to Parishioners of Christ Church and St. Andrews, Wolverhampton, 1878, SRO D3863/4/2.*

³⁶ The Diocese of Lichfield still maintains a beneficial deployment ratio of residents to clergy for rural areas.

Tithe as a Disadvantage

Despite the advantages of the tithe, as a system of clerical financial support it had several disadvantages. The most major of these was that it failed to provide in many parishes an adequate income for the clergyman. This led to a great discrepancy. In the Church of England of 1830 clerical poverty and clerical wealth flourished. Bishop Blomfield considered that it was a fundamental weakness in the position of the clergy because it was an “unequal distribution of resources, inflicting upon the Church at once the discomfort of being extremely poor and the discredit of being extremely rich.”³⁷ The poor clergyman, unbeneficed or poorly beneficed, received only a low income, perhaps around £50 a year. At the other end of the scale the well-connected clergyman, who after a brief sojourn as a curate, was instituted into a living with a value of £500 or more, had enough to provide him with the lifestyle of a gentleman. He may have obtained another living, which could yield an income to pay for a curate and have a considerable sum remaining. Some clergy were earning over £1,000 a year. There was no relationship between the size of the parish, or the amount of work it demanded, and the income of the benefice. There was a movement within and outside the church to make the stipend a wage, that is an amount related to the task involved rather than the benefits of the office. However, those who profited from the

tithe system were unlikely to press for its reform, and it was the more influential clergy who held the most valuable livings.

In Staffordshire in 1830 22 benefices were worth more than £500 a year, and six of these were worth more than £1,000. Of the 22, the vast majority were small parishes with an average population under 1,400 people. Such a small parish with a light duty would constitute a very comfortable living. For example, at Aldridge Henry Harding received £1,200 a year to serve 800, at Clifton Campville Robert Taylor received the same amount with a population of just over 1,000, while the Hon. Arthur Talbot lived at Ingestre where he received £569 for looking after 200 people, “including the family at the house”, and also held Church Eaton for which he received £1,078 to look after 830. At the other end of the scale a large parish population was no guarantee of an adequate income. In 1830 the combined living of Wigginton and Wilnecote with a population of over 1,000 was worth only £190, William Hickin as Vicar of Audley received £177 for looking after 3,000, and Edward Rathborne had the responsibility of the 900 in Seighford and received £110. The poorest 30 Staffordshire livings were worth less than £100 and had an average population of 750 each. ³⁸

³⁷ Brown (1953) p115-6.

³⁸ Robinson (1980) *passim*.

There is evidence that the poverty of the clergy in the most deprived livings was affecting their work and was to the detriment of those whom they tried to serve. In one parish it would seem that the clergyman had to live off the glebe at the expense of the education of the local children. In Coppenhall in the 1850s it was noted “education in the village had been for a long time terribly neglected, by the fraudulent abuse of power on part of the Incumbent of the Church appropriating most of the Glebe Land for himself.”³⁹

The favoured course of reform was not to equalize the stipends of the clergy by redistributing the wealth of the well-endowed parishes, but rather to raise the income of the poor clergy. During the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and Queen Anne’s Bounty Board were particularly involved in this task by grant-aid and loans. This was an important boost for many poor benefices, and it helped to stimulate private finance by making matched funding a condition of grants.⁴⁰ Overall the efforts of the Commissioners and the Bounty were not enough to change the injustice of the system, for what actually brought about equalisation in the end was the demise of valuable livings after the fall in agricultural income in the 1870s.

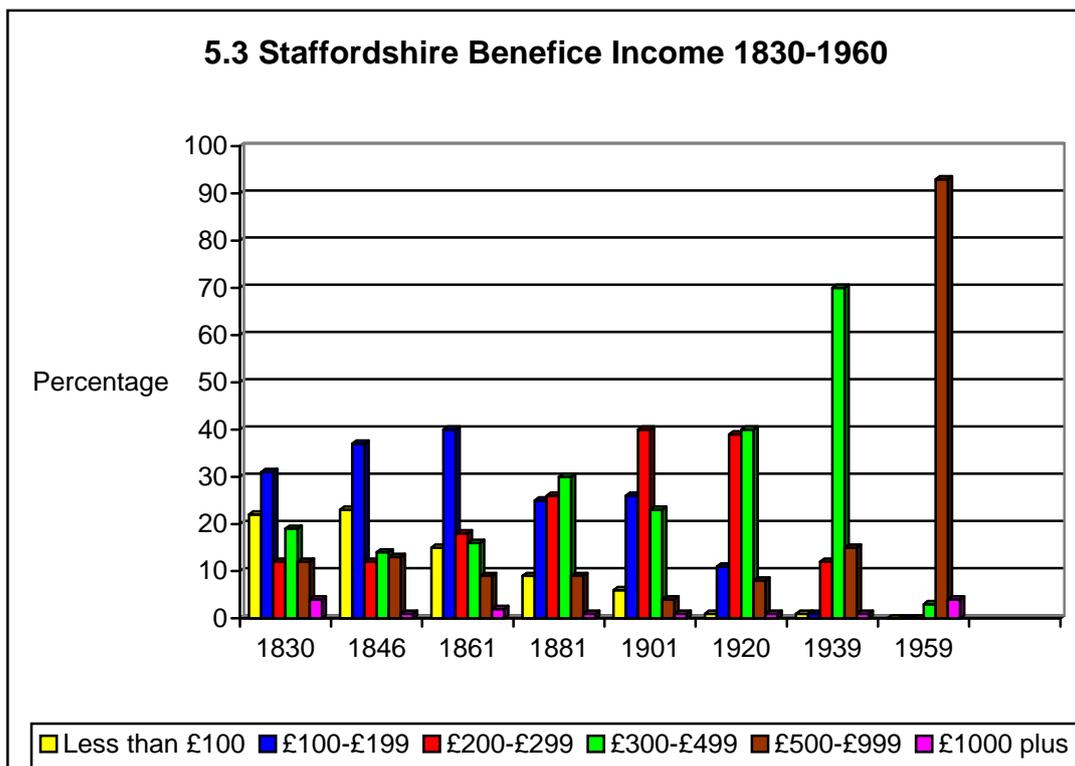
³⁹ Byrd Family Recollections, SRO 3586.

⁴⁰ Jones (2000) pp158-159.

The gradual process of the levelling of clerical incomes, which began in the mid nineteenth century, meant that the rich clergy as well as the very poor clergy were eliminated. Within a generation after 1830 the number of rich benefices had dwindled. In Staffordshire by 1862 only seven clergy held benefices worth £1,000 or more, a fall from eleven in 16 years. Across the nation the same change was noted in 1863: “This is the state of things that may well startle those who have been accustomed to look upon the clerical profession, with its glittering prizes, as the most attractive of all professions”.⁴¹

⁴¹ Phillips quoted in Towler and Coxon (1979), p23.

The equalisation of clerical income is shown in graph 5.3. In Staffordshire the number of poor clergy diminished dramatically after 1900, and within 20 years only 5% of benefices were worth £100 or less. By 1959 the vast majority of clergy were earning around £700, which had been set as the acceptable figure for a clerical income. Only 4% earned substantially more, and only 3% earned substantially less. This average income made the Anglican clergy as a group the poorest they had ever been since the seventeenth century. Greater equality has been created by the removal of the rich few.



Sources: Archdeacon Hodson's *Visitation Returns* 1829-1841, Lichfield Record Office; *The Clergy List*, 1846; *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, 1856 onwards.

There is an argument that suggests that the diversity of incomes helped to provide a spectrum of clergy suited to different kinds of parishes and people. The wealthy clergy could relate to the rich and the less well off clergy could relate to the poor. All sections of society could look to the clergy for some kind of representation. Indeed, the clergy as a group might be considered 'class-less' or 'trans-class'. This view was maintained in the early nineteenth century by bishops who were upholding the ideals of the eighteenth century, that the church would parallel the hierarchical shape of temporal society.⁴² As one who belonged to that century Archdeacon Paley argued that "the distinctions of the clergy ought, in some measure, to correspond with the distinctions of lay society, in order to supply each class of people with a clergy of their own level and description, with whom they could associate upon equal terms".⁴³ For a different reason the need for clergy of all classes was restated in the second half of the nineteenth century. By then the traditional poor clergy had vanished and there was a concern that there should be clergy from poor backgrounds to minister to the unchurched poor, particularly those in the large urban parishes. Bishop MacLagan, from his experience of Staffordshire, spoke on the need for working class clergymen in working class parishes.⁴⁴ In the diocesan magazine he wrote "we want men who can speak to their fellows in their own language, knowing what their difficulties and temptations are".⁴⁵ In Staffordshire there is strong evidence that where the working class were attending church it was not the Anglican Church that they chose to attend,

⁴² Soloway (1969) p14.

⁴³ Quoted in Clark (1973) p30.

⁴⁴ *Church Congress Report* 1880, p105

particularly in the Potteries.⁴⁶ The recruitment of the clergy from poor backgrounds was never comprehensively achieved, and all that happened was that fewer people from wealthy backgrounds offered themselves for ordination.

Proponents of the need for clergy from poor as well as rich backgrounds included Hurrell Froude of the Oxford Movement who coined the phrase ‘gentleman heresy’ to describe the idea that only the social elite could adequately minister in a parish. Similarly in 1849 Edward Miall wrote: “I am bound to say, that in watching the operations of our religious institutions, whenever I have endeavoured to put myself in the position of the humbler classes, and have asked myself, ‘what is there here to interest me?’ I have been at a loss for a reply”.⁴⁷ Miall attributed the problem to the social distinctions inherent in church seating and the ‘aristocratic’ preachers and ministers, who were just gentlemen routinely doing the service.

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Anglican clergy were becoming a group with a narrowing band of income. Although none of them had to subsist on a pittance, fewer could command the high income associated with those at the centre of society. Thus the equalisation of clerical incomes resulted in the limiting of clerical social identity. The ‘caste’ of clergy now more distinct in terms of occupation and dress were less associated with any one section of society. Ironically it was the diversity of

⁴⁵ *Lichfield Diocesan Magazine*, 1883 p4.

⁴⁶ See Duprée (1995) p281-2.

⁴⁷ Quoted in Golby (1986) p33.

income, which arose from the tithe system, that had created a wide range of types of clergy that had enhanced the parson model.

By the end of the period the extremes of clerical income had disappeared, but it was only after 1960 that the stipend was regularised. However, because the range of parish sizes remained very diverse, and the duties of one clergyman hard to compare to another, the relationship of stipend to duty has never been fully standardized.

When there were well-paid clergy they did present an ideal, which all clergy might have tried to emulate. Where these clergy were good pastors working in small parishes where they had influence, and that influence was generally good and for the benefit of all, then the parson role was at its zenith. The economic position of these clergy emphasised their importance in society. The fact that some of these clergy got into these positions through family connections rather than merit and did little to enhance their communities does not diminish the ideal. The disappearance of such clergy over time was one of the ways that society was expressing the devaluation of the clergy. The opportunities for good incomes in the church were diminishing and at the same time the opportunities for the good occupations outside the church were greater than ever.⁴⁸ One bishop in 1840 feared a situation “where the clergy are but one degree removed from the labourer and the mechanic”, and a little later another attributed the disappearance of the ‘better sort’ of clergy in France, Scotland and

⁴⁸ Soloway (1969) p14.

Ireland to the equalisation of clergy incomes.⁴⁹ From the perspective of 1960, when the clergy as a group had returned to their meagre income levels, Best states, “the continued poverty of the poorer clergy, whether they were in town or country, not only remained a scandal but gravely impaired the church’s efficiency”.⁵⁰

The last quarter of the nineteenth century marks the significant fall in clerical income. Early signs of the change were the 1832 Reform Act and the 1846 repeal of the Corn Laws, both of which were indications of the growing power opposed to the landed interest. By the 1890s land values had fallen to a third of what they were before 1879, which presented the Church of England with a financial crisis. At the end of the century 4,173 livings across the country were worth less than £200, and 1586 of these had fallen into this class in the previous decade.⁵¹ In 1911 The Archbishops’ Commission on Church Finance stated ‘it is scarcely necessary to point out how seriously the income from endowments of benefices has been affected by the fall in the value of land’.⁵² The Commission called for a “living wage”, but the decline continued.

⁴⁹ Bishop Murray of Rochester and Bishop Monk of Gloucester, quoted in Soloway (1969) pp13-14.

⁵⁰ Best (1964) p410.

⁵¹ Jones (2000) p230.

⁵² Rubinstein (1981) pp213-4.

The reliance on tithes meant the clergy as a professional group were unable to keep pace with other groups. In the mid nineteenth century a middle class annual income was at least £200-300, a level enjoyed by about half of Anglican incumbents in Staffordshire.⁵³ For the rest of the century middle class incomes steadily grew to about £500 in 1900, whereas many clerical incomes either remained the same or fell. A 'new gentry' of doctors, lawyers and civil servants had arisen and the clergy as earners were being eclipsed.⁵⁴ The Commissioners struggled to maintain a minimum stipend of £200 a year, but this was pitiful in comparison with other professional groups. There was even a fall observed in 1900 in the number of teachers offering for ordination, which in the past had been an important source of candidates.⁵⁵ The clergyman who had worn a frock coat and rode around the parish in carriage and pair in 1830 had been replaced by the clergyman with a short coat and riding a bicycle in 1900. The fall in clerical income was probably one of the most important factors in the decline in the number of candidates after the 1880s.⁵⁶ At the beginning of the First World War clergy were earning only about half the income of doctors and lawyers, by the end of the Second World War this had dropped to a third, affected by another agricultural economic depression and the abolition of tithes in 1936. By 1960 clerical income was about a quarter of doctors and lawyers. Indeed the change in

⁵³ Davidoff and Hall (1987) pp23-4.

⁵⁴ Clark (1962) pp206-7.

⁵⁵ *Report of Committee of Diocesan Conference on the Supply of Candidates for Holy Orders*, 1900, LRO A3/A/1/5.

⁵⁶ The other major cause was a fall in occupational prestige, see Towler and Coxon

relationship of clerical income to that of other groups probably means that it is better in the twentieth century to compare clergy with teachers, rather than doctors and lawyers. However, not only had the incomes of the clergy fallen in relation to other professionals it had also fallen in real value. Whereas the cost of living between 1914 and 1960 increased by 425%, clerical incomes only rose by 283%.⁵⁷

As the tithe had linked the clergy to landed wealth, this association was not as profitable as it had been. Even though the landed interest was able to maintain its political power and social influence well into the twentieth century, the fall in its economic wealth was detrimental to the long-term position of those who depended upon it. The fate of the clergy can be tracked in a similar pattern, with the economic demise as a precursor of future decline.⁵⁸ The fall of the landed interest affected the clergy in two ways. Their own wealth, based on the land, was reduced. But their decline was sharper still, since the landed classes, in decline themselves, were ceasing to support the clergy or encourage their sons to become clergy. Fewer clergy were being selected from the higher classes, a tendency noted with Nonconformist ministers as well.⁵⁹ In terms of wealth both groups were losing ground but the parish clergy were losing it at a greater rate.

(1979) p191.

⁵⁷ Elliot (1972) p58.

⁵⁸ Mingay (1976) p171, Jones (2000) p230.

⁵⁹ See Brown (1988).

The association with the landed interest also had a damaging effect in terms of relationship to some parts of the community. The clergy would share the blame for social injustice inherent in the traditional landed wealth, and this it has been argued led directly to the decline in the popular support for the Church of England.⁶⁰ Tithes remained an issue of discomfort for clergy until they were effectively abolished in the 1930s.⁶¹ Over the period there are several examples of tithe dispute. A case regarding the tithe at Cheadle started in 1817, lasted almost twenty years and cost over a thousand pounds.⁶² When Thomas Garrott became vicar of Audley in 1832 he published a letter about the tithe in order “to prevent erroneous impressions and misunderstandings, which might lead to unpleasant and unprofitable disputes” and not wanting “any disagreeable interruption to that feeling of mutual friendship and affectionate regard, which should ever subsist between a clergyman and his parishioners”.⁶³ It is not recorded whether the letter was successful, although the tithe the vicar was claiming was a substantial £500. At Lapley in 1833 the diocesan registrar wrote to one parishioner: “I am instructed to commence proceedings against you for the recovery of seven pounds due to Rev. M. Ward, Vicar of Lapley, for balance of composition for Tithe. Anxious to avoid expensive litigation I have deemed it right to give you this notice that if the above amount is paid to Mr. Ward, or remitted to me

⁶⁰ See Evans (1976).

⁶¹ *Minutes of the Leek Ruridecanal Conference*, volume II, 1918-1956, LRO B/A/25/1/1.

⁶² Evans (1976) p31.

⁶³ Audley Tithe Letter, 6 August 1832, SRO D1394/6/2.

within ten days, no further steps will be taken, otherwise I shall comply with my instructions".⁶⁴ In Barlaston in the 1830s and 1840s the clergy and inhabitants disagreed over the value of the tithe.⁶⁵ Bishop Ryder addressed the Staffordshire clergy and advocated the reform of the tithe for the sake of the pastoral relationship because it "could revive the intercourse each between the minister and the bulk of his people from occasions of collision, from fuel for discord ... [and] would materially contribute to the maintenance or restoration of a right, pastoral and spiritual feeling between the shepherd and his flock".⁶⁶ The reform of the tithe through commutation, which was in effect the beginning of its abolition, would seem, at least in Staffordshire, to have led to a decrease in the disputes. There are fewer documented cases of disagreement over the tithe in the second half of the nineteenth century and later.

At the beginning of the period when the links with landed interest were strongest, there were more clerical magistrates than in any period since.⁶⁷ Where other 'gentlemen' were scarce, as in the outlying districts, the more ubiquitous clergy were an important source of candidates for the bench, and there can be no greater indication of the respectability and influence of the clergy.⁶⁸ It is hard to collect evidence to suggest that clerical magistrates were necessarily more lenient than other magistrates,

⁶⁴ Evans (1976) p52.

⁶⁵ SRO D953/K/1/3/22-25.

⁶⁶ *Visitation Charge*, 1832. LRO B/V/1/120.

⁶⁷ The drop is consistent with other counties, see Mingay (1976) p127, Lee (2006) p105.

but such involvement was always going to be contentious.⁶⁹ Brougham in 1834 wrote on the subject of clergy as magistrates, “nothing has a more direct tendency to excite hatred and contempt both towards them and towards their sacred office”.⁷⁰

This was particularly so in two notable periods, the 1830s-1840s and the 1870s. In the first, social unrest in the countryside had been created by the rise of the cost of living and perceived increased profitability of farming, and some clergy were prominent in supporting the status quo either by passing heavy sentences or leading the local militia against rick-burning mobs. The clergy were sometimes a target, such as the Dean of Lichfield, whose carriage “departed very fast” when the riots arose in the city.⁷¹ In the next decade, there were several outbreaks of chartist demonstrations in Staffordshire, fuelled by the striking colliers. A comment by a clergyman in the Baptismal Register at Salt shows his view on the events in August 1842: “there were great disturbances in the County of Staffordshire, more particularly in the Pottery Districts. Large bodies of men tumultuously assembling themselves together and breaking into and setting on fire the dwellings of several of the more peaceable and respectable inhabitants”.⁷² One of the leading Chartists was Joseph Capper, a blacksmith and Primitive Methodist from Tunstall, who was convicted of sedition,

⁶⁸ Evans (1976) p10-11.

⁶⁹ See Evans (1975).

⁷⁰ Evans (1976) p109; see also Aston and Cragoe (2001)

⁷¹ *Diary of Anne Bagot*, May 1832, SRO D4752/4

⁷² *Baptismal Register*, Salt, 1843-1878, SRO D4327.

which included accusations against some of the Anglican clergy.⁷³ The Assize Judges came to Stafford in October “to try the naughty men who had been guilty of these outrages” and attended Salt church for a service where the Hon. Arthur Chetwyn Talbot preached on the text Psalm 145 verse 16: “Thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing”.⁷⁴ The transcript of the sermon does not survive but it can be conjectured that it drew attention to the way that God supplies the needs of all and for this all should be content. To understand the context of the sermon it is useful to know that only four years previously Salt church had been built at a cost £1,360 as a testimonial to Charles Chetwyn, Earl Talbot, Lord Lieutenant of the County.

In the second period of unrest, the cause was the fall in agricultural profits and the reaction of farm workers who sought to maintain their wage rates. At the Stafford Archidiaconal Conference in October 1873 there was a long debate on a motion to support the agricultural labourers, but it was outvoted.⁷⁵ There would seem to be more support from the clergy for those who were causing the unrest in this second period, a shift in position that might reflect the way the clergy were losing their connections with landed interest.

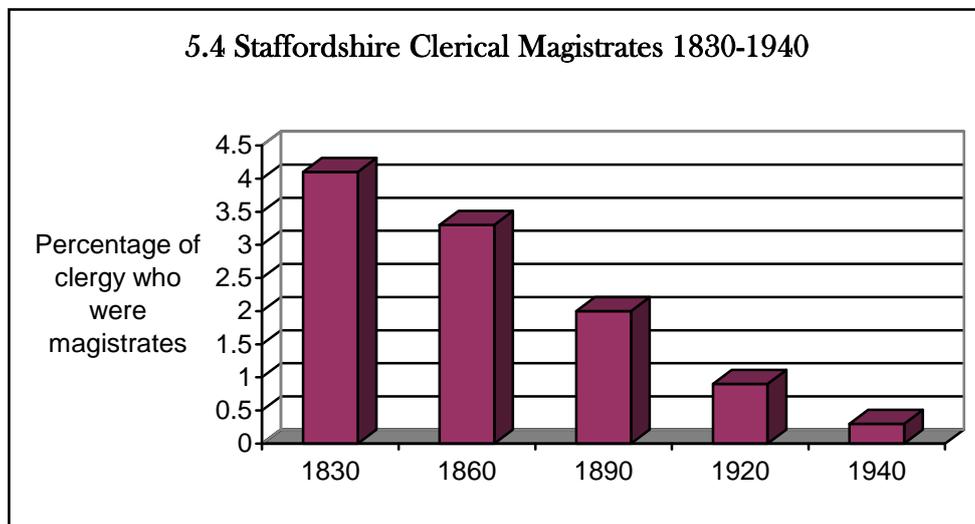
⁷³ Wedgwood (1970) p58-61.

⁷⁴ *Baptismal Register*, Salt, 1843-1878, SRO D4327.

⁷⁵ *Stafford Archidiaconal Conference Minute Book*, from 1869, LRO A3/A/1/20.

Throughout the period there were always clergy who were magistrates in Staffordshire, and these clergy had a specific duty to uphold the law. The percentage who were magistrates, as shown in graph 5.4 was never great, although the percentage of magistrates who were clergy was relatively high at the beginning of the period.⁷⁶ The fall in the number of clerical magistrates towards the end of the nineteenth century was probably due in part to an unease with clerical involvement in the judicial process and the diminished role for the clergy as landowners

⁷⁶ The drop in England from 1831 to 1881 was from 25.8% to 6.1%, see Lee (2006) p105.



Sources: W. White, *History, Gazetteer and Directory of Staffordshire*, 1834, 1851, E.R. Kelly, *The Post Office Directory of Staffordshire*, 1872, 1896, 1912, 1921 and 1940, *Archdeacons Returns 1829-32*, *Lichfield Annual Directory*, 1860, 1890, 1920, 1940

A correlation between the clergy who were magistrates and members of the Free Masonry has been observed.⁷⁷ No particular conclusions have been drawn, other than the fact that a small number of clergy in Staffordshire at any one time throughout the period held prominent social positions in their localities. This number would seem to decrease in later years.

Another disadvantage of the title was pluralism, where clergy took on the responsibilities of more than one parish in order to enhance their income.⁷⁸ The 1838

⁷⁷ The magistrate lists have been compared with the records of the Provincial Grand Lodge of Staffordshire.

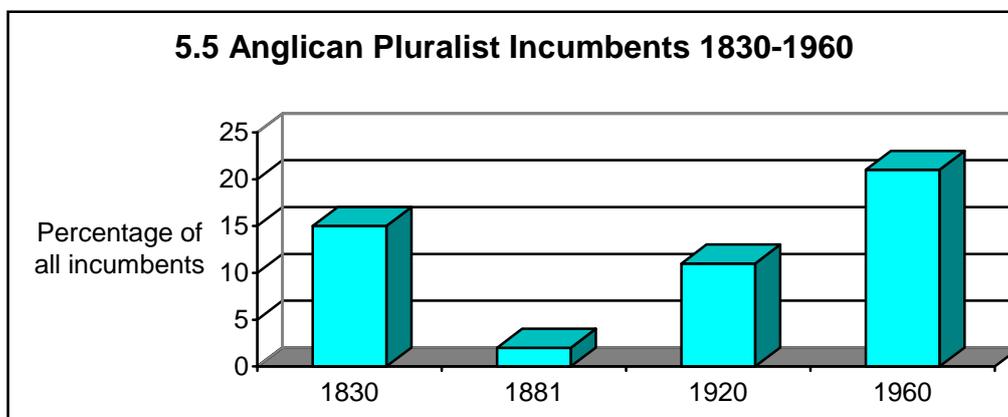
⁷⁸ Evans (1976) p3-4.

Pluralities Act was one of the main instruments of ecclesiastical reform, which like the others was founded on the notion that clergy ought to be accountable for and efficient in what they do. ⁷⁹ Non-residence was regarded as one the reasons for a failing church. The restrictions of the Act had a direct implication for the richer clergy, since those already with wealth tended to take on other parishes. The justification for the reform was that the pastoral care of people was more important than the adequate payment of the clergy. The connection between the two was not always fully understood.

In 1830 Archdeacon Hodson recorded 28 parishes without a resident clergyman but in all but six the incumbents lived in the next parish or within three miles. Nowhere, according to the official record, was there a parish without a clergyman providing the Sunday duty. The unreformed Church of England was not so corrupt that pluralism was rife and parishes languished without the attentions of a priest. Attempts to stamp out pluralism were largely successful, and the bishops' powers were strengthened by the second act of 1850.

⁷⁹ The Act prohibited the holding of two livings if either had a population of 3,000, the joint income was more than £1000 or the distance between them more than 10 miles (later reduced to 3 miles).

In Staffordshire 145 non-residence licences were issued to incumbents between 1836 and 1875. Over the period the main reason given changed from “lack of a suitable residence” to “ill health”. This probably reflects the improvement of housing and an aging group of clergy. In the last ten years of the period the licences were issued at a greater frequency than ever before.⁸⁰ Pluralism was to steadily increase into the twentieth century as it became impossible to provide resident clergy for small rural parishes, as shown in graph 5.5, and despite the advantages of modern transport it has been argued that latter day pluralism is worse because there are no peripatetic curates to support the system.⁸¹



Sources: Archdeacon Hodson’s *Visitation Returns* 1829-1841, Lichfield Record Office; *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, 1856 onwards.

Another disadvantage of the tithes was its collection, the cost of which was around

⁸⁰ *Register of Non-Residence Licenses 1836-1875* LRO B/A/9.

⁸¹ Hart (1959) p153.

15%, depending on local circumstances. Since time immemorial there had been problems with getting the tithe in, although after commutation the whole system had been simplified. It was a resented tax, all the more begrudged by those who were not Anglicans. As the Church of England lost its hold as the Established Church serving the whole community, it was less easy to justify the way it financed its clergy.

The position of the church rate followed a similar decline. This tax was primarily raised for the upkeep of the building and was set by the churchwardens at the annual vestry meeting. The church rejected proposals for the abolition of the church rate in 1834. At this stage the Church of England still had the influence as the Established Church to demand that inhabitants in a parish needed to support the upkeep of the parish church building. Clergy saw the charge on the people of the parish as payment for the clerical obligation to serve all inhabitants.⁸² The debate was about the role of the clergy in society more than the removal of a tax. The abolition of the church rate became a principle of personal and religious freedom over the next thirty years until Gladstone succeeded in making it a voluntary tax in 1868.⁸³ This victory was in itself was an indication of the growing political power of non-Anglicans in the second half of the nineteenth century.

The way the tithe was calculated meant that it adjusted slowly in the times of price depression. This meant that the charge would appear to be unjust and disputes arose

⁸² In 1860 the clergy were much engaging in discussing the issue, *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference, 1886-1899*, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

⁸³ Helmstadter (1997), p99.

over the unfair level of tax. With the break up of the large estates after the First World War many farmers purchased their own farms and became directly responsible for paying the tithe, which they resented. In the 1920s the Tithe Payers Association was formed as a lobby group, and various acts in 1918, 1925 and 1936 prepared the way for the complete abolition of tithes. As a consequence clergy lost on average 18% of their income. ⁸⁴ Finally, in 1936 tithes were effectively abolished. The support of a church through a compulsory local tax on the produce of the land had become anachronistic and indefensible.

One of the most significant disadvantages of the tithe was the way that it was unsuitable for the expansion of the church in a time of population growth and industrial change. Staffordshire experienced a dramatic urbanisation in the nineteenth century, and by 1901 it was the fourth most populous county in England. The growth of towns was most dramatic in the Black Country where Wolverhampton, Walsall and West Bromwich all increased by over seven times between 1801 and 1901. In the Potteries the growth was on a slightly less dramatic scale although Burslem increased six fold during the century. ⁸⁵ To link the income of the church to agriculture was to freeze it in a pre-industrial framework. To enshrine this link in each parish was to discourage the creation of new parishes, even when the need was great. If the church had been able to substantially supplement its reliance on tithe with the new wealth of trade and industry the Agricultural Depression of 1870s would have had far less of an

⁸⁴ Evans (1976) p167.

impact. It was unfortunate that the fall in income came at a time when expansion was needed, and because the fall affected all parishes, including the well endowed, there was little opportunity for a transfer of investment to assist the new parishes. By 1917 it was recognised that the over reliance on the ancient endowments had left the Church of England as “a shattered wreck of its former self” and the only answer was “a strong policy of consolidation”.⁸⁶ There is evidence that the other churches, both Nonconformist and Roman Catholic, perhaps because they were more dependent on new forms of wealth, cultivated such sources more carefully and reaped the benefit.⁸⁷

Therefore, the growth in the number of urban parishes necessitated by the dramatic increase in population overstretched Anglican resources. The initial problems of creating new parishes were overcome by the measure introduced by Peel after 1841, and in the early years there were enough clergy to staff them. However, attracting endowment for the new parishes, and in particular for the clergy to work in them, was never very successful. As Best states, “church building, in fact, became fashionable, but church endowment did not”.⁸⁸

New parishes were created even when the funding was not there. Reliance on the tithe had made the church complacent and its supporters unused to other forces of financial

⁸⁵ Page (1968).

⁸⁶ Comment made in 1917 in a study of church endowments and quoted by Brown (1953) p181.

⁸⁷ Staffordshire provides some key examples such as the Ridgway pottery manufacturers, see Briggs (1988).

support. The appeal for endowments was constant and many churches were built, opened and staffed on the hope of potential income. Unviable parishes were created which were never able to adequately support a clergyman. Some of these parishes only had a lifespan of a couple of generations or so before they were amalgamated.⁸⁹ Best describes how new churches were opened in debt, received minimal support from the Commissioners, never had the middle class population to sustain the necessary parish functions, and struggled to raise funds through pew rents.⁹⁰

The insurmountable problem was that the tithe and the parish system were inflexible. Creating new parishes led to financial uncertainties and the amalgamation of old parishes was a threat to benefits of the few. Interested parties could always object, and patronage sometimes got in the way of innovation.⁹¹ Some families wanted to control the appointments to the parishes where they had invested considerable wealth, often presenting a relative to the living, and therefore unwilling to have their right impinged. Usually the only acceptable argument for amalgamation was a very low population in the parish. During the nineteenth century many new parishes were created without adequate provision for the payment of the clergy. In Staffordshire the number of parishes more than doubled between 1830 and 1900, and over a quarter of the new ones had a value in 1901 of less than £200, and over three-quarters of less

⁸⁸ Best (1964) p354.

⁸⁹ A typical example is the Parish of the Good Shepherd and St. John, West Bromwich.

⁹⁰ Best (1964) p408.

⁹¹ Jones (2000) p158.

than £300.⁹² Not only were poor parishes being created but as a consequence older ones were losing assets, both real and potential. Any expectation that there would be an injection of capital into the parish system was groundless, and as a consequence there were insufficient resources to maintain the income of the clergy.

In this period, because of the cost of materials and labour, churches were relatively cheap to build. Typically a local landowner would donate some land for the church and the parsonage. Subscribers, a group usually dominated by two or three wealthy families, would fund the building work. In return the largest benefactor would be granted the patronage of the new church, a practice that was well established in Staffordshire.⁹³ Sometimes this was a way for interest groups within the church, such as Evangelicals and Tractarians, to gain control of parishes, and it is debatable how this affected the relationships between clergy and the community.⁹⁴ Patronage was thought not to encourage merit nor good appointments, and yet was needed for financial reasons.⁹⁵ The crucial problem would be the financing of the clergyman. The diocesan authorities recognised this by insisting that petitions for consecration would have to be accompanied by a covenant signed by those who would provide an

⁹² Robinson (1980) and *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, 1856 onwards.

⁹³ A policy promoted by Bishop Ryder, but not his successor Bishop Butler, Butler ii p301.

⁹⁴ The Anglo-Catholic clergy of Tividale became living legends in their community, see *Souvenir and Programme of the Jubilee Bazaar*, St. Michael's, Tividale, 1928, D3456/1/182.

⁹⁵ *Stafford Archidiaconal Conference Minute Book*, from 1869, debate on 5 November 1878, LRO A3/A/1/20; *Report of Committee of Diocesan Conference on the Supply of Candidates for Holy Orders*, 1900, LRO A3/A/1/5.

endowment set at a minimum level. This was set at £1,000 in the early nineteenth century, rising to £3,000 by 1900. Such sums even when achieved were insufficient to generate a good income for the clergyman. There was an expectation that the clergyman would have to increase the endowment, or introduce an alternative ways of fund raising such as pew rents or the free-will offertory. Support from the diocesan and national charities and from other institutions was very limited.⁹⁶

It was up to the few to provide the financial backing. The new church at West Bromwich in 1839 cost £4,465 of which £3,388 was raised from 11 subscribers. A further 37 gave around £10 each.⁹⁷ In the same decade St Peter's Church at Stoke was rebuilt with contributions from the rector who gave £3,300, and £1,000 each from the patron, who was a relation of the rector, the Spode family and King George IV. A further £1,000 was raised from the poor of the parish paid in cash or in kind.⁹⁸ Between 1844 and 1845 the church at Great Wyrley was financed and an endowment established largely from the personal donations of three people, two of whom were local clergy, whereas other fund-raising brought in only 15% of the total cost.⁹⁹ When the new district of St. Luke in Leek was constituted in 1845, the Commissioners agreed to pay the minister £100 a year, with a further £30 when a building was licensed for worship and a total of £150 on the consecration of a church. Fees and

⁹⁶ The Ecclesiastical Commissioners only endowed new livings from 1867-1880, and in other years made annual grants.

⁹⁷ *The Minute Book of the Proposed New Church at West Bromwich, 1839*, SRO D4578/2/12.

⁹⁸ Jones, 2000, p278.

Easter offerings would bring in a further £30 a year.¹⁰⁰ The cost of the building was largely met by private subscriptions, including a large bequest from a widow, and grants from the Diocesan Church Extension Society, the Incorporated Church Building Society, and Sir Robert Peel's Fund.¹⁰¹ In Wolverhampton Baring Gould persuaded Miss Stokes to donate £2,000 in 1858 for the establishment of the new parish of St. Jude, for which she received the patronage.¹⁰²

Another typical example, though on a less grand scale, was the foundation of St Mary's Church, Knutton. Opened in 1875 the church building cost £4,994, and the school and schoolhouse £1,921. £3,192 was collected as an endowment, which would have paid a meagre stipend for the new clergyman. The benefactors were headed by the new patron and incumbent of a nearby parish who gave £3,829 and a local landowner who gave £3,600. Along with three other subscribers they gave a total of £8,500 and so effectively the church was established with the help of five wealthy people. The diocese contributed £250 from the church extension fund.¹⁰³

Such was the importance of the support of the rich the opening of the church was arranged for their convenience. The consecration of the new church at Dunston in

⁹⁹ *Parish Details*, Great Wyrley, SRO D1215/6/4.

¹⁰⁰ *London Gazette* 4 July 1845, pp2020-2022.

¹⁰¹ *Bishop's Register* O pp297-311, SRO D3359; Memo on Will of Mrs. Brentnall SRO 3867/6/1; *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 23 December 1848.

¹⁰² *Parish Book, St Mark's Wolverhampton*, SRO D4970/1/126.

¹⁰³ *Account Book of St Mary's Church, Knutton, 1875*, SRO D3689/1/35-58. Outside of Staffordshire it would seem that fund-raising was more significant than donations,

1878 had to be delayed because the major benefactor was out of the country. ¹⁰⁴

When Christ Church, Lichfield, was consecrated in 1847, most of the land was given by three local residents, one of whom bore the cost of the building of the church, and another provided a house and investments to produce £30 a year for the clergyman. The Commissioners made a grant of £100 a year. The parish was formed in 1848, and in 1868 rent charges were assigned from the old parishes out of which it had been created amounting to around £160 a year. ¹⁰⁵

In West Bromwich the Church of the Holy Trinity was built by a group of local wealthy men in 1840-1, one of whom gave the site. An endowment of £1,000 was established but this was insufficient and had to be supplemented by a grant of £200, which was made from the Bounty in 1850. The right of nominating the minister was granted by the bishop to the trustees. ¹⁰⁶ At Hill Top in West Bromwich land was given in 1840 by a local landowner and a church built in 1842. Subscribers towards the cost included Lord Dartmouth. The parish was formed in 1844 and the living was endowed with £50 a year out of the impropriated tithes by Lord Dartmouth, who in 1845 also invested £300 for the insurance and repair of the church. ¹⁰⁷

see Green (1996).

¹⁰⁴ *Dunston Parish Book*, 1877-1891, SRO D4633/1/32.

¹⁰⁵ Elrington (1990) pp134-155.

¹⁰⁶ *Holy Trinity Church Centenary Celebrations*, 1841-1941, LRO B/A/2(i)/L, p244-66, B/V/6/West Bromwich, White (1851). *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 22 December 1849, Hodgson (1864), pp. lxxviii, lxxxvii.

¹⁰⁷ *St. James' Church, Hill Top*, West Bromwich, Centenary 1942.

Henry Sneyd, incumbent of Wetley Rocks, sought to establish a new church in the Compton area of Leek, but there were insufficient funds for other than a school-church opened in 1863. This was replaced by All Saints Church in 1887, on land given by a local solicitor who also contributed nearly one third of the costs.¹⁰⁸ A parish was formed in 1889 and the patronage of the vicarage was vested in the solicitor for life. The vicar was supported by grants and benefactions until 1896, when the Commissioners granted a stipend of £150 a year because the patronage was transferred to the bishop. A bequest of £1,000 from a local woman in 1905 increased the income to £210.¹⁰⁹

For many years because of the poverty of the local area it was difficult to find any endowment for the proposed church of St Peter, West Bromwich, but eventually a site was given by Sir Horace St. Paul. The living was granted a capital endowment of £1,000 from the Bounty. A succession of vicarages were replaced by a new house largely paid for by Henry Jesson, vicar 1893-1910, who had served his first curacy in the parish.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ SRO D 4855/5/29, 4855/3/7, 4855/3/14, *Lichfield Diocesan Church Calendar*, 1881, *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 30 July 1887, p6.

¹⁰⁹ *London Gazette* 7 August 1896, p4516, 19 April 1907, p2657, 22 May 1908 p2657, *Lichfield Diocesan Magazine* (1896), p182f, SRO D4855/11/1, D4588/3/16, D4855/3/39.

¹¹⁰ LRO B/A/2(i)/Q, p176-86, *Staffordshire Advertiser* 18 April 1857, *Lichfield Diocesan Church Calendar*, 1859 p65.

In 1908 St. Paul's Church, Newcastle, was consecrated and the local paper reported that A. F. Coghill had contributed a total of £12,500 for the site, building and endowment. It was somewhat ironic at that at the opening ceremony the bishop addressed the crowd outside the church and said the church belonged to them. ¹¹¹

It was not uncommon for the major benefactor to have an influence on the name of the new church. In 1908 Lady Pilkington gave over £13,000 for a new church at Butterton, to be called St Thomas, after her father Thomas Swinnerton. ¹¹² Some benefactors wanted to remain entirely anonymous and so their support has not been recorded. When Anne Bagot visited Wolverhampton in 1841 she went to see "Miss Hinck's new church and Parsonage House and a grand affair it is. The latter she has endowed and a great deal of pain she takes that her name may not appear in that or her many other liberal acts". ¹¹³

The ordinary people played their part, but it was usually minimal. A general subscription list might be established so that all donations were recorded which gave recognition to the comparatively unwealthy. For instance at St. James' Parish, Longton, £1,354 was raised for the new rectory with gifts ranging from £35 from the Duke and Duchess of Sutherland to 6d from a Mrs. Ford, although well over half was

¹¹¹ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 30 April 1908, SRO D5762/2/320.

¹¹² *The Church in the Wood*, (undated).

¹¹³ *Diary of Anne Bagot*, April 1841, SRO 4752/4.

made up of the larger donations.¹¹⁴ At other places gifts in kind such as labour were recognised. When in 1837 the new church at Onecote was built the clergyman declared that “the inhabitants that assist with the building work by carting will have their labour recorded as a subscription up to 15 shillings a load and the Committee will pay the toll gate charges incurred”.¹¹⁵

From these examples the role of local landowners in providing a site and finance for the building of a church, its maintenance and repair and an endowment for the clergy can be seen to be very significant. The buildings were easier to fund than the clergy probably because they were more tangible and helped to give a new community the identity of a separate parish. The building was paramount because the role of the clergy depended on the building and very few clergy operated without a building.¹¹⁶ It can be argued that the funnelling of resources into buildings was to handicap future generations with large and underused structures at the expense of properly staffed parishes.¹¹⁷ After 1900 when the clergy numbers were falling it was apparent that the parishes and the church buildings would endure even if the clergy disappeared, since very few parishes were amalgamated until later in the twentieth century.

From the tithe came the notion that each parish was independent, and any support

¹¹⁴ *Longton Parish Magazine*, January 1896, SRO D5676/7/4.

¹¹⁵ Onecote incumbent’s handbook, 1836-1840, SRO D3816/2/1.

¹¹⁶ Critics of the policy of putting the parish before the clergy were vocal throughout the period, see Jones (2000) pp167-169.

¹¹⁷ This is a point raised by Gill (1989 and 1992).

from outside the parish was minimal or short-lived. When a new parish was created a proportion of the wealth might be transferred from the older parish, but this was not guaranteed. National and diocesan bodies did not have the funds to offer new parishes very large grants. Unable to marshal its financial resources as other denominations could, and yet committed to provide ministry in all places, the Church of England was in an unenviable position. The tithe had served some parishes well in the recent past but had become a block in the creation of new parishes needed for new communities.

The Glebe

The glebe was land acquired by the church, which traditionally was farmed by the clergy or let by them. The 1838 Pluralities Act, which was not repealed until 1964, permitted clergy to farm up to 800 acres. In the mid nineteenth century in some parishes the glebe was a significant holding, such as in Alstonefield, where it amounted to 365 acres.¹¹⁸ In other rural parishes it was small, such as the 45 acres at Ashley.¹¹⁹ The image of a clergyman as farmer was for some demeaning, and in contrast to their role as a landowner and tithe collector. Macaulay pictures the clergyman “toiling on his glebe ... feeding swine ... and loading dung carts”.¹²⁰ Some clergy in Staffordshire continued to farm until the end of the period, although this was exceptional. It tended to be the poorer clergy who needed to utilize all sources of income. At Wychnor the clergy farmed the glebe but it was poor land and in 1900 only brought in £50 a year.¹²¹ The vicar of Bradley was farming the glebe in 1922 and in the parish magazine gave an account of the hay harvest.¹²² At Onecote people still remember the incumbent farming in the 1960s and having to leave the fields in order to take a service or lead confirmation classes.¹²³ Where the clergy did

¹¹⁸ *Terrier of Glebe and Tithe*, Alstonefield, 1841, SRO D922/20.

¹¹⁹ *Ashley Terriers*, 1845, SRO D5724/1/2/1.

¹²⁰ Macaulay (1849) I p245-247.

¹²¹ From a note in the *Alrewas Registers*, 1899-1902, SRO D783/3/5/2.

¹²² *Bradley and Church Eaton Parish Magazine*, July 1922, SRO D3379/42.

¹²³ From notes taken from a visit to Onecote in November 2003.

farm this was a very practical expression of the link between the church and the land, and provided them with first hand experience similar to that of many of their parishioners. Others complained that the clergy ought to be involved in more spiritual activities, and resented the time the clergy spent in the fields. As a source of income the glebe was relatively insignificant.

Parish Appeals

With the fall in the tithe income in the last quarter of the nineteenth century some clergy resorted to a financial appeal to the parish population. This was often in the form of a letter sent to all households asking for an annual subscription to support the clergy or various parish activities. The cost of the church building was usually covered by the church rates, which were voluntary after 1868. The clergy were not embarrassed about asking money for themselves. At St. Mary's Church, Lichfield, in 1899 the vicar sent out a parish letter to explain how the tithe was no longer able to support him and the work of the church, and that his income of £350 was insufficient to pay for himself and a curate, and that at present "the Parishioners have the service of their Clergymen practically without cost to themselves". The result of the appeal was a total collection of only £30.9.0. Within twelve years the parish introduced a congregational freewill envelope scheme and had abandoned the appeal.¹²⁴

Parish appeals were common in the twentieth century even though they were usually unsuccessful. At Armitage the parochial church council discussed at some length the implementation of a local tax: "It was suggested that the whole of the inhabitants should be brought under a levy for their Parish Church with which most of them were in some way associated. No resolution was formulated nor the method of conducting

¹²⁴ *Minute Book of the Parochial Church Council of St. Mary's Parish, Lichfield, 1898-1920, SRO D20/5/2*

this levy could be decided upon”.¹²⁵ In Little Aston a house-to-house collection was organised in 1921 but the result was disappointing.¹²⁶ In the parish of St George, Walsall, in 1931 the vicar wrote in his magazine that the parochial church council was in debt and that many people who called themselves “C of E, whether they came to church or not” needed to give to the church. He suggested that every household keep what he called a debt box in which they put 6d, or at the least 1d, a week.¹²⁷ Needless to say the scheme failed to raise any significant funds.

The parish appeal was also termed a stewardship campaign by some, although the focus was different. In the former all or most of the parish population was approached and asked to make a contribution. In the latter the target audience for the request for funds was the congregation and those closely associated with it. The move from parish appeal to stewardship campaign, which happened around the mid twentieth century in many parishes, was itself a reflection of the narrowing focus of the clerical ministry.¹²⁸

The number of parish appeals suggests that many clergy considered that because they ministered to the whole parish they were entitled to some financial support from the community in return. The fact that most appeals failed to raise anything like the

¹²⁵ *Armitage Minute Book*, 1920-1930, SRO D3266/3/1.

¹²⁶ *Little Aston Minute Book*, 1919-1929, SRO D4150/6/1.

¹²⁷ *St. George's Parish Magazine*, July 1931, SRO D3673/8/3.

¹²⁸ See Hocking who in the 1950s advocates a ministry based on the congregation as the core.

required funds reveals that these communities were unwilling or unable to support such a view. It may indicate that by the early twentieth century the clergy were more marginalized than they realised.

There was also the diocesan appeal, often in aid of church buildings and the clergy. It was the concern of every bishop from Ryder in the 1830s onwards to seek out those who would make financial contributions. Not inconsiderable finance was raised through the Diocesan Extension Society, which between 1835 and 1880 assisted in the building of 173 new churches, the enlargement of 252, and the augmentation of 221 parish endowments and the stipends for 96 additional clergy. However by the 1880s, as parish incomes fell, the money raised diminished. In 1850 annual subscriptions amounted to £800, but by 1880 they had fallen to £200.¹²⁹ Just as the parishes were needing more injection of investment the diocese was unable to supply it. In 1900 Bishop Legge launched the Twentieth Century Million Shilling Fund, but it never raised the target of £50,000. The diocese launched another campaign in 1920 and teams visited the parishes to encourage an increase in giving. The aim was to raise the minimum income of beneficed clergy to £400 a year by setting up a diocesan fund of £20,000. The parishes were left to decide how to campaign for the money and were fairly critical of this diocesan appeal. For instance in Arlewas the parochial church council complained that it was unreasonable.¹³⁰ In 1939 another diocesan appeal was launched for new churches, which despite the war did manage to raise

¹²⁹ Greenslade (1970) p85.

£90,000 by 1945.

The diocesan quota, a voluntary charge in each parish introduced in Staffordshire in 1914, was a form of diocesan appeal. Initially the quota was set to raise £7,000 a year. In the 1920s each parish was only asked for a contribution of between £20 and £40, but even at this level the quotas were disliked and seen as an unnecessary tax. There was a big rise in quotas in the diocese in 1947, which increased the diocesan budget by a third to £14,000, in an attempt to bring all clergy to the minimum stipend of £400 a year. Ironically, it was the clergy who opposed this increase in quota most vehemently, perhaps because they feared their loss of autonomy if they became dependent on diocesan funding.¹³¹ There was a sense in which each parish was still independent, and primarily responsible for its own finance, a legacy of the tithe system and enhanced by the parson model of ministry. However in due course the quota system became the major means of distributing financial support around the diocese in order to provide poorer parishes with clergy, though not wholly successfully until after the period of this study.

Investments

Investment income came from three sources. Firstly, parishes held their own

¹³⁰ *Alrewas Church Council Minute Book*, 1920, SRO D783/4/1.

¹³¹ *Minutes of the Leek Ruridecanal Conference*, volume II 1918-1956, LRO

investments, because each was an independent corporate body with the right to use its assets in any way entrusted to it. Such investments varied from bank deposits to speculative excursions on the stock market. They could also lodge their investment in the national church trust, the Ecclesiastical and later Church Commissioners who would hold it on trust and pay out the premiums. This became a more popular way of holding investments and was certainly recommended by the diocesan authorities, following some spectacular bad investments by some parishes. Secondly, the Commissioners, who were established in 1836, had the task of investing the assets created from the major reorganisation of the ecclesiastical endowments, particularly those at cathedrals. From the very beginning one of their key objects was to support ministry in the poorer parishes. From 1856 they took on the role of the Church Building Commissioners and from 1907 began to develop a clergy pension scheme. The Commissioners had an important role in collecting and monitoring the tithe charge rents, but their involvement was purely administrative. The third source was the Bounty, established in 1704, to assist the maintenance of poor clergy, and in time to help in the provision and repair of parsonages for small livings.

As has been noted the Commissioners and the Bounty were important for those parishes that benefited from their support but made less impact on the church as a whole until later in the period. It can be argued that because their support was limited to those parishes that were failed by the tithe system they were helping to perpetuate

the traditional form of finance where every parish was independent. It was not their function to challenge the system based on the tithe or to challenge the injustices that had created the diversity of clerical incomes. The Commissioners became involved in the augmentation of the incomes of many parishes, often requiring that the patronage be transferred from private hands to the bishop or other diocesan body. They were also involved in any alterations to parish boundaries and in the amalgamations of parishes. They ensured that the rights of the patron and other interested parties were protected and maintained. The influence of the Commissioners ensured that many small parishes were able to survive which had the effect of helping to preserve the parson model.¹³²

The development of the very nature of investments is significant, especially in the move away from direct land investment. The Commissioners were charged to invest in the most profitable way, with some regard to the ethical concerns of the church. The result was that many investments that funded the church had no association with the parish, and no direct link to the role of the clergy. How the investment improved was not related to the state of the local agricultural economy. This made more sense for the growing number of urban parishes, but it did tend to sever the link between the stipend of the clergy and the local economy, which may have had the effect of

¹³² Best (1964) suggests that the smaller parishes were preserved by the activities of the Bounty, p451. After 1923 amalgamations were made easier through the Union of Benefices Measure, and even more so after the Pastoral Reorganisation Measure of 1949. From 1921 to 1963 thirty-three parishes in Staffordshire had been united, only about 10% of the total number of parishes.

marginalizing the clergy.

As land values fell the church transferred more of its wealth into investments, with varying degrees of success. New investment in the church was rather inadequate. There was not enough to support the current number of parishes, let alone the number that was needed for an increasing population. Every new church that was built depended upon the generosity of individuals and grant support from over stretched church extension societies. Few new churches were built without some debt on the building and even fewer had an adequate endowment for the payment of the clergy, as has been noted.

The failure to attract new investment into the church, and the reliance on the inheritance of previous generations and the commutation of the tithe, is one of the most important indications of how the church was losing its position in society. By the mid nineteenth century the Church of England had lost its monopoly and this pluralism meant that potential funds went to other churches, which may have responded to the needs of local people in more appropriate ways, and also allowed people to avoid supporting any church at all.

Other denominations seemed to be able to attract investment, either because they were more entrepreneurial, or because they were associated with the primary activities of the new economic order, attracting members who were industrialists, managers and

shopkeepers.¹³³ The newer churches had a direct link with those who were managing the economic boom of the nineteenth century. Non-Anglican churches were able to respond to the prolific urban growth of the nineteenth century with considerable success because they could quickly establish churches and deploy ministers. They were not bound by historic land wealth that restricted where clergy could serve, and such flexibility in investment was crucial in this rapidly changing era.

Investments remained crucial to the funding of clergy until the end of the period. Endowments, either established through the tithe, benefactions or donations, provided the major part of the income of many parishes.

Pew Rents

The system of pew rents developed from the practice of allocated seating in church according to status and residence in the parish, which remained in some rural Staffordshire villages until very recent times. For instance, at Baswich the Levitt and Chetwyn families kept their ornate and elevated family boxes until the 1960s. Pew rents lingered on until the 1950s, as at Christ Church, Stone, where 60 pew holders

¹³³ Rubinstein, (1981) pp145-50, discounts the theory of Max Weber that non-conformists were more entrepreneurial. He discovered that wealth in the nineteenth century was more dependent on inheritance and the engagement in certain forms of activity, of which the most profitable were commerce and banking, often undertaken by Anglicans.

brought into about £50 a year, although before the war it had been nearer £100. ¹³⁴

The renting out of pews became a natural way to provide an income, and was part of the culture of church life. ¹³⁵ Ironically, because the town clergy tended not to have the benefits of large endowments they were more likely to rely on pew rents, which only exasperated the problem of the lack of free seats. In 1830 Hodson noted that the Potteries town of Burslem provided fewer free seats than any other parish. ¹³⁶

The problem of the pew rents is that in all but the most successful of cases they could not raise enough funds. In all denominations there was a move to abandon the system from the 1880s onwards because it was not working. ¹³⁷ This can be seen in the example of one parish, St Thomas, Penkhull. The church was built in 1842 and the first clergyman was the nephew of Henry Minton, local pottery manufacturer, who gave £1,000 as an endowment for the clerical stipend. The money was invested in 3% stock and because this was insufficient to provide an adequate income pew rents were also introduced. In 1860 the vicar William Morton unsuccessfully petitioned the Commissioners for a grant in lieu of pew rents. The pew rent system continued until 1883 when the annual income was around £40, at which point it was abandoned. In 1892 a new church was opened with the specific intention of providing free seating

¹³⁴ *Pew Register and Plan*, SRO D5360/3/2.

¹³⁵ Clark (1962), p168.

¹³⁶ Robinson (1980) p.xix.

¹³⁷ Green (1996) records how virtually all the churches in his study had rejected pew rents by 1920, p152.

and never again were the parishioners of Penknoll asked to pay pew rents.¹³⁸

Similarly at Golden Hill in West Bromwich across the front page of the parish magazine in the 1890s it was written, “The church is free and unappropriated”.¹³⁹

Pew rents created churches that were speculative ventures. The clergyman appointed to a new church would have to attract the congregation to pay off the debts and fund his stipend. Pew rents were “a self-defeating exclusionary system” that did nothing to enhance the role of the clergy in the wider community.¹⁴⁰ For instance, at Castle Church in Stafford William Kendall was such a popular and charismatic preacher that the church became packed with “fine silks and satins who, like cuckoos, pushed the railway workers out of their own church”.¹⁴¹

Collection was often an issue, as in 1864 at St. James’ Church, Longton, where the clergyman considered pew rents outdated and favoured a freewill offertory at the close of each service, “without obtrusively pressing upon each an obligation”. If however this didn’t work he said he would have to return to the pew rent system.¹⁴²

At Burslem in 1879 the churchwarden reported that one who sat for free was “an old teacher of the Sunday School who seems to think he ought to sit for free for I have

¹³⁸ Report in *The Staffordshire Advertiser* 14 May 1892.

¹³⁹ *Golden Hill Parish Magazine*, 1898, SRO D5278.

¹⁴⁰ Soloway (1969) p312.

¹⁴¹ Greenslade and Stuart (1998) p90.

¹⁴² *Letter to Parishioners*, St. James’ Church, Longton, 23 December 1864, SRO D5676/7/43.

never been able to get any money from him".¹⁴³

Attempts to get the pew rents abolished were fairly common throughout the period. For example, at Aldridge the rector asked the Easter Vestry to abolish all appropriated seats in November 1909.¹⁴⁴ In Hilderstone in 1936 the parochial church council wrote to the Commissioners requesting a grant in lieu of the income of around £20 a year from the rents, but the plea was apparently unsuccessful because in the 1940s the council set up a special Pew Rents Redemption Fund.¹⁴⁵

Pew rents were more successful in some areas, particularly in the urban parishes where there was Nonconformist rivalry. In 1840 the pew rents raised £200 in Tunstall and £220 in Shelton.¹⁴⁶ At Christ Church, Tettenhall in 1867 £203 was raised.¹⁴⁷ However, at St. Paul's Church, Burslem, the annual pew rent income was less than £50 in the 1870s.¹⁴⁸

The price of seating in church depended on the location of the pew, with the more expensive seats near the front where the congregation was more visible and could see and hear more. Several church plans show where the free seats were, usually at the

¹⁴³ *St. Paul's Church, Burslem, Rent Book*, 1879, SRO D5401.

¹⁴⁴ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, November 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

¹⁴⁵ SRO D5508/7/7.

¹⁴⁶ Greenslade (1970) p71.

¹⁴⁷ *Pew Rent Schedule*, Christ Church, Tettenhall, 1867, SRO D3363/2/16.

¹⁴⁸ *St. Paul's Church, Burslem, Rent Book*, 1879, SRO D5401.

back or in rear of the gallery. ¹⁴⁹ At Christ Church, Tettenhall, in 1867 it cost £7 a year for the front seats, £5-5-0 for the middle, and £3-10-0 for the rest, apart from those at the very back, which were free. ¹⁵⁰ The cost of having a good pew in church, particularly in a fashionable church in a wealthy district, was not inconsiderable. ¹⁵¹

Anglicans had a natural aversion to pew rents. The Tractarians disliked the system because it was contrary to their view of the layman's role in the House of God. ¹⁵² Throughout the nineteenth century many thought that appropriated seats were discouraging the poor from attending church, even though commentators, such as Horace Mann, discredited such a theory. It placed an emphasis upon the congregation, who were paying to be present at services. Pew rents shifted the focus of ministry away from the wider community, and as such had the tendency to erode the ministry of the parson. The smaller parishes on the whole did not have pew rents, partly because within a small community the parson model worked well.

¹⁴⁹ For instance, see the *Plan of Pew Allocation of St Bartholomew's Church, Wednesbury*, c1835. SRO D4383/4/19.

¹⁵⁰ *Pew Rent Schedule*, Christ Church, Tettenhall, 1867, SRO D3363/2/16.

¹⁵¹ Green (1996) found more reliance on pew rents by Anglicans in West Yorkshire than would seem to be the case in Staffordshire, perhaps accountable by the different in urban and industrial contexts.

¹⁵² Green (1996) pp153-154.

Offertory

There has nearly always been the opportunity to make an offering during a service either to contribute to the cost of the worship, such as the provision of the bread and wine at Holy Communion, or to support the charitable acts for the local poor. There was also the tradition of the Easter offering collected for the clergy, a development from the Easter Dues, or tithes owed to the clergy and given at Eastertime. At least as early as the 1860s there was a recognition that the offertory was necessary for the funding of the clergy, and that Ireland provided an example of where it worked.¹⁵³ Bishop Selwyn was a great advocate of the offertory system, probably on account of his experience in New Zealand where the church was largely self-funding.¹⁵⁴ Easter Dues had been almost universally replaced by Easter Offering by the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, at Abbots Bromley in the 1890s the vicar received kindly advice from the vicar of St Mary's Church, Lichfield, to give up the Easter Dues, and for this he was congratulated by the parish.¹⁵⁵ It was the development of a compulsory local asset tax into a voluntary church tax.

Easter Offerings were not usually very large. At St. Luke's Church in Leek in 1886 the vicar recorded an Easter offering of £15 and lamented that it was "due from the

¹⁵³ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference 1860-1886*, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

¹⁵⁴ Greenslade (1970) p79.

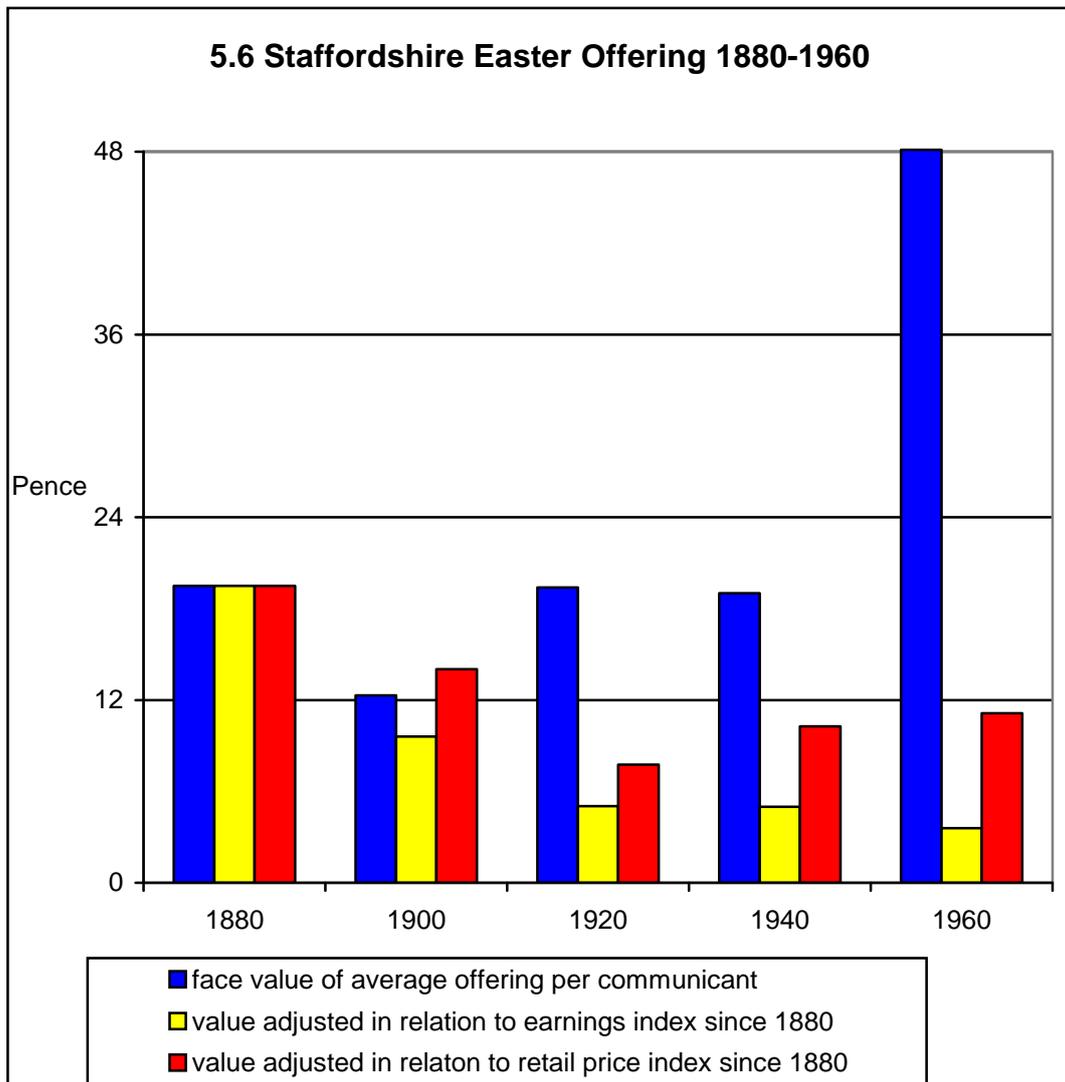
whole parish, but paid only by a few persons”.¹⁵⁶ The vicar of St John’s Church, Longton, a more urban parish, was more fortunate; in 1914 he received £156 from the Easter offering which made up a third of his stipend.¹⁵⁷ The vicar of Abbots Bromley reflected on the £5-3-10 raised through the Easter Offertory in 1933 stating that what was important was not its size but its historical significance because it was “an expression of parochial goodwill”.¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ *Statement of Easter Dues*, Abbots Bromley, 1891, SRO D5362/1/78.

¹⁵⁶ *Glebe Terrier*, St Luke’s Church, Leek, 1886, SRO D3867/2/8.

¹⁵⁷ *Accounts of St. John’s Church*, Longton, 1914, SRO D3276/2/7.

¹⁵⁸ *Minute Book*, Abbots Bromley, 1852-1940, SRO D1209/5/3.



Sources: Parish returns 1880-1960, statistics provided by H.M.S.O.

Table 5.6 shows a fall in real value of the Easter offerings over the period. The offerings in 1960 had a value between a half and a fifth of what they were in 1880. The decline was greatest in relation to the earnings index, which is an important comparison because the offertory was used to pay the clergy. There was less of a decline in relation to the price index, indeed some recovery in the last decades. This

may indicate that people gave according to the cost of goods and services, rather than wages, reflecting a view that the clergy were valued for the services they provided rather than their role in the community. The fall in value as measured against both indexes, particularly after 1900, is all the more significant because the Easter offering had become increasingly important as a source of income for the clergy.

Although some urban parishes were reliant on Easter offering because they did not have tithes, it was not just an urban feature. It existed as a means of financial income in all types of parishes, but only became prominent in most in the second half of the twentieth century. Parishes with high offerings were some of the richest ones, and always the well-attended ones, where clergy had a central role in local society. However, over time in all parishes it was a smaller group of people who through the offering were being asked to raise funds for the clergy. It is interesting to note that where communicant numbers were in decline the Easter offering declined at a slower rate, suggesting that those who were ceasing to attend were the less committed and that the burden of finance was falling on the shrinking core of the membership.

The Easter offering developed at the end of the nineteenth century into the freewill offering, sometimes called the envelope scheme. The congregation were encouraged to make a weekly contribution to the church, which was collected at the service every Sunday. Interestingly, this made the clergy very keen to record the collections. The rector at Aldridge was very concerned about the number of coins on the plate and on

20 October 1912 he recorded that there were 276 people in the congregation and 276 coins in the collection. Later he wrote: “Let us all try to do better”.¹⁵⁹ The envelopes were provided both to remind the giver that the offering was weekly and to enable the donation to be made with some privacy. The giving was meant to be planned, based on what the congregation member had pledged for the year. Pledge Sunday became a popular feature of parish life in the early twentieth century and was commended by most clerical mentors in their manuals.¹⁶⁰ It came late to some parishes, as at Ashley in 1959, where “the Rector asked everyone to think very seriously about Direct Giving as the basis of Church Finance”.¹⁶¹ For Ashley the appeal was too little too late as it was soon to become part of a larger multi-parish benefice.

By 1901 the Church of England was receiving £5.5m through the offerings on Sundays, an indication of how much it relied upon the financial support of those who attended worship and how marginal in society the church was becoming.

One interesting feature of the offering was that for the first time the poorer members of the church were asked to make a contribution. Working men were expected to put money on the collection plate. In the 1890s at Palfrey Mission Church in Walsall, which had been established as an outreach in a poorer part of the Parish of St Mary,

¹⁵⁹ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, November 1912 and August 1913, SRO D3563/1/50.

¹⁶⁰ De Blank a strong supporter of Pledge Sunday, p138

¹⁶¹ *Ashley Church Minute Book*, 1860-1967, SRO D3173/2/1.

the curate expected a working man to give 6d and a working lad 2d every week. ¹⁶²

The basic problem of the free will offertory was that it was voluntary and that the laity were not willing to contribute enough to adequately support the clergy. They were more concerned with the upkeep of the building, the object of much of the fund-raising, than the payment of the clergy. At their meetings the clergy complained about the laity who gave “considerable large sums for the beautifying of the fabrics in which they worship [but] ... neglect the pressing necessity of the men who conduct that worship”. ¹⁶³

Parish Charities

Some of the offertory was also used, as were parish charities, to help the poor. It was the clergy who decided who was to receive these benefits which gave them some influence in the local community. In Pattingham in the 1840s the vegetable allotments were only given to those who agreed to attend church. ¹⁶⁴ At Colwich in the 1850s the clergy distributed coal and blankets but only to Protestants, and excluding those who had more than one illegitimate child or who never attend public worship. ¹⁶⁵ In the

¹⁶² *Incumbent's Book*, Palfrey Mission Church, Walsall, 1893-1896, SRO D4053/3/8/1.

¹⁶³ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference* 1886-1899, LRO B/A/24/3/2.

¹⁶⁴ *Allotments of Poor's Land in the Parish of Pattingham*, November 1844, SRO D5823/4/1/9.

¹⁶⁵ *Colwich Memorandum Book*, 1851-1886, SRO D874/2/27.

1860s in Stowe Parish in Lichfield the clergyman devised a set of 'Rules for the Distribution of Alms': first class recipients were widows over 60 and those with four or more children, next were the permanently disabled, "blind, dumb, lame, imbecile", then old single men above 70 and incapacitated couples over 60, followed by younger widows with two or three children, next families afflicted with illness and lastly large dependant families. ¹⁶⁶ In the parish of Gold Hill in West Bromwich the parish registers of the 1870s carried a list of the recipients of aid, and those who as a consequence had promise to abstain from drink. ¹⁶⁷ In the Potteries there was a direct link between those who got charitable support and those who attended Sunday School. ¹⁶⁸

There was disquiet about parish charities. At the Ruridecanal Conference of Trentham in 1888 some clergy thought that the payments were better made in secret, while others said it was an acceptable way to make the poor feel obliged to attend church. ¹⁶⁹ Oversight of the parish charities was such a burden at St. Mary's Church, Lichfield, that it was the first item of business at the first meeting of the parochial church council in 1898. ¹⁷⁰ There was a decline in the influence of the parish charities during the nineteenth century, from a significant means of supporting the local poor to a minor contribution to ease their burden. In Stowe Parish in the 1830s the clergy had

¹⁶⁶ *Private Register of Stowe Parish*, SRO D29/2/1.

¹⁶⁷ *Golden Hill Confirmation Register*, 1874-1954, SRO D3588/ADD/1.

¹⁶⁸ See Duprée (1995) p285-6.

¹⁶⁹ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference* 1886-1899, LRO B/A/24/3/2.

¹⁷⁰ *Minute Book of the Parochial Church Council of St. Mary's Parish, Lichfield*,

control of the distribution of around £50 a year, but this sum failed to keep up with inflation over the next decades, and by the twentieth century it had all but disappeared.¹⁷¹ Similarly at Blithfield Lord Bagot's Charity remained at around £60 a year from 1833 to 1859, as did Tibbatt's Dole and Rawley's Dole in Bilston.¹⁷² By 1957 the vicar of St. Modwen's Church, Burton on Trent, reported that although he and the churchwardens had the grand title of 'Trustees of the Burton Poor', it was pointless because there was no money left.¹⁷³ The demise of the parish charity not unnaturally followed a similar pattern to the influence of the parish clergy.

1898-1920, SRO D20/5/2.

¹⁷¹ *Private Register of Stowe Parish*, SRO D29/2/1.

¹⁷² *Disposal of Lord Bagot's Charity Money*, 1833-1859, SRO D1386/7/3; *Parish Magazine*, St. Leonard's Church, Bilston, No. 3 volume II, 1864, SRO D3338/21/B.

¹⁷³ *Parochial Church Council Minute Book, St. Modwen*, Burton on Trent, 1929-1957, SRO D4219/4/1.

Bazaars

From the second half of the nineteenth century fund-raising for many of the churches in Staffordshire involved the organising of local events, supported by voluntary efforts.¹⁷⁴ Some churches were able to stage very lavish bazaars, that brought in significant funds for the church. This was often the case at the grander churches, particularly those in town centres, such as St Peter's Church in Wolverhampton, which had large-scale events in the 1870s and 1880s.¹⁷⁵ For other churches the annual round of fund-raising was a thankless task, particularly when the number of willing helpers diminished. Furthermore, some argued that such activities turned the church into a commercial organisation, and not a very good one at that. For these reasons, the clerical advisor De Blank pleaded, "It is, I suppose, a fond hope to suggest a moratorium on all bazaars for a period of time". He went on to say that "the Church of England has gone bazaar-mad. Drive through any urban area and see the posters outside the churches; how many refer to some coming money-raising event as compared with those that proclaim the Church's message".¹⁷⁶ Bazaars were hard work, which did not necessarily pay off.¹⁷⁷ The curate at the Palfrey Mission Church in Walsall regretted the poor attendance at the church bazaar in 1895 and thought it

¹⁷⁴ The increasing use of the bazaar as a fund-raising activity in this period was universal, due to social and technological improvements, and increasing church debts; see Green (1996) p165.

¹⁷⁵ See the collection of elaborate programmes, SRO D1157/1/8/5.

¹⁷⁶ De Blank (1954), pp136-137.

¹⁷⁷ Green (1996) found opposition to bazaars for practical and theological reasons

showed how poorly the local community supported the church.¹⁷⁸ In 1939 F. E. Lafford triumphantly wrote to his bishop, “I have replaced whist drives, dances and co., with study circles and Devotional Services”.¹⁷⁹ It is not recorded what effect this had upon the parish finances. At Bishops Wood in 1948 the parishioners organised a Bring and Buy Sale at the vicarage to try and increase the value of the living. The proceeds were very small, and led to the gift of £5 to the vicar so that he could go on holiday. He left the parish for good in the following year.¹⁸⁰ In the minds of parishioners and some clergy fund-raising events had become essential for parish survival. In the 1950s the annual garden party at the vicarage in Marston “was becoming an invaluable affair, both socially and financially”.¹⁸¹ Most of the mentors were against such activities and saw them as undermining the clerical ministry, particularly by the end of the period. In the 1950s Southcott wrote, “the finances of the Church ought to proclaim the Gospel”, and in the next decade Hammerton regretted that the “worse feature of the Church’s preoccupation with fund-raising is that the time and energy of the parochial clergy are diverted into entirely wrong channels”.¹⁸²

across the denominational spectrum.

¹⁷⁸ *Incumbent’s Book*, Palfrey Mission Church, Walsall, 1893-1896, SRO D4053/3/8/1.

¹⁷⁹ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

¹⁸⁰ *Bishops Wood Parochial Church Council Minutes* 1908-1955, SRO D6039/3/1/2.

¹⁸¹ Marston with Whitgreave confidential notebook for successor, 1951, SRO D4781/2.

¹⁸² Southcott (1956) p47; Hammerton (1962) p127; see also Reindorp (1957) p49-54 and Wickham (1931) p78.

Fees

Fees were never a major part of the clerical income, although this did depend on the size of the parish. The occasional offices were the main source of fee income, although there was never a charge for baptisms. In the mid nineteenth century a clergyman would receive around 2/6d for a wedding and 1/- for a funeral, and a century later the fees had risen to 3/9 and 2/- respectively, an increase well below any inflation index. Generally, two trends were making fees less important as an income source: the value of fees was falling in real terms and such Anglican services, in particular weddings, were becoming less popular. A clergyman at any point in the period would have to perform many such services in order to gain a significant income from this source. However, where other financial sources were poor then fee income could not be ignored.

Fees might not cover the cost of ministry, or indeed pay a reasonable amount for the time involved in preparing for the wedding or funeral service and the pastoral care involved. Because the Church of England was attempting to offer pastoral care to the whole population it could consider the occasional offices as a way to remain in some kind of contact with the wider community. As such the fees were a 'loss leader', the cost of maintaining the ideal of an Established Church. Any dependence on fees would be a sign of marginalisation, because it would be an indication that clergy were dealing with people through the occasional offices more than in other ways. If the

church's main business was certain specialised services that may only be necessary at one or two points in a person's life it would have lost the relevance it has to the whole of life. At the same time a degree of fee income indicated that the church still has a place in the community and the ministry of the clergyman was sought by many of the people at some stage.

Private Income

Income provided by the wealth of an individual or his family was one of the main supports for clergy throughout the period. It was nearly always necessary for anyone seeking to be a clergyman to have private funds to pay for the training. A renowned exception was Bishop Selwyn's Probationers' Scheme of the 1870s, which supported men with insufficient means, but this was short-lived.¹⁸³ Once ordained and appointed the clergy could not recoup the cost of training through their income as other professionals might. Indeed, through the nineteenth and into the twentieth century the financial rewards for the clergy were diminishing in real terms and in relation to other occupations. Private wealth was needed as a subsidy both in the training and in the career of the clergy. To rely on just a stipend was to be limited to a lower middle class income, which was at odds with the status and responsibilities of the occupation. There is no doubt that candidates for ordination were turned down because they were not wealthy enough: "I am sorry to say that I do not see my way to accepting you for

that position” wrote the Bishop of Lichfield in 1883 to one hopeful man. He went on to explain why: “Among other reasons I may mention only this one – that being, as you are, married with already 2 young children and no private income, I do not think it would be either for your own advantage or that of the Church that you should be admitted to Holy Orders”.¹⁸⁴

The fact that private wealth was bolstering the church is significant, because it indicates that the value of the role was important to the individual and their family, and less important to society as a whole because it was unwilling to invest in the role. The significant change came about during the last two decades of the nineteenth century when there was the fall in the private financial support of the clergy. The rector of Haughton in the 1950s reminisced how his father could simply “raise £100 by writing to some of his relatives”.¹⁸⁵

Studies of the wealth of clergy have tended to concentrate on the income they earned in the role. The wide availability of this information through church returns and clergy lists has deflected attention away from the issue of private income. In 1854 it was estimated that the private income of Anglican clergy was at least as great as their professional income.¹⁸⁶ In 1890 one commentator thought that 95% of the clergy

¹⁸³ Tomlinson (2004).

¹⁸⁴ Letter to W. H. Kidwell from W. D. Lichfield, 31 January 1883, SRO D1274/8/2.

¹⁸⁵ Royds (1953) p92.

¹⁸⁶ Heeney (1976) p31.

must have had some recourse to personal wealth to be able to stay in their jobs.¹⁸⁷ A diocesan report, reflecting in part on the situation in Staffordshire, considered the supply of clergy in 1900 and concluded that one of the reasons for the fall in candidates for ordination was the decline in support from private incomes.¹⁸⁸ There are many personal accounts of this development. In a confidential note to the bishop in the 1940s J. Crook wrote, “Twenty years ago I began to spend all my life’s savings in preparing for the ministry and educating my two sons who are both Camb. MA. Stipends have been just a mere existence. I think, you will agree, it is no wonder that private and joint income is nil”.¹⁸⁹ Some mentors advised on the problem: “if the wife is a careful manager and the husband a man of simple habits, then it is surprising what can be done on a small stipend”.¹⁹⁰ By the twentieth century it would seem that private wealth was no longer able to keep the Church of England afloat.

If education was a mark of private wealth, at least in the early part of the period, it is interesting to note that in Staffordshire the percentage of graduate ordinands was at its peak in the late 1830s.¹⁹¹ The policy of the bishop will have had some effect, and Bishop Ryder with his reputation as a reforming evangelical did not ordain any non-graduates after his first year. His successor Bishop Butler insisted on graduate clergy

¹⁸⁷ Jessop (1890), p59.

¹⁸⁸ *Report of Committee of Diocesan Conference on the Supply of Candidates for Holy Orders*, 1900, LRO A3/A/1/5.

¹⁸⁹ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

¹⁹⁰ Watkins (1934) p83.

¹⁹¹ *Lists of General Ordinations at Eccleshall, October 1836, April 1837, September*

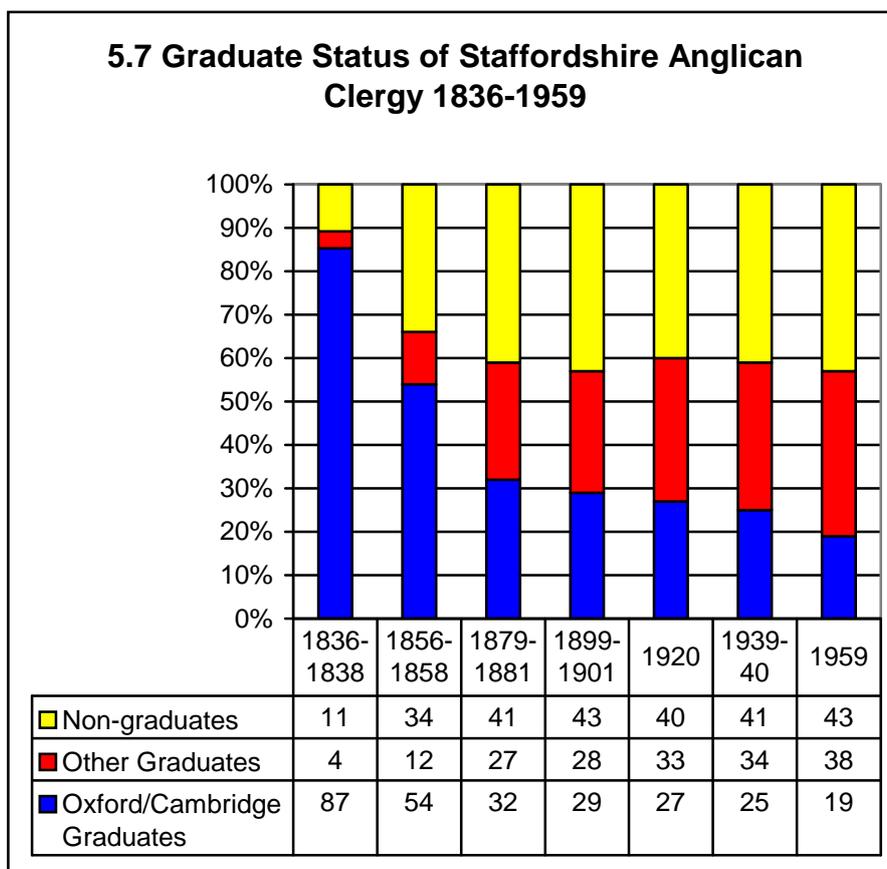
when he stipulated, “all candidates should be at least A.B. of one of our English universities (Durham included) or if of T.C.D. that they shall have been born of English parents”.¹⁹² There was a gradual decline from this high point, a pattern observed nationally, although the fall in Staffordshire was greater than elsewhere.¹⁹³ As shown in table 5.7 in the 1850s Oxford and Cambridge graduates accounted for only just over half of clergy in the county, and this proportion gradually fell over the succeeding decades. The number of graduate clergy with a degree from any university remained fairly constant at around 60%, although in the context of an increase of graduates in other occupations this marks a decline. The relatively high number of non-graduates in Staffordshire compared to other areas might be due to the early establishment of the Theological College at Lichfield in 1857 and its strategic use in the staffing of the diocese. During the whole period only a very few Anglican clergy had post-graduate qualifications, generally less than 2%.

1837, January 1838, May 1838, September 1838, LRO B/A/10.

¹⁹² Butler (1896) vol. 2, p207.

¹⁹³ Crowther (1970) p220-1.

5.7 Graduate Status of Staffordshire Anglican Clergy 1836-1959



Sources: Clergy lists and visitation reports, *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac*, from 1856, and *Crockford Clerical Directory* from 1870.

In the early part of the period attendance at university was the preserve of the rich, and only later did a degree usually indicate a certain level of educational attainment. Across the period 1830 to 1960 the drop in the number of graduates indicates a fall in the number of candidates from wealthy backgrounds, rather than a fall in educational

standards, although this may also be the case.¹⁹⁴

There is considerable evidence of clergy using their private wealth to benefit the community. They contributed to the restoration of the church, the parsonage, and if they were a landlord to the improvement of houses in the parish. Some gave help to other parishes, particularly in the building of new churches, since the subscribers' lists nearly always included local clergy. Parish histories will often refer to clergy in the nineteenth century building churches and establishing parishes with their own private means, although few could match the record of Isaac Clarkson of Wednesbury who from 1829 to 1855 raised a £1,000 a year for church buildings.¹⁹⁵ In a letter to the vicar of Baswich in 1899 a friend commends him for the way that he was investing his own money into the parish: "I was glad to hear you had done so much for Baswich and I shall look forward to seeing it in its improved condition sometime in the Summer or Autumn. I hope you will be able to devise a good way of spending your legacy".¹⁹⁶ In 1912 in St. Mary's, Longton, the vicar and his mother raised £30,000 for this poor Potteries parish, out of their own resources and that of their family friends such as the Wedgwoods and the Sutherlands.¹⁹⁷ Clergy with private wealth were obviously more desired by parishioners, a tendency noted by McClatchey.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁴ Towler and Coxon (1979) p32.

¹⁹⁵ Greenslade (1970), p74.

¹⁹⁶ Letter to F. G. Inge from W. A. Spooner, 23 March 1899, SRO D3361/5/49.

¹⁹⁷ *Parish Scrap Book*, SS Mary and Chad, Longton, SRO D4019/2/1-3.

¹⁹⁸ McClatchey (1960) p28.

Incumbents were expected to pay for the curates, even if it was a responsibility shared with the laity of the parish. "I have devoted out of my private income £75 a year towards expenses," wrote George Oliver of Wolverhampton in 1843. His subsidy was to blight his successor who did not have the means to continue it.¹⁹⁹ The Rector of Stafford, a member of a local wealthy family, admitted in the church magazine of June 1899 that he had private means "which enabled him to staff the parish adequately", but this did not exonerate others from contributing to the curate's stipend fund. His appeal to the generosity of others would seem to have been unsuccessful for the matter is raised in several further editions of the magazine.²⁰⁰ In 1909 the Rector of Aldridge explained in his parish magazine how he was dependent on private wealth: "the Rector has so many other expensive luxuries almost forced upon him, that the official income is altogether insufficient".²⁰¹

Another indication of private wealth is household expenditure, which can be estimated by the number of servants. The costs of servants can be accurately estimated.²⁰² From the censuses of 1881 and 1901 it is possible to ascertain the number of servants living in clerical households, and by comparing this expense with the value of the living to estimate the subsidy from private sources.

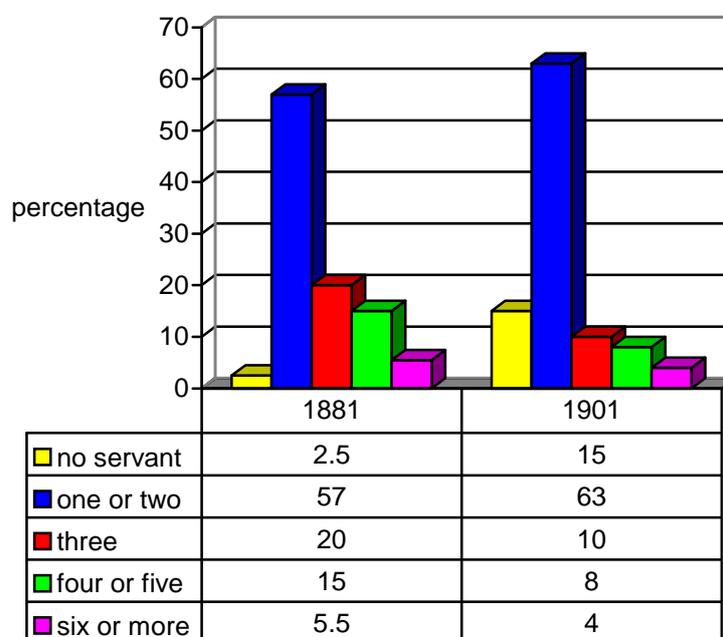
¹⁹⁹ Letter dated 28 February 1843, SRO D1157/1/2/14.

²⁰⁰ *Church Magazine* of St Mary's Church, Stafford, June 1899, SRO D834/1/3/1.

²⁰¹ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, January 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

²⁰² Lohead (1964) p30; Peel (1926) p185.

5.8 Servants in Staffordshire Incumbents Households 1881 and 1901



Sources: Page (1968) pp318-329.

The number of servants in incumbents' households, as shown in graph 5.8, generally relates directly to the value of the living, although at a level consistently above that value. Those clergy with wealthier livings employed more servants, but the value of the living did not provide sufficient income to employ such domestic staff. For example, in 1881 those incumbents with no servants held livings valued at £186 on average, those with four or more £456, and those with six or more £606. The evidence suggests that around half the benefice income was being spent on servants for the parsonage. It may have been possible for clergy to employ servants at a cheaper rate

because clergy wives often took on a training function for young women, and they had access to charities that might subsidize some servants' wages if they qualified for relief.²⁰³ Furthermore, clergy tended to live in large houses with large gardens used by the parish, which demanded extra labour to keep them serviced.²⁰⁴ However, even with such considerations many clergy were employing more servants than their professional incomes would allow and must have had recourse to private income.

Private wealth was also subsidizing Anglican curates. In 1881 the average stipend of a curate was around £100-120 a year. Just over half of them were unmarried lodgers but most of the others kept servants, at an average of 1.3 per household. Aspiring to become an incumbent the curate was already relying on private income. There were also ten or so in the diocese that declined to accept any stipend at all.

The fall in private wealth in the last quarter of the nineteenth century is also suggested by the increase in the number of applications to clerical charities. The Sons of the Clergy, which gave grants to clergy particularly to support their children, saw a large increase in grants to beneficed clergy from 87 in 1872 to 229 in 1892.

²⁰³ Lochhead (1964), p131; Davidoff and Hall (1987) pp388-390.

²⁰⁴ By 1900 the clergy could not afford to employ the number of servants they needed to maintain their houses and gardens adequately, see Towler and Coxon (1979) p9, and Lee (2006) p40.

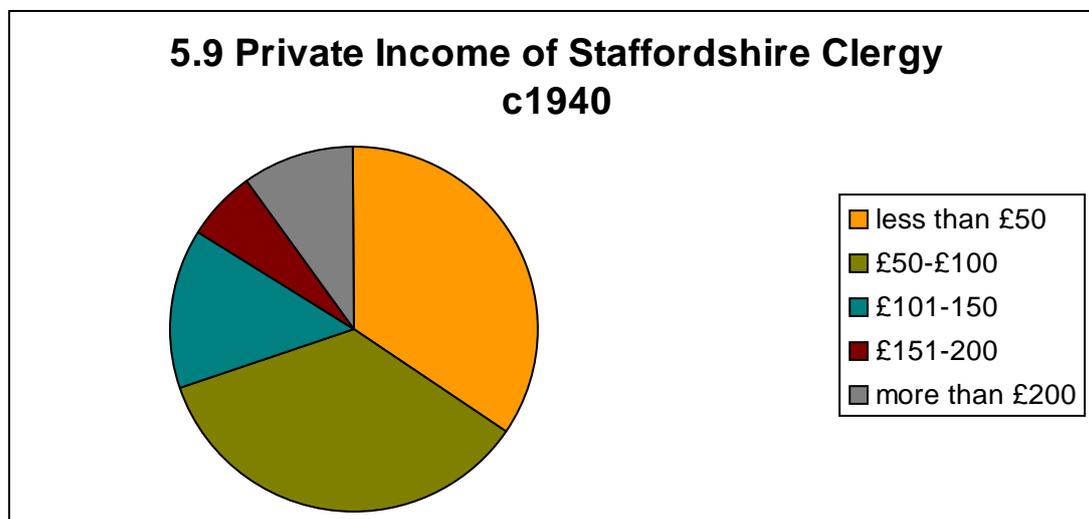
In the Stafford archdeaconry in 1940 there was a confidential survey of clerical private income, the results of which are shown in graph 5.8. As the record is for the majority of clergy in the archdeaconry it would have been fairly representative, and reveals that most had access to only a modest private income equivalent to a quarter of their parish stipend or less. These clergy were able to approach various clerical charities that gave grants for the education of children. About a third of the clergy were able to draw on private wealth of some sort and this gave them a comfortable standard of living. Interestingly there were two assumptions that lay behind the survey: some clergy needed some kind of financial support in order to supplement the stipend, particularly if they had children; some parishes needed a clergyman with a private income to assist in parochial expenses. G. D. Prime wrote, "Although I have not definitely a private income of my own, should it be agreed that a parish seemed to be a suitable one, though the stipend needed augmenting a little, my parents would do something to help me". The lack of a private income for some of the clergy meant that their work was affected. "I can only stay in Tunstall for a limited time until small savings are exhausted, because of high expenses of office and outside calls, relative to income", wrote S. F. Linsley, who only had the £20 of private income of his wife to rely upon. F. S. Sinker complained of the extra expenses he faced as a consequence of his incumbency, "such private income as we have has to supplement the upkeep of a large vicarage and garden". Once the private income had been used up there was a degree of hardship. C. G. Wright informed the bishop, "my present vicarage has 24 rooms and owing to the loss of private income my wife now has of necessity to do all

the domestic work herself. When we first came here we kept 2 maids, a Daily Governess and a Gardener”. There was even the accusation that private income was prerequisite for promotion. H. C. Tummadine wrote, “I wish to record an emphatic protest against the continuance of a situation in which men are selected for positions on the basis of ‘means’ rather than suitability”.²⁰⁵ Unfortunately he did not quote any examples.

The obvious decline in clerical income and decrease in the subsidy from private wealth was lost on many people, even towards the end of the period: “Even today it is so generally assumed that the incumbent has means which are at the disposal of the parish, either for him to spend directly or to help subsidize his own stipend”.²⁰⁶

²⁰⁵ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

²⁰⁶ Brown (1953).



Source: Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

It is interesting to note the place of the clergy wife in these developments. There was a major role for such a person in most parishes involving the running of some parish organisations, particularly those that worked with women, children and the poor, and was a general support for her husband. She was what was often called ‘the unpaid curate’. In her own right she could bring in private wealth or earnings to the parsonage household. The clergy, because of their social standing made good husbands for women of wealth. Lonsdale improved his financial status through matrimony, and claimed that his enhanced income subsidised his episcopate.²⁰⁷ Some clerical wives wrote in order to supplement the household income.²⁰⁸ When there was no private wealth from husband or wife the domestic staff had to be cutback and the

²⁰⁷ See Denison (1868).

²⁰⁸ Davidoff and Hall (1987) p125.

clergy wife would have to take on the maintenance of the house, and possibly a paid job. The effect of this on the role of the clergy was not insignificant but has not been fully recognised or studied.²⁰⁹

Clergy pensions also need to be considered. The Incumbents Resignation Act of 1871 allowed a clergyman to retire and receive a third of the income of the benefice, but this legislation was amended in 1887 largely because benefice incomes were insufficient to support such a system. Effectively only those who were in wealthy livings or had private income could retire. Not until 1907 did the Commissioners provide a pension, first at the annual rate of £50, increased to £75 in 1915, and to £200 in 1926. The poor pension provision probably prevented many clergy from retiring, although it may have been based in part on an assumption that because clergy have a private income better pensions were not needed. Again, there has been little study in this area.

The nature of the clerical role did allow clergy to be engaged in opportunities to earn extra income from work. The 1838 Pluralities Act forbade clergy to “engage in or carry on any trade or dealing for gain or profit or deal in any goods, wares or merchandise”.

²¹⁰ The most common occupation was teaching, usually preparing boys for public school. In some cases the parsonage was turned into a small boarding school, as in

²⁰⁹ There are occasional references, such as Hart (1959) p151, and Davidoff and Hall (1987) p119.

²¹⁰ Melinsky (1992) p229.

1841 at Lapley where James Bewsher ran his own boarding school. In 1881 at Salt the vicar shared his home with seven boys, at Seighford the vicar looked after nine boys, and in Harborne the vicar managed to house 21 boys in his vicarage.²¹¹ Medicine also was an important source of income for some clergy, at least in the early part of the period.²¹² Quite naturally some of the laity resented the clergy spending time on activities that were considered a distraction from their ministerial duties within the parish or the congregation.

Some occupations of the clergy might actually be a drain on resources. Far from generating extra income their role in the community, particularly charity work, would have involved extra expense. A large population in need of charitable help could be an expensive burden and would reduce the value of a modest living. One Wolverhampton clergyman wrote how having too many paupers tended to increase the financial burden of the clergy.²¹³ As clergy became poorer through the reduced value of livings and the fall in private wealth, their involvement in some activities in the wider community would have been curtailed.

The necessary support of private wealth for clergy was not always recognised or appreciated. Indeed, it was often seen as a handicap. Horace Mann in the *Report on the Religious Census* of 1851 said that a chief cause why poorer people didn't attend

²¹¹ Weate (1982) p2; 1881 Census Returns

²¹² Parsons (1988) vol. 1 p199.

²¹³ *Letter* from H.R.Slade, January 3rd 1845, Tettenhall Masonic Lodge Archive.

church was that they saw the clergy as too wealthy.²¹⁴ Opposition to the ‘gentleman heresy’ was strong in both the Evangelical and Tractarian parties within the Church of England. The most important factor that dispelled the heresy was the fall in the value of livings and the erosion of private wealth as a hidden subsidy. By the end of the nineteenth century the role of a clergyman had lost its financial attractiveness, which for some improved their standing and for others added to their burden. One commentator lamented about “the hard lot of the clergy who suffer from the new poverty is sometimes made harder by the scarcely veiled contempt they have to bear”.

²¹⁵ The 1908 Archbishops’ Commission on ordinands suggested that candidates from poorer backgrounds might have the advantage of the commendable experience of self-denial.²¹⁶ This was to make a virtue out of a necessity and to ignore the very significant way that private income had provided support for the clergy.

Conclusions

The wealth of the clergy was not limited to what they earned in various roles, or what they inherited. There was value in their position in society, their influence in the parish, their autonomy in their work, and their job security. They had access to charitable funds, and had control of the school and other parish organisations. They were usually provided with a house, which in some cases was rather grand, as is

²¹⁴ As quoted in Golby (1986) p41.

²¹⁵ Underhill (1927) p8.

discussed in chapter seven. They had a moral superiority and trustworthiness, inferred if not always justified. Because of their social position many of them were able to marry well and rise up the social ladder. Ironically, even the poverty of the clergy had a value because it enhanced the image of piety and devotion.

However, clerical incomes were falling, at least from the last quarter of the nineteenth century. By the middle of the twentieth century there were no clergy with large incomes, indeed by then they would be just a faint memory. Whereas doctors, lawyers, engineers and accountants were enjoying an increase in real income clergy were growing poorer.²¹⁷ Clergy had fallen behind members of other professions and could not expect to have the income of many of their parishioners.²¹⁸ In the period 1830-1960 there is levelling of income and a reduction in real value of incomes.

The main reason for this was that the church was too reliant on one type of financial support, the tithe, either in its original or revised forms. The full effect of the decline in clerical earned wealth was not apparent because of the support, often hidden, from private wealth, but this in turn was also to diminish. The church failed to establish sufficient alternative forms of finance, in particular sources linked to the new industries.

²¹⁶ Towler and Coxon (1979) p41.

²¹⁷ Raynor (1969) pp30, 59.

²¹⁸ See Reindorp (1957) p93-95, where he suggests that because clergy cannot afford a television they have to ask their parishioners to keep them informed of what is being broadcast.

All other ways of funding the clergy, either through pew rents, parish appeals and congregational offertory, were both inadequate and encouraged introversion. They were more suited to a specialised ministry, serving a core membership, dealing with the wider community at very specific points in their lives, and providing a service in competition with other providers. This professional model of ministry was more common in the larger parishes of the towns and industrialised areas where the church was more reliant on the new forms of financial support. It was in the small parishes where the tithe income remained significant, and in a few cases where the glebe was still farmed, that the parson model was most resilient.

Chapter Six

THE PARSON

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the parson as ‘a vicar, or any beneficed clergyman; a chaplain, a curate, any clergyman’.¹ The definition within this study is somewhat narrower. The parson is an Anglican clergyman, and they were all men in this period, who had pastoral charge, within a wide spectrum of legal rights of tenure, of a parish or part of a parish. It would include those holding the freehold of a benefice, such as rectors and vicars, whose only distinction was their historic rights to the various tithes, which at the beginning of the period is of some importance, perpetual curates, with their limited rights, and assistant curates, who worked under the supervision, theoretically with very few rights but often with considerable independence, of another clergyman. In addition the parson was someone who engaged in parish ministry in a traditional manner, in accordance with the features of the parson model outlined below.

Evidence for the features of the parson model has been sought largely in clergy notebooks, worship records, parish and other periodicals, and personal correspondence. The persistence of the model as a basis for parish ministry is

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition 1989.

remarkable. It was the model in which the majority of clergy were trained and it was the model that they expected to apply in their parishes. The reality of the situations in which they found themselves meant that the model could only be partly workable. Understandably, this led to some guilt and denial. The mentors who wrote the clergy manuals conspired to promote the parson model, with the necessary adjustments for the modern context. The fact that they had been successful, which may have been due to particular circumstances, convinced them of the universal application of their advice. A small minority dared to challenge the relevance of the parson model, asking, for instance, whether parish visiting was either possible or did any good, or whether the Church of England had any significant role in certain parishes. None of the manuals was written by mentors who actually lived in Staffordshire, which in itself is an indication of the ordinariness of the place, but it is supposed that they represent a body of received wisdom, often borne out of first-hand parochial experience, which would have been read by Staffordshire clergy and was likely to be fairly influential in their practical approaches and aspirations for their work.

One of the greatest inspirations for the parson model came from the writings of George Herbert whose work 'A Priest to the Temple or The Countrey Parson, his Character and Rule of Holy Life' was made popular in seventeenth century, partly through the influence of Izaak Walton of Staffordshire. After being considered somewhat gothic and uncouth in the eighteenth century he was revived in the

nineteenth century particularly by Keble and others in the Oxford Movement.² For the next century or so Herbert's work remained influential, if only as an unobtainable ideal, and was the blue print for much of the advice given to clergy throughout the period 1830 to 1960. The duties of the parish priest outlined by Herbert were enshrined in Ecclesiastical Canon C24.

Assumptions Underpinning the Organisation

The parson model depends upon a relationship with the whole parish, not just those who attend the parish church, or regard themselves as Anglican. The parson ministers to everyone and regards members of other churches and those who are members of none to be within the scope of his pastoral care. This is only possible if the people of the parish accept his ministry.

As an organisation the Church of England worked on the premise that all people were within its pastoral responsibility to some extent. The fact that the archdeacons' articles of enquiry throughout the period did not ask for details of attendance nor communicant numbers, but rather required information on population, benefice income and seating capacity, is an indication of how the ministry of the clergy was to be judged on their relationship to the whole population.

² Patrides (1983); Davie (1983) p4.

There was a great interest, even obsession with seating capacity because of the need to provide church accommodation for all the residents, or at least a good proportion of them. This was a major issue in the early part of the period and a spur to the erection of new churches at a substantial rate in the mid nineteenth century. The 1851 religious census was designed to provide important information about seating capacities in relation to population, although its relevance was questioned in the subsequent report. The 1881 Potteries census sought the same information and the compilers drew their own conclusions about the need for more seating. Up until that time the seating capacity within Staffordshire had risen at about the same rate as the population growth, although remaining at a low percentage.³ This was a significant achievement but the increase could not be sustained. In the twentieth century, largely because the battle to provide adequate accommodation had been lost and the costs of church building became prohibitive, the issue of church seating was less of a priority.

The concept of church membership within the Church of England underwent considerable development in this period, although it remained a loose concept.⁴ Whether it was those who had been baptised, those who went on to confirmation, those who regularly took Holy Communion or those who entered their name on the electoral roll when this became a possibility in 1920, the membership was never

³ The issue of seating is discussed in more detail in chapter four.

⁴ Anglican church membership is discussed in fuller detail in chapter four.

clearly defined. As the parson dealt with all people it was unnecessary for him to differentiate between members and non-members.

In some parishes in the nineteenth century the appointment of clergy was the responsibility of representatives of the whole population. At Willenhall eventful elections took place, often involving lobbying from Nonconformists and resulting in lawsuits.⁵ Significantly, when a new vicar was chosen in 1894 he set about successfully abolishing the electoral system, substituting trustees who included the bishop and archdeacon. By the end of the century, with the rise of denominationalism, Anglicans needed to control the appointment of their clergy. In urban areas with the presence of other churches and a large population unaffiliated to the church, the appointment by the wider community had become totally unfeasible.

⁵ Tildesley (1951), p45-56, Bird (1974) p52.

The Clergyman as a Recognised Figure

The central feature of the parson model is that the clergyman is a recognised figure, with a longstanding relationship to the whole community. The classic model of parish ministry will only work in a small community where the clergyman is known by all. This is the size on which George Herbert constructed his approach to parish ministry.

⁶ He wrote that the parson “is not only a Father to his flock but also professeth himself thoroughly of the opinion, carrying it about him as fully, as if he had begat his whole parish.” ⁷ John Calvin wrote of the ideal of being a pastor to fifty families. ⁸

In Staffordshire there are many examples of the well-known parson throughout the period. In 1836 when Anne Bagot reflected on her visit to Elford where the vicar sat with “90 children on the lawn eating cake and drinking and dear good Francis very happy in the middle of them”, the picture is of paternalism embodied in the clergy. ⁹ Through the children there would be a link to most households in the parish, a connection secured within each generation. Elford was a small parish but even in the urban areas the clergy would seem to be well-known. When Baring Gould retired from St. Mark’s Church in Wolverhampton in 1868 after twenty years of service in

⁶ See Charles (1977).

⁷ Herbert (1652) p64.

⁸ See McKee (1988) and Parker (1995).

one of the poorest parts of the city he was so popular amongst his parishioners that they contributed 300 guineas as a retirement gift, as well as a large bible bought through penny subscriptions from the poor, and a silver tray from the rich.¹⁰ When J. E. Wetherall of Brereton died in 1874 after 34 years as incumbent, the parishioners “crowded around the grave to mark their affection for one whom they could not fail to love.”¹¹ At Abbots Bromley John Lowe wrote a letter to 1,000 parishioners at his retirement in 1891 and addressed them as “friends”¹² In the 1890s every household in the parish of Drayton Bassett received a copy of the church almanac from the incumbent, regardless of the fact that few people actually attended church.¹³ In the same decade Thomas Ridsdel of Hirst Hill was thought of “with profound respect ... for he achieved a great reputation throughout his parish,”¹⁴ and at the death of Edward Holland, vicar of Colwich for 39 years, it was recorded that “he was a shepherd who knew his sheep and was known by them.”¹⁵

Clergy would seem to have acquired a local celebrity status. When the rector of Aldridge went on holiday in Europe in 1909 he wrote an account for the parish

⁹ *Diary of Anne Bagot*, June 1836, SRO D4752/4

¹⁰ *The Story of a Century*, St. Mark's Wolverhampton, 1846-1946, SRO D4970/1/120.

¹¹ *Parish Magazine*, Brereton, October 1874, SRO D5599/9/3/1/1.

¹² *Farewell Letter*, Abbots Bromley, 1891, SRO D5362/1/100. Of course, the term ‘friends’ does not say anything about the parishioners’ regard for John Lowe.

¹³ *Drayton Bassett Parish Magazine*, 1897-1904, SRO D3396/16/3.

¹⁴ Roper (1952), p110.

¹⁵ *Trent Valley Parochial Magazine*, August 1890, SRO D1274/8/5.

magazine and suggested that the children of the parish look up the places on a map.¹⁶ In the summer the rectory garden was open to parishioners on Sunday afternoons provided that they behaved well and did not discard their cigarette ends in the flowerbeds.¹⁷ In 1914 when the new church was built at Basford the event was so important that a cinematographic film was made of the clergy at the ceremony and shown at local cinemas.¹⁸

It was at the death of clergy that their status within the local community was revealed. When William Wright died in 1921 after 39 years as vicar of All Saints Leek, “he passed away to [the] great grief of all the parishioners, and indeed to all who knew him, and it is safe to say that there were very few people in Leek and district who did not.”¹⁹ When the vicar of Burntwood died in 1929 a memorial fund was set up because “practically everyone” in the parish wanted to contribute to a new lych gate in his memory.²⁰ Before the third vicar of Tividale died in 1925 he asked that his funeral procession take in the whole parish so that “the sight of the coffin would touch the hearts of his people.”²¹ When the fourth vicar died in 1960 hundreds of people turned out to show their respects: “Silent crowds lined the two mile route.” The bishop commended the clergyman’s faithfulness “judged by the fact that he stayed for

¹⁶ *Aldridge Parish Magazine* June 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

¹⁷ *Aldridge Parish Magazine* June and October 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

¹⁸ Bragg (1995), p36.

¹⁹ *In Memoriam, William Benson Wright, Vicar and Rural Dean*, SRO D4855/3/51.

²⁰ Note on Memorial Fund, Burntwood, 1929, SRO D4045/10/2/1-16.

²¹ *Souvenir Programme of the Jubilee Bazaar*, St. Michael’s Church, Tividale, 1928,

half a lifetime in the middle of this highly industrial area which is not everyone's idea of mortal bliss.”²²

In the smaller parishes the celebrity of the clergy was prolonged until the end of the period, and some clergy had methods of maintaining their fame. The country parish continued to provide the opportunity for a ministry to all people well into the twentieth century.²³ At Hilderstone in the 1950s the vicar sent a picture of himself to every household, so that even if the people did not know him they would at least know what he looked like.²⁴

Some considered that the recognition of the clergy and the acceptance of them as ministers by the whole population was actually increasing in the twentieth century. This renaissance of the parson model was due to central churchmanship, according to Hocking who wrote, “the suspicion of the clergy is getting less, and the situation is very different now from what it used to be.”²⁵ Tolling the bell at 7.30am and 7.30pm would help remind the people that the clergyman is praying for them, as would the introduction of Rogation Sunday processions in the towns.²⁶ He may have been buoyed up by post war optimism apparent in increased baptismal statistics.

SRO D3456/1/182.

²² *The Tipton Herald*, 24 September 1960, SRO D3456/1/183.

²³ Cunningham (1932) p52.

²⁴ *Parochial Council Minutes*, Hilderstone 1926-1955, SRO D3408/412.

²⁵ Hocking (1960) p154.

²⁶ Hocking (1960) pp149-150, 163.

About the same time De Blank insisted that the clergyman “must be a familiar figure in the vicinity. He must live and shop where he can be found and seen. He must share the interests of his parishioners, material as well as spiritual, and he must care for the things that are of moment to his flock.”²⁷

One of the key factors was the length of stay within the parish, and by the mid twentieth century the shorter incumbencies were seen as detrimental to the church.²⁸ It has been suggested that the long incumbencies of the nineteenth century had enhanced the ministry of the parson.²⁹ Anglicans considered that Non-conformists were at a disadvantage because they moved on too frequently.³⁰ As the period progresses clergy tended to stay for shorter periods. There were always exceptions with short incumbencies in the nineteenth century and the occasional long one in the mid twentieth. However, clergy were more mobile in the later years.

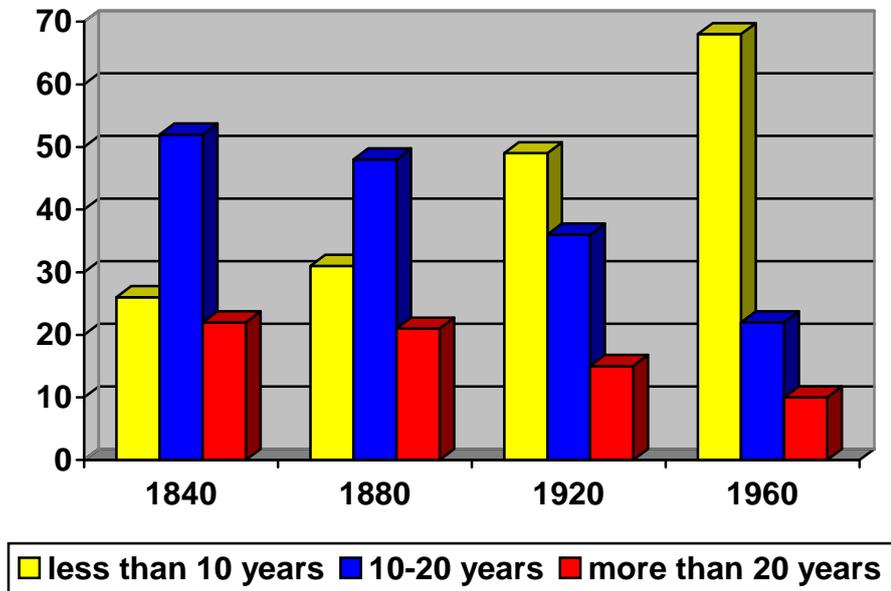
²⁷ De Blank (1954) p18.

²⁸ Colquhoun (1952) p64.

²⁹ Lee (2006) p182.

³⁰ Wickham (1931) p7.

6.1 Length of Staffordshire Incumbencies



Sources: Archdeacon Hodson's Visitation Records 1829-1841, *Church Calendar and General Almanac*, from 1856, later *Lichfield Diocese Church Calendar* and *Crockford Clerical Directory* 1954-1960

The clergy were all the more likely to be recognised if they had grown up in the parish and went on to 'inherit' the incumbency. "I had grown up with the hope of being ordained and some day succeeding my father as Rector of Haughton", wrote one clergyman who stood in a line of rectors of that family in that parish.³¹ "I was instituted and inducted .. very nearly forty-two years after my baptism in the same church. My father, as patron, presented me to the bishop, and so began my twenty-

³¹ Royds (1953) p23.

five years as rector.”³² This was the longest standing family incumbency in Staffordshire, which began in 1822, was secured with the purchase of the patronage for £4,200 in 1830 and lasted until the 1950s.

What is inescapable is the personal nature of parish ministry, and it is this emphasis upon the person of the minister that is the essence of the parson model. The personal knowledge of the parson was seen as crucial as highlighted by one of the most well read of the mentors: “our Blessed Lord give us the true ideal of the pastor in the words ‘I know my sheep and am known of mine’. The most regular, careful and beautiful sermons, the most eloquent and thoughtful preaching, the most elaborate music, not one or all these things will supply the lack of that true pastoral relationship which nothing but personal knowledge of your people will give.”³³ One mentor writing in 1920 was very critical of this approach and longed for something more professional, rather than the endless round of “visiting, shaking hands, entertaining, exhorting, counting communicants and looking them up, pottering about in church clubs for boys ... and trying to ‘get hold of them’, with much talk about ‘my’ church, ‘my’ parish, and ‘my’ workers, of thanking people who ‘kindly’ arrange the flowers for the altar, and chairmen for giving ‘us’ such a delightful and bright service, and expressing our ‘gratitude (sic) to our dear fellow-workers’ for all that they do.”³⁴ Any occupation so centred on the individual and their personal interaction with others

³² Royds (1953) p46.

³³ Green (1924) p34.

could never be fully professionalised.

The Essential Task of Visiting

If the parson was to be well known and if he was to know his people then he needed to visit them regularly. Herbert recommended that the parson should spend every weekday afternoon visiting his parishioners, “for there he shall find his flock most naturally as they are, wallowing in the midst of their affairs.”³⁵ This is such an important feature of the parson model that it was recommended by virtually all of the clergy manuals. “The strength of the English Church has been for years, and is today, her visiting” and this is the “Peculiar to the genius of the English Church.”³⁶ “It is his visiting work which brings a parish priest into the closest personal touch with his parishioners..”³⁷ One mentor noted how in the smaller parishes “visiting is among the most popular of our duties.”³⁸ In the larger parishes visiting had to be “performed in a methodical and systematic manner, otherwise some parishioners may never be visited.”³⁹ In addressing the Staffordshire clergy Bishop MacLagan had no doubts about its centrality: “There is no part of our ministerial work more important, none

³⁴ Rogers (1920) p64.

³⁵ Herbert (1652) p57.

³⁶ Winnington Ingram (1895) p69.

³⁷ Savage (1903) p23.

³⁸ Coles (1906) p139.

more productive of good, and yet, I fear it must be added, none more apt to be neglected.”⁴⁰ Those who could not achieve the ideal, which was to visit every household at least once a year, were failing on one of the crucial tasks of ministry. In another charge to the Staffordshire clergy Bishop Kempstone said that the main task of parish ministry was to “visit, visit, visit”, a duty which if neglected made the clergyman a mere ‘idle shepherd’, unworthy of the priesthood. There are plenty of examples of the clergy of Staffordshire seeking to fulfil the advice of their bishops.

The undertaking of a parish census was often connected to an extensive visitation of the inhabitants. In the small parishes censuses were quite usual. In 1832 the incumbent of Wetley Rocks did a complete census of the 823 people in his district, perhaps as a way of justifying the need for the establishment of an independent parish.

⁴¹ In 1861 the incumbent of Weston-under-Lizard recorded full details of the 483 people in his parish. ⁴² In the same decade in Stowe Parish in Lichfield the clergyman recorded what he found at every house, carefully noting if there were dependents and if people belonged to other parishes in Lichfield, which would have excluded them from receiving relief in the Stowe Parish. The census was an attempt to get to know everyone’s family circumstances, occupations and vices. Beside the entries there are

³⁹ Watkins (1934) p67.

⁴⁰ Maclagan (1892) p32

⁴¹ Incumbents Census 1832, Wetley Rocks, SRO D5626/1/7.

⁴² Incumbents Census 1861, Weston-under-Lizard, SRO D1060/2/1.

comments such as ‘thief’, ‘very drunken’, and ‘wife very worthy’.⁴³

Although time-consuming the task of visiting was seen as essential. “In the days before the clergy learnt to annihilate distance by the bicycle, much time was occupied in getting to see parishioners.”⁴⁴ reflected the daughter of the rector of St. Chad’s, Lichfield, 1853-1893. She remembered how he was determined to visit everyone, and how “as a clergyman, he lived wholly for his parish.”⁴⁵ Others recalled their days as curates “when there were no committees to attend, and no business to transact, and very few letters to write, and when one gave oneself up to the intense please of really knowing the people.”⁴⁶

The curate in charge of Palfrey Mission Church in Walsall declared on arrival in 1894 that he would visit everyone of the 4,000 or so in the ecclesiastical district.⁴⁷ Whether he ever achieved this aim is not recorded, but it was likely to be based more on youthful enthusiasm than practical experience. In 1899 the vicar undertook a census of Colwich and made frank comments on some of the 985 inhabitants in the 197 houses.⁴⁸

⁴³ Census, Parish of Stowe, Lichfield, c1865, SRO D29/2/1.

⁴⁴ Graham (1899) p44.

⁴⁵ Graham (1899) p113.

⁴⁶ Winnington Ingram (1895) p78.

⁴⁷ *Incumbent’s Book*, Palfrey Mission Church, Walsall, 1893-1896, SRO D4053/3/8/1.

About the turn of the century the curate of Aldridge was given the task of visiting every house in the parish, which at the rate of ten houses a day took him a year. He invariably found someone in and nearly always received some kind of welcome. Where he did not he recorded his findings with notes such as “unsatisfactory people”, “wife left and lives with another man”, “husband rather cantankerous but I always find them civil and they seem to appreciate visits”, and “this is a dirty house.” He went with the assumption that he had the right to call on everyone and enquire of his or her personal circumstances. To some he gave a gift of a shilling or two, with money supplied by the vicar. He was concerned to know if they attended church, and if not the parish church then the Roman Catholic or Wesleyan.⁴⁹ When the new rector arrived in the parish eight years later he set about visiting the 570 houses over a period of seven months.⁵⁰

In the smaller parishes general visiting carried on well into the twentieth century. The clergy of Drayton Bassett kept a visiting book for 27 years, starting in 1901, with a record of visits to every house in the parish. Out of 70 houses 38 provided a communicant, and 12 were “altogether aloof”. The local landowner Sir Robert Peel is described as “gone to the dogs.”⁵¹ At Ipstones the vicar recorded his visits to all parishioners from 1918 to 1921, and in a population of 1,300 he called on every house

⁴⁸ Colwich Parish Census, 1899, SRO D874/2/31.

⁴⁹ *Curate's Diary*, Aldridge 1900-1901, SRO D1104/3/5.

⁵⁰ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, January 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

⁵¹ *Drayton Bassett Visiting Books*, 2 volumes, 1901-1928, SRO D3396/10/1-2.

four times a year. Apart from the various comments about the residents, the vicar was anxious to note the regularity of the communicants.⁵²

Clergy who were new to a parish often made it their duty to visit every household, even if they were unable to keep to this level of pastoral care in subsequent years. When the new vicar arrived at St. Modwen's Church, Burton on Trent, in 1925 he set about visiting all 250 households in the parish, an achievable task because of the relatively small population of this town centre parish. The vicar claimed that his efforts had led to a 37% increase in communicants.⁵³ A similar visitation census was done at Armitage in 1940, again with the assumption that everyone was a member of the Church of England unless they declared otherwise. At every house questions were asked about subscribing to the parish magazine, contributing to the freewill offering, joining the choir, and sending children to the Sunday School. The comments about the inhabitants included: "reported to come to church but never comes", "trying old woman", "friendly Irish", "rough family, no use to church", and "most dangerous man in parish – at bottom of all village trouble", with the addition of some notes written in Greek.⁵⁴

⁵² *Ipstones Visiting Book*, 1918-1921, SRO D711/18.

⁵³ *Review of the Year*, St Modwen's Church, Burton on Trent, SRO D4219/1/90.

⁵⁴ *Armitage Register of Residents*, c1940, SRO D3266/5/2.

In the small parish the ideal of parish visiting was achievable, particularly during a long incumbency. ⁵⁵ “I consider,” wrote H. S. Barker in a confidential note to his bishop in 1939, “regular day-in day-out visiting as an essential part of the work I am called to do, and this not only to regular church people but to others who are indifferent.” ⁵⁶ In an anonymous account written in 1964 a clergyman confesses how he failed to achieve the ideal, which was to get into every house. ⁵⁷ Hocking advised clergy that they had should express their ministry to the whole parish through visiting: “It is generally understood that the clergy of the Church of England have the right and the duty to visit parishioners in their homes, whether they are members of the congregation or not.” ⁵⁸ He went on to say that such work would always be rewarding: “we have ample evidence for believing that visiting leads to churchgoing.” ⁵⁹

There is evidence that clergy were struggling to fulfil the ideal, although to admit to this failure was probably always difficult. Even in a small parish it was very time consuming. In a large parish it was mathematically impossible, and this basic fact meant that visiting in the way it was conceived and practised at the beginning of the period was impossible in most places by the end. In Chesterton in 1962 the vicar

⁵⁵ Royds (1953) p151.

⁵⁶ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

⁵⁷ Anonymous (1964) p11.

⁵⁸ Hocking (1960) p 149.

⁵⁹ Hocking (1960) p 183.

promised his best: “In a parish of this size it is obviously quite impossible for the Vicar to get round to you all in your homes, but I hope to get a considerable number of visits in each week.”⁶⁰ The parson model depended on comprehensive scheme of visiting which had become unworkable.

Indiscriminate Pastoral Care

The parson visited everyone because the parson had a pastoral concern for everyone. In the 1840s the first sermon preached in the new church of St. John, Wednesbury, by Isaac Clarkson, the Vicar of Wednesbury, declared with great confidence that “for the benefit of the inhabitants of this new district ... has this Church been erected.”⁶¹ The parish church was not a sectarian body because the clergy were there for everyone regardless of their religious allegiance. The main strength of the Church of England was the parish system which meant that it cared for everyone, at least in theory as one Professor of Divinity put it in the 1860s: “it leaves no corner of the country, however dim a spot, without pastor bound to look to it. It prevents all picking and choosing of inviting districts – here a dearth of clergy, and there a deluge.”⁶²

⁶⁰ *The Parish Letter*, Chesterton, March 1962, SRO D5677/6/2.

⁶¹ *A Sermon Preached in the New Church of St. John, Wednesbury*, 13 May 1846, SRO D4053/41.

In the small parishes this aspect of the parson model could flourish. In Blithfield in the 1890s every household was expected to and nearly all did attend the Rectory Garden Party. ⁶³ The *Birmingham Mercury* commented on the rector's hold on the parish: "The Reverend Douglas Stuart Murray MA. is honoured by a full congregation. The people of this sequestered place go regularly to church, most of them walking a mile or two. The villages around have no publichouses, no police men, no Dissenting chapels, no rags or destitution, and no crime." ⁶⁴ The care of the Anglican clergyman in this parish would seem to be universal and undeniably good. At Ipstones, the vicar of the 1920s was remembered particularly because he indiscriminately ministered to everyone in the parish "no matter what their need or denomination", a typical pastoral approach of many clergy in small parishes. ⁶⁵ When the vicar of Branston retired in 1935 he was commended by the people in the church for his work with parishioners of all denominations and classes in the village. They saw his role as relating to everyone without distinction. ⁶⁶

⁶² Blunt (1861) p125.

⁶³ *Parson Murray's Parish Diary*, 1890-1917, SRO D1386/5/3.

⁶⁴ *Birmingham Mercury* 9 June 1894.

⁶⁵ Brighton (1937), p79.

⁶⁶ *Parochial Church Council, Minute Book*, Branston, SRO D5914/8/3.

Where there were groups that did not seem to relate well to the church the clergy often made efforts to improve matters. Troubled that men were excluded from church the vicar of Drayton Bassett, through his parish magazine in 1898, invited men to come to the vicarage and talk to him if they had problems with attending worship.⁶⁷

Because the parson had a universal pastoral care he would find himself particularly concerned for those parishioners in distress. The rector of St. Peter's Church, Stoke on Trent established a special fund for the benefit of coal and ironworkers in North Staffordshire in 1870.⁶⁸ In 1909 the Rector of Aldridge refused to be drawn into the coal miners strike but did show some sympathy for the men: "The Rector has no wish to interfere in trade disputes, and even if he did wish to do so, his information as to facts is so incomplete that he is not qualified to come to any decision. Still, he has so much respect and sympathy for men who, though willing to work, are unable to find employment, that he would most willingly, if asked, do whatever he could in the way of peacemaking."⁶⁹ Three years later he commented on the good behaviour of the miners and distributed £26 in relief.⁷⁰ The links between the coal mining companies and the church were not strong which may have enabled the rector to be more sympathetic to the miners. In 1912 the clergy of St. George's Church, Newcastle

⁶⁷ *Drayton Bassett Parish Magazine*, 1897-1904, SRO D3396/16/3.

⁶⁸ See Duprée (1995) p291.

⁶⁹ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, January 1909, SRO D3563/1/50.

⁷⁰ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, April 1912, SRO D3563/1/50.

organised some relief for the striking miners in that parish.⁷¹ Different clergy would have reacted to these situations in different ways, but the guiding principle was that all the people were under their pastoral care, which meant that they were not universally committed to maintaining the status quo at the expense of the socially and economically disadvantaged.

De Blank sees the task of the clergyman as to get the whole population to worship God in the church, and therefore those who do not attend services have to have a high priority.⁷² Hocking insist that even if a parish had no active Christians it should still have a clergyman to serve the people.⁷³

The nature of this indiscriminate pastoral care meant that it often went unrecorded. An article in the Aldridge Parish Magazine of 1934 summed up the parson's task of caring for a whole population. It involved "quiet work which is done every day. The patient teaching and visiting, the unostentatious alms-giving, the loving, quiet service, the care of the children, the letter writing, the quiet pleading, all of which have an untold and untellable effect on the life of the community."⁷⁴

⁷¹ Briggs (1980) p45.

⁷² De Blank (1954) pp17, 24, 35.

⁷³ Hocking (1960) p179.

⁷⁴ *Aldridge Parish Magazine*, October 1934, SRO D3563/1/52.

The accessibility of the clergy had its disadvantages. The mentors advised an attitude of patience so anyone who came to seek counsel was freely and courteously received. However “ it is most annoying when one is in the midst of preparing a particularly brilliant sermon that the maid should show in a man who wants to beg.” ⁷⁵

Striving to be in touch with all people gave the clergy a vantage point from which to notice social changes upon which they could comment. Their remarks were not always negative. The vicar of Abbots Bromley was excited in 1932 that the church was beginning to have a relevance to everyone: “the people of England far from giving up Christian duties and practices, are returning to them; not out of habit or custom, or in deference to a popular opinion, but because the Church supplies a need, not of religious-minded people only, but of all sorts and conditions of men, and in these hurrying busy days no less than in the more leisured days of years gone by. ‘Laud Deo’.” ⁷⁶

The Anglican tradition of the beating of the bounds at Rogationtide was a practical expression of the parson’s area of responsibility. It was practised in many rural parishes in Staffordshire well into the twentieth century, though often in a rather informal manner. At Baswich the Rogationtide perambulations were recorded over 60

⁷⁵ Watkins (1934) p64.

⁷⁶ *Minute Book*, Abbots Bromley, 1852-1940, SRO D1209/5/3.

years, noting the route, the participants, and the psalms that were read. In 1890 the vicar and the police constable led the procession that included 14 young men, and on the way they came across an adder which one of the men killed with the vicar's umbrella.⁷⁷

The justification for Church Rates was that as the clergy serve the whole community it was reasonable to spread the costs of the upkeep of the church building amongst the population. In the debates about the Rates the issue of indiscriminate pastoral care was often cited.⁷⁸

A Multi-Faceted Ministry

It has been argued that the development of the different aspects of the clerical role indicated that it was a profession in development.⁷⁹ However, these aspects could be considered features of the parson model, where the clergy attempt to engage with the fullness of community life. The way that the parson was expected to be involved in the issues of education, health, justice, moral welfare and the economy of the parish arose out of a concern for the whole community. Herbert wrote that the parson

⁷⁷ *Rogationtide Notebook*, Parish of Baswich, 1829-1890, SRO D3361/7/3.

⁷⁸ This was the debate in the meetings of the clergy when the abolition of church rates was discussed, *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference 1860-1886*, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

⁷⁹ Russell (1980) is the best known classic, but others have promoted the theory.

“desires to be all to his Parish, not only a Pastour, but a Lawyer also, and a Physician.”⁸⁰ The professionalisation of ministry, which narrowed down the areas of clerical involvement giving way to others better qualified, led to a clerical specialisation contrary to the parson model. In the mid nineteenth century a clergyman was expected to maintain in his parish the full range of community services, including day, evening and Sunday school, weekly lectures, choir, parochial library, providence society, funds for coal, food and baby clothes, allotments, and a branch of a missionary society, amongst other things as well as church services, and all this over and above his social and economic involvement in local life.⁸¹ By the twentieth century the parish organisations might still be in existence, though with a decreased membership and involving a smaller proportion of the parish. More importantly what had declined was the social and economic involvement in local life, the very encounter that had nurtured the parish organisations in the first place.

There are many examples of clergy in Staffordshire working beyond what might be termed strict ecclesiastical duties. In the cholera outbreak in Bilston in 1832 the clergy took a prominent role in organising relief, and gained respect for staying in the infected area, while others moved out.⁸² In Sedgley and Coseley during the same epidemic clergy signed the vast majority of the burial registers and so must have

⁸⁰ Herbert (1652) p88.

⁸¹ Best (1964) p155.

⁸² Leigh (1833).

remained at their posts.⁸³ There is some evidence that the outbreaks resulted in better attendance at church, perhaps because the clergy demonstrably showed their care for the people.⁸⁴ One clergy wife advised on how to cure cholera with “one tablespoon of cayenne pepper, ditto of salt, half a pint of warm water.”⁸⁵ Fisher of Willenhall was instrumental in improving the living standards in his parish, principally by setting up a public health committee in response to the threat of a cholera epidemic in 1849.⁸⁶ The influence of the clergy of a whole area was felt in the fund-raising for the North Staffordshire Infirmary through Hospital Sunday 1875, when the churches and chapels collected £867. If the congregation contributed a large sum their minister could become a governor of the hospital and be able to recommend people for treatment.⁸⁷

In the 1830s in Wolverhampton, William Dalton set up the St. Paul’s Provident Society, to which men paid five shillings a year and women three shillings and six pence. The rules stated that “the object of the society is to enable persons of both sexes to make provision by specified contributions for sickness, old age, and death, without exposing its members to those many and serious temptations so frequently associated with other Friendly Societies.”⁸⁸ Such a system of social security was not

⁸³ Roper (1952), p75.

⁸⁴ Briggs (1980) p67.

⁸⁵ Royds (1953) p63.

⁸⁶ Tildesley (1951) p121.

⁸⁷ See Duprée (1995) p284.

⁸⁸ *Rules and Tables of St. Paul’s Provident Society*, Wolverhampton, established

unusual in the Staffordshire parishes.

In Grindon in 1841 the clergyman took on a minor legal function as he tried to reconcile three parishioners who had come to blows over the ownership of a dung heap.⁸⁹ The rector at Haughton in the nineteenth century was called to stop a fight between two village men, which was an occasion that required that he first went back to the rectory to get his top hat.⁹⁰ The role of the clergy in dealing with local industrial disputes has already been commented on.

Francis Paget was Rector of Elford from 1835-1882, and was involved in many different projects, including campaigns against child labour and the working conditions of seamstresses. He was also a prolific writer, but declined any money from his books saying as they were done in parish time the proceeds should go to the parish.⁹¹ One mentor at the end of the nineteenth century was very insistent that clergy should be concerned with a wide range of community needs, including public drains and open spaces.⁹²

The concern for the welfare of all did not stop at the parish boundaries. The church was the focus of national and international concerns, events such as wars, famine, and the health of the country' leaders. On 21 April 1854 one of the clergy in West

1837, SRO D3786/5/3

⁸⁹ Letter from Revd. Bradshaw of Grindon, 13 November 1841, SRO D924/2/27.

⁹⁰ Royds (1953) p106.

⁹¹ Bird, (1974) p36.

Bromwich called on all the inhabitants of his district to attend church on the following Wednesday, a day of Humiliation and Prayer for the Crimean War, where they would be an opportunity to give to a fund for the wives and children of the soldiers. ⁹³ There were similar services held during the Boer War, and the First and Second World Wars. On other occasions special services took place for other national concerns, such as the illness of a member of the royal family.

Parsons were occupied in other ways. The Alsop clergy who ministered in Trussell and Bednall for nearly sixty years were accomplished poets with a national reputation. It is recorded that "each was a devoted servant of his parish, and each loved literature; each, after preaching, catechising, and christening, after comforting the sick and succouring the needy, would retire to his study and his slippers, and there let imagination flower in to poetry." ⁹⁴ John Selwyn who was curate at Alrewas in the 1870s was a fine Cambridge athlete, preached on Sundays and on Mondays taught the local boys to swim. ⁹⁵.

⁹² Winnington Ingram (1895) pp130-133.

⁹³ *Notice to Inhabitants of Trinity Church District, West Bromwich, 21 April 1854, SRO D4578/2/43.*

⁹⁴ Mee (1971) p14.

⁹⁵ Mee (1971) p16.

In the 1890s at Blithfield the clergy oversaw a whole range of parish organisations, including the Medical Club, Clothing Club, Book Club, School Savings Bank, Library, and Bee Keeping Society as well as the more usual church organisations for women, men and children. At the same time it was observed that the spiritual side of parish life was no longer a clerical monopoly. The vicar commended his parishioners because “more people are involved in the religious side of life, instead of only the parson. For instance, I am thankful to say that I hear less often than I used to do that Church spoken of as if it belonged to me instead of to you all.”⁹⁶

Regret about the way that clergy were losing their social role was reported at the Trentham in 1893: “the clergy should be the foremost in all social as well as spiritual work”, to which was added the comment that the Nonconformists had successfully undertaken some of the social function previously reserved to the Anglican clergy.⁹⁷

At Kinver a review of the parish magazine reveals the extent of the vicar’s interest in local matters. In 1890 a soup kitchen was established for the parish children, and 150 of them came on summer retreat to the vicarage garden, in 1893 the Band of Hope held a meeting in the fields near the vicarage and prizes were given out including one for opening a savings account, and in 1899 the vicar publicly opposed the new

⁹⁶ Parson Murray’s Parish Diary, 1890-1917, SRO D1386/5/3.

⁹⁷ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference* 1886-1899, LRO B/A/24/3/2.

sewerage system because it was too expensive and unnecessary if householders kept their premises “wholesome.”⁹⁸

The involvement of clergy in local schools is well known. Whereas this involvement was significant in most parishes in the nineteenth century in the small parishes this continued well into the twentieth century. For example, at Lapley in the 1930s the vicar was responsible for teaching elements of architecture and took the children on nature field trips.⁹⁹

Writing in the 1950s about his ministry the rector of Haughton included a chapter on wild animals and flora, and on sport.¹⁰⁰ This clergyman was rather sensitive of the term ‘hunting parson’ and explained how hunting brought together the rural community, “servant and master” bridging the “gulf between classes.” He added, “Lest any of my readers suspect me of being a real ‘sporty parson’, I must add that I never hunted more than once a week.”¹⁰¹

⁹⁸ *The Church Monthly*, Kinver, 1890-1900, SRO D5011/1/1-10.

⁹⁹ Weate (1995), p37.

¹⁰⁰ Royds (1953).

¹⁰¹ Royds (1953) p179-181.

In the same decade Hocking felt the need to justify some of the activities of the clergyman. He insisted that the clergy had to help people in every way they could and be involved in every aspect of their lives, and in so doing may bring about new Christians: "I have had recently three confirmation candidates who came along originally for help with housing difficulties." ¹⁰²

The Moral Conscience of the Community

Knowing the people of the parish, caring for them all, and being involved in a variety of activities was made all the more significant because the parson took on the role of collective moral conscience. With his wife and family the clergyman could affect the whole district. In the mid nineteenth century the vicar of St. Thomas' Church, Wednesbury, was congratulated on such a duty when he "aided by his estimable lady ... has done much to improve the moral atmosphere of the parish." ¹⁰³

The way that the clergy took over the oversight of the harvest festivals in the second half of the nineteenth century was a sign of their moral authority over the community. By 1857 14 church based festivals had been introduced in the Diocese of Lichfield and their influence was commended in the diocesan almanac: "The presence of Clergy

¹⁰² Hocking (1960) p144.

and Gentry of the Parish, proved, as would be anticipated, an effectual safeguard against excess at the table, or confusion and disorder in the amusements which followed." ¹⁰⁴

In the 1860s Henry Sneyd of Wetley Rocks was dismayed to find in his parish on a Sunday, a butcher selling meat, a woman baking and another washing. ¹⁰⁵ In 1877 the incumbent of Barton wrote in his parish magazine that the harvest festival had been a great success, "the dancing was excellent, quiet, and much enjoyed", and all had gone home by 9.30pm. However, "many did not attend the service in Church, and amid their enjoyment omitted to thank God for the harvest." He threatened to drop the harvest festival if church attendance did not improve. Interestingly, he also commented on the fact that one child at the festival was still showing signs of scarlet fever, and that the archdeacon would be called upon to prosecute any father who let his infectious child attend church functions. ¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ *Gazette*, 29 June 1864, SRO D3298/2/6.

¹⁰⁴ *Lichfield Diocesan Church Calendar and General Almanack*, 1858, p42.

¹⁰⁵ Notes by W. G. Keyworth on Henry Sneyd, 1927, SR0 D4855/14/1.

¹⁰⁶ *Barton Parish Magazine*, November 1877, SRO D1137/11/3.

The vicar at Blithfield in 1904 considered the improvements the parson had brought about in the parish over 25 years. He reflected that “bitterness and wrath, and clamour and evil-speaking” had lessened and that “in many little matters help and service given which a generation ago would have been considered quite out of the province of any lay man or woman.”¹⁰⁷

At Onecote in the 1920s the clergyman laid down the rules about dancing: “no swinging of feet, no dollying, no smoking.” Certain people were banned by formal resolution of the council.¹⁰⁸ In the same decade the rector at Haughton managed to get the bookmakers banned from the parish and the horseracing abandoned.¹⁰⁹ The same clergyman “would not be seen smoking by a parishioner if he could help it, fearing it might suggest slackness and self-indulgence.”¹¹⁰ Another wrote of how he “did not consider it to be in keeping with that office for a priest to frequent public houses.”¹¹¹

When H. B. Freeman was preferred to a canonry at Bristol after his ministry in Burton on Trent, he was commended by the local newspaper for his work “towards the amelioration of the moral tone among the younger classes.”¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ *Parson Murray's Parish Diary*, 1890-1917, SRO D1386/5/3.

¹⁰⁸ *Parochial Church Council Minutes*, Onecote, SRO D5760/3/1/1

¹⁰⁹ Royds (1953) p106.

¹¹⁰ Royds (1953) p152.

¹¹¹ Watkins (1934) p75.

¹¹² *Staffordshire Advertiser*, 28 January 1924.

One mentor wrote in the 1870s wrote of how the whole parish was affected by the presence of a clergyman: “the very presence of the clergy ... is often a step, by itself, towards a recognition of the presence of their Master.”¹¹³ Cunningham advising clergy in the 1930s betrayed his own social background and a degree of naivety when he wrote, “what an inspiring and sympathetic master at school can be to a public school boy, many a curate whom I have known has been to generations of boys in some great industrial parish.”¹¹⁴ The parson has the right to confront a drunken man in the street and say “had not you better hand me all the money in your pocket for me to keep for you?”¹¹⁵

The moral influence of the clergy was the work of their whole family, as they presented a model of upright domesticity to the whole parish. Herbert wrote, “the Parson is very exact in the governing of his home, making it a copy and model for his Parish.”¹¹⁶ At the turn of the century the children of clergy in the small rural parishes were “brought up often, if not always in simple natural surroundings, amidst the influence of elevating examples and in sympathy with great and noble thought, not without some knowledge of history, not without some desire of distinctions but with definite religious impressions and in obedience to the Divine Book. If I were to look anywhere for the fountain-head of healthy, vigorous lives and elevated ideas and

¹¹³ Blunt (1872) p82.

¹¹⁴ Cunningham (1932) p39.

¹¹⁵ Cunningham (1932) p54.

¹¹⁶ Herbert (1652) p37.

dignified character, it would seem natural to look to the country homes of the clergy.”

¹¹⁷ Creating the image of an ideal Christian home was “by no means the last part of the married priest’s obligations” in the twentieth century as well, because “it is most extraordinary how much of the private life of the priest is known in the parish. Maids will talk, and they are prone to exaggerate rather than understate any domestic difference.” ¹¹⁸

Educated in a General Way

It was a strength of the Anglican Church that it drew its clergy from society without requiring them to be separate from it. At the beginning of the period a good proportion of clergy had become ordained because it was a natural and very common consequence of a university education. All the clergy ordained for Staffordshire in the 1830s were graduates, although this marks the high point from which there is a steady decline. At this point a clergyman was by definition usually a man of some learning, although graduate status in the nineteenth century was more a mark of social standing than great educational ability. To attend Oxford, Cambridge, Durham or Dublin was to be assured of social contacts that would serve a lifetime of ministry. Most importantly the system produced clergy who had strong links with other leaders of the community.

¹¹⁷ Welldon (1906).

The parson model helps to explain the developing relationship of the clergy to their education. The principle was that clergy needed some education provided it did not damage their faith or their social position. In the early nineteenth century this is what a degree from Oxford or Cambridge provided. In subsequent decades with the admission of non-Anglicans and the intellectual crisis facing the church the universities were ceasing to be the ideal place for clergy to be trained. The emergence of the theological college sited either near one of the universities or one of the cathedrals provided the kind of institution that could nurture young ordinands. They provided courses in some specialist knowledge although not to the level that was required for other professions. The very nature of Christian ministry meant that what was taught could not be wholly exclusive. The colleges sought to form men into clergy by way of social education as much as intellectual input. In some cases they were trying to bring candidates up to a level of general education. This was certainly the case of the Lichfield College, which trained many of the clergy deployed to Staffordshire. The general education provided by a university was thought to be sufficient until the twentieth century, and Oxford and Cambridge men dominated the ordination lists well until the 1930s.

¹¹⁸ Watkins (1934) p82.

Even at the end of the period it could not be said that the all clergy were receiving specialist training, or that any of them were trained adequately in this respect. Hocking writing in 1960 says that clergy know little of the new welfare state. Clergy “just did not know the answers” and “lacked the specialised knowledge that had become indispensable.”¹¹⁹ There was a criticism that clergy were poorly educated in general: “can the Church tolerate a situation in which the parson is less well equipped educationally than the schoolmaster?”¹²⁰ Often the periods of study at theological college were too short and the curriculum too unspecific for specialist training to be given. Allan in particular is critical of the college courses.¹²¹ To argue that the clergy had become a professional body through their training is to ignore what the colleges actually offered, and how clergy felt under equipped once they started work.

The parson model required men to receive a general education to cope with the general nature of the role. It was as important to have social contacts as it was to have some knowledge. Parsons needed skills to deal with pastoral situations, an ability to lead worship, some intellectual capacity to deal with current issues and knowledge of the bible, church history and theology. This did not amount to the kind of specialist knowledge that other professions required. For some this is comprehensive proof that

¹¹⁹ Hocking (1960) p141.

¹²⁰ Barry (1960) p101.

¹²¹ Allan (1954) pp102-107.

the clergy were not fully professional.¹²² The persistence of the parson model explains why the clergy as a group did not retain their educational status.¹²³

A Man Like Other Men

A general education made the clergy the kind of people that could relate to those round them. The parson model depended on the clergy being much like other men except for the few additional duties they had to perform. The exceptional examples are of those who seemed to have gone out of their way to prove their commonality. For example, William Moreton, vicar of St Giles Willenhall until 1834, “was addicted to the great Black Country pastime of cock-fighting ... the Old Church House having its own cockpit, while the vicar would preach with his church door open, cutting his sermon short when his cock-fighting friends passed on their way to Darlaston Fields.”

¹²⁴ He also liked bear baiting, dog fighting and bull baiting and his behaviour may have helped in the spread of Nonconformity. Moreton and his like were extreme examples for there were many other clergy who took up the leisure pursuits of men of their class.

¹²² Towler and Coxon (1979) pp45-47.

¹²³ The decline in graduates amongst Staffordshire clergy is outlined in chapter five. Chadwick (1972) suggests that the 1870 and 1880s were the decades when graduate clergy first declined. Towler and Coxon (1979) state that by the 1960s only 40% of clergy are graduates.

¹²⁴ Bird (1974) p57.

Seventy years after Moreton the clergyman was still “educated exactly like the layman for the most part; his direct professional training is often of the slenderest description; he lives the same sort of life as the layman; to a large extent indulges in the same recreations, and has the same interests. He is usually the head of a household, a husband and a father; sometimes a magistrate, sometimes, though this is becoming rarer, a country gentleman, landowner, or farmer, who differs little in habits, or even in dress, from his lay neighbours.”¹²⁵ However the mentor went on to hope for something more professional: “It would be better from all points of view if the ordained could look upon themselves as not being primarily either social reformers or benevolent organisers, but follow the Apostolic injunction to ‘study to be quiet and do their own business’ (1 Thessalonians 4:2).”¹²⁶ The notion of a clerical caste was emerging, partly due to the influences of the Evangelical and Tractarian ideals which clearly defined the role and activities of the clergyman. One mentor in the 1920s regretted that the clergy had withdrawn too much. If they had been more diligent in attending social events in the parish “it is probable that English society might have escaped the introduction of some modern and very unseemly dances.”¹²⁷ The racecourse and the theatre were definitely out of bounds. Despite this in the smaller parishes the parson model persisted and there were country vicars in Staffordshire would still go out to hunt and shoot in the 1950s.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Whitham (1903) pp173-174.

¹²⁶ Whitham (1903) p188.

¹²⁷ Underhill (1927) footnote on p83.

¹²⁸ See Royds (1953).

Lacking the Features of Other Professions

Despite attempts to define the clergy as a profession there are significant ways in which they failed to conform to professionalisation. The most important of these is the autonomy of the clergy, particularly those who held the freehold of a benefice. They had the independence to regulate their life and define their role that was not possible within any of the newer professions. This autonomy encouraged long tenures in parishes, personally vested authority and patronage. The connection between parish incumbency and patronage, which had the status of property rights, secured the position of both throughout the period. Ordained ministers of other churches, such as Methodists and Roman Catholics, who did not have this degree of autonomy developed greater professional identity.¹²⁹

The failure to erode this independence was very significant in several ways. The dioceses were unable to establish a workable system of clergy discipline. The 1840 Church Discipline Act had been a significant step forward but it was too public and formal to be of much use.¹³⁰ Bishop Lonsdale, who had been trained as a lawyer, lamented that it was virtually impossible to sack a clergyman for anything other than

¹²⁹ One of the points made by Ranson, Bryman and Hinings (1977).

¹³⁰ Knight (1989) p357.

gross misconduct, and then only with recourse to the courts.¹³¹ The best solution was to encourage the offender to leave to go to another diocese.

Clergy were not managed. The reintroduction of rural deans in the early nineteenth century as a level within the diocesan hierarchy was ineffectual in enhancing any kind of strategy at the deanery level. No system of appraisal was set up and clergy were left to interpret the way their ministry could be developed. For Staffordshire files on some clergy in the first half of the twentieth century have been preserved. When asked about the possible future direction of their ministry most clergy were very reticent. The comments which were made on the files in red ink by the bishop or archdeacons are usually very short and dismissive.¹³²

Clergy could not be deployed at the will of the bishop, which meant that certain parishes were left without clergy. These parishes were those with difficulties caused by population size, social composition, industrialisation, remoteness or lack of investment. These were the very parishes to which the clergy should have been deployed in order to maintain an effective parish system. In 1939 G. E. W. Johnston pleaded to be sent to a rural parish because he had spent too long “in industrial and dirty areas”, and in the same year J. R. Bennion wrote to the bishop “owing to my upbringing, I feel more suited for work in parishes which are not centres of heavy

¹³¹ Denison (1868) pp55-56.

¹³² The files relating to the late nineteenth and early and mid twentieth century are

industry.”¹³³ The way the clergy were financed made deployment very complex. Each parish had a different value and because there was a significant dependence on the private income of the clergy they could not simply be deployed where the need was greatest. In 1939 W. F. P. Ellis, with a private income of £500 a year, wrote to the bishop, “I am unambitious with no great wish to be moved.”¹³⁴

The persistence of the parson model was evident in the practice of ministry. One mentor wrote in 1920, “the vicar still retains the method of cottage industry, utilizing the services of his wife and perhaps a handy man.” He went on to say that very little was delegated so parishes were run on the model of sheep farming of ancient Palestine rather than modern Australia.¹³⁵

One particular development in the nineteenth century was to make professionalisation less likely. The dissolution of the monopoly of Anglican clergy and the sharing of their tasks with other ordained ministers and officials of the state meant that they could not claim the necessary monopoly that professionals required.

available at the Lichfield Record Office.

¹³³ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

¹³⁴ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

¹³⁵ Rogers (1920) p23.

Conclusions

The parson model showed considerable resilience over the period. The small parish with a clergyman at the centre was held up as the ideal, however unrealistic it had become. There may have been a great deal of idealisation both by the clergy and their mentors. The organisation of the Church of England was predicated on the parson model, with independent parishes and autonomous clergy. It was thought that the system could be simply updated for a modern industrial society, with a few adjustments and the use of innovations and new technology. On the whole the mentors seemed to have largely missed how societal changes influenced the possible models of ministry. Their approach to ministry did not significantly evolve over the period, and the same advice perhaps dressed up in new expressions was given to each new generation of clergy. Parish visiting was still considered the most essential task even though it was no longer possible, and had been effectively substituted by strategic and crisis visiting. The clergy found themselves goaded into applying a model that could not work, and failing because they had not the resources. The clergy did not become a profession in the way that other occupation groups developed. They lost their monopoly to provide a religious and social service to the community, and they were not trained adequately, managed or regulated as other professionals were.

Over the period two crucial changes made the parson model unworkable. The growth

in parish populations, so that the vast majority of parishes had populations over 2,000, and the fall in traditional sources of income, so that congregations needed to fund their clergy, had the effect of emasculating the parson model. However, as an ideal it continued to excite the minds of some clergy, particularly those who did not have the experience of working in large industrial parishes. De Blank wrote towards the end of the period something that had been applicable throughout: “The practical application of Christianity to an industrial society is a colossal problem still awaiting solution.”¹³⁶ Despite his popular approach and willingness to challenge he remained so committed to the parson model that he could offer nothing but a hope in new techniques and methods.¹³⁷ Seeking a new model could threaten the parochial system and clerical independence, and be an admittance that the Church of England could not effectively minister to all the people all the time.

¹³⁶ De Blank (1954) p59.

¹³⁷ De Blank (1954) p171.

Chapter Seven

THE PROFESSIONAL

The word professional used as a noun was a nineteenth century invention and first began to appear in literature to describe the new occupational groups emerging at that time. The Oxford English Dictionary defines a professional as ‘one who belongs to one of the learned or skilled professions, and one who makes a profession or business of any occupation, art or sport, otherwise usually or often engaged in by amateurs, especially as a pastime’.¹ The clergy were not necessarily professionalised as other occupations were, since they had existed as a professional occupation for hundreds of years.² In this study the professional is a clergyman who belongs to a distinct group of service providers and has adopted some of the features of other professions. He works on tasks that are clearly defined and reserved for him, and with a specific group of people who receive this service, primarily because they have chosen to. This chapter will assess how the features of the professional model were apparent in Staffordshire over the period, and whether this amounts to a full adoption of the status of a professional by the clergy. As with the parson model, evidence for features has been

¹ *The Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition 1989.

² See O’Day (1988).

sought largely in clergy notebooks, worship records, parish and other periodicals, and personal correspondence. Also, reference is made to clergy manuals written by clergy mentors over the period, a type of literature which of itself was an indication of a growing awareness of a distinct group seeking to legitimise their profession.

In the period 1830 to 1960 there were many developments in society that affected the clerical role. Industrialisation and urbanisation meant that communities were larger and the social structure more complex. After 1850 most of the population of Staffordshire lived in such an environment, and the very size of the parishes meant the clergy could no longer relate to all the people. At the same time other denominations were growing in numerical strength and influence, although in the case of the Nonconformists this was reversed after 1900. The increase in denominationalism was accompanied by the strengthening of parties within the Church of England, which perhaps in a quarter of all parishes was significant throughout the period. The growing presence and power of other professional occupations were also to challenge the monopoly of the Anglican clergy. The relationship between the church and the state was weakening from the very beginning of the period with the transfer of registration in civil authority, and by the end of the century the divorcing of secular and ecclesiastical government. From the mid nineteenth century many in the church seemed to become more uncomfortable with developments in science, perceiving intellectual innovation as a threat, although this was not a view held universally in the

church and in time new understandings of knowledge would be largely accepted. However, there was a trend for clergy to be more involved in specific religious tasks, particularly from the mid nineteenth century when they undertook church restorations and provided more services.

The Narrowing of the Ministerial Task

In the 1930s when the vicar of St Modwen's Church, Burton on Trent, reported to the parochial church council that he was not well, they suggested that he reduce his duties to essential work, which they defined as looking after the church building and the pastoral care of the congregation.³ It is not recorded whether this is what he did but it is interesting that this is what was considered essential. In some denominations this would have been the full scope of the minister's work when he was fit and well. St Modwen's Church as the main church of the town would still have expected its clergy to have a civic role and to relate to the wider community, although apparently this was not an essential task by the interwar period.

One of the key marks of professionalization was the reduction of the scope of parish ministry, so that a more limited range of duties was expected of the clergy. Whereas in

³ *Parochial Church Council Minute Book*, St. Modwen, Burton on Trent, 1929-265

the parson model the clergyman was ‘the person of the parish’ engaged in a wide spectrum of tasks, the professional model envisaged a man whose functions were more obviously religious. No longer was he so involved in the economic activities of the parish, because he was less likely to be earning a living as a farmer of the glebe or a landlord. His income was not so directly connected to the economy of the parish, and he became more dependent on the offertory made by worshippers at services. He was less involved in basic medical care or legal matters, since these functions were being taken over by the emerging medical and legal professions. He ceased to provide for many of the social needs of the parish because a welfare state was evolving. He remained involved in education and as Obelkevich suggested this was the only medium where clerical influence grew in the nineteenth century.⁴ However, such involvement was increasingly more likely as a governor of the parish school rather than a teacher, and the clergy may have faced resistance from teachers who were establishing their own professional status, increasingly with a non-denominational bias.

In all these things it was not that clergy took on extra religious duties but rather that they gave up non-religious ones. Robinson, one of the clergy mentors writing his manual at the turn of the century, strongly advised clergy to concentrate on spiritual

1957, SRO D4219/4/1.

duties and not be over occupied in other duties because this was a sign of secularisation. ⁵ Bell in the 1920s rejoiced in what he saw as a release to do spiritual things: “The Church, with a generous recognition of the noble work done under State auspices and every wish to help it forward, has more freedom for that which may be described as its specially religious responsibilities.” ⁶

Over the period and particularly in the twentieth century, the clergyman’s ministerial task was becoming more focused upon spiritual welfare, expressed through pastoral care, moral concern and the enhancement of the church. This meant that more time was to be spent on things such as the leading of services, the setting up and running of church organisations, and the restoration of the church building. A comparison of the nineteenth century and twentieth clergy manuals reveals a trend where the tasks performed by the clergy were becoming more ecclesiastical and less community orientated. ⁷

Liturgical change in Staffordshire, as elsewhere in England, reflected a church that was becoming more introverted. The standard diet of Anglican worship in most parishes at the beginning of the period in 1830 was Holy Communion on three or four Sundays a

⁴ Obelkevich (1976) p326.

⁵ Robinson (1902) p105.

⁶ Bell (1928) p7.

year, and Mattins or Evensong on the rest. By the end of the century most parishes had a weekly Holy Communion, as well as both or either Mattins and Evensong.⁸ The number of services on a Sunday had increased, as well as the frequency of services in the week, only made possible by the residency of clergy in the parishes. This pattern was maintained in most parishes even when clergy numbers fell after 1900 and in some places until 1960. More services meant more time spent by the clergy doing services, all the more so when there were fewer clergy.⁹

The number of parish organisations with a direct connection to the church, usually established, financed and run by the clergy or a member of his family, increased from the mid nineteenth century. Undoubtedly the clubs took up a considerable amount of clergy time, to the extent that clergy were advised to get the laity to run them.¹⁰ Bishop Kempstone told his Staffordshire clergy that they “cannot and ought not to give a great deal of their time to clubs and social work. This is plainly the business of the laymen and women of the parish – one of the many spheres in which their active and constant

⁷ This is outlined by Russell (1980) p274.

⁸ Accounts of the evolution of the Parish Communion movement can be found in Hebert (1939), Jagger (1978) and Gray (1986).

⁹ Evidence for this trend can be found in the visitation returns and worship registers.

¹⁰ Parish magazines and annual meeting minutes provide an indication of the number and type of clubs in the parishes. The advice about delegation is to be found in most clergy manuals, although most particularly from the early twentieth century onwards and may be a consequence of the increasing demands made on the clergy as their numbers reduced.

help is indispensable.”¹¹ In Staffordshire the trend over the period is for these organisations to become more restricted to church members, or to be used for evangelisation. Moorhouse in the 1890s advised that every parish should have organisations, which were “the means of withdrawing our young men more especially from evil habits and company.”¹² By the 1950s Hocking was advising that only churchgoers can be members of clubs or else “the sparrows will teach the canaries to chirp”, which did nothing for his influence, made him the “most disliked man in the neighbourhood” and resulted in several local traders withdrawing their advertisements from the parish magazine.¹³ It was the strategy of a professional concerned to care for the congregation first and foremost.

Church building restoration is linked to the increased residency of clergy in the parish and the availability of funds to support the work. As such the high period of church restorations in Staffordshire was in the three decades after 1850. Many churches were rebuilt and remodelled in this time, and the collective activity must have absorbed a considerable amount of clerical time and effort. The restoration of a church could be one of the most obvious indications of increasing clerical control, particularly if it involved such works as the removal of box pews to increase visibility of and from the

¹¹ Kempstone (1919) p126.

¹² Moorhouse (1894) p7.

¹³ Hocking (1960) p68.

pulpit, and the dismantling of the west gallery and installation of an organ to regulate lay participation in the liturgy.¹⁴

The narrowing of the ministerial task is also apparent in the range of subjects that clergy talked about when they met in associations and in synods.¹⁵ In the mid nineteenth century the main issues of debate at the clergy meetings in Stone were public education, temperance, Sunday labouring, alms giving and church extension. In succeeding decades at the conferences in Stafford and Stoke on Trent the concerns were more church centred, in particular the “careless and irreverent attitude of some candidates at the moment of confirmation”, the new synodical structure, the decline in clerical incomes and the perceived fall in the number of confirmation candidates. A review of the debates at the Stafford Archidiaconal Conference from 1869 shows that although most items for discussions were ecclesiastical in nature, this majority grew as the century progressed. In the earlier years the exceptions were subjects such as pauper children, local charities, garden allotments and housing for the working class. In later years there was much time taken up with internal church disputes, liturgical changes and clerical income, to the exclusion of non-ecclesiastical business.¹⁶ In Trentham in

¹⁴ The vast majority of Staffordshire churches were restored in the nineteenth century, as recorded in local directories, visitation returns and commemorative documents.

¹⁵ Melinsky (1992) observes this trend, pp165-166.

¹⁶ *Minutes of the Stone Ruridecanal Association* 1843-1860, LRO B/A/25/2/1; *Stafford Archidiaconal Conference Minute Book*, from 1869, LRO A3/A/1/20;

1895 there were full and time consuming debates about the main crisis facing the Anglican Church, the proposed disestablishment of the Church in Wales. The clergy passed a resolution calling for each parish to discuss the issue with a view to setting up a defence committee “offering an organised resistance to the measure” through public meetings and the distribution of pamphlets. One clergyman protested, “Romanists get what they want. Nonconformists get what they want. We cannot get what we need!”¹⁷

This trend continued in the twentieth century when even more time was taken up with ecclesiastical matters, especially the unfairness of the quota system, dilapidations of clerical housing, the collapse of the tithe system, the new liturgy, and overseas missionary work.¹⁸ Furthermore, a study of the minutes of clerical meetings reveals a change in the nature of church business discussed. Whereas in the early years the church matters had a direct bearing on people outside the church, such as the provision of church schools, rights of burial in churchyards, and the abolition of the Church Rates, in later years discussion was more introspective, as in the debates on religious teaching in schools, clergy pensions and the receiving of reports from diocesan synod.

Minutes of the Proceedings of Rural Deans of Archdeaconry of Stafford and Stoke on Trent, 1880-1909 LRO B/A/25/2; *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference 1860-1886, 1886-1899*, LRO B/A/24/3/2, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

¹⁷ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference 1886-1899*, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

¹⁸ *Minutes of the Leek Ruridecanal Conference, volume II 1918-1956*, LRO B/A/25/1/1; *Minutes of the Trentham Rural Deanery Conference, 1950-1969*, LRO B/A/25/3/3.

The clergy never lost their concern for the wider community, nor would they refuse to comment on the state of society, but the tendency was to be more interested in those aspects of the life of the parishioners that were directly connected to clergy's spiritual specialism and the institution for which they worked, such as church services.

There is a similar pattern at the parish level in a later period. From the extensive collection of parochial church council minutes available from the end of the nineteenth century the changing emphasis of church business can be assessed.¹⁹ The wider agendas that included general parish issues, such as local poverty, housing, street lighting and drainage, gave way to the more restricted business of exclusively church matters, such as local church governance, members rolls, and liturgical changes. Even matters that would seem to be political had an overriding ecclesiastical flavour. For instance in 1910, the vicar of Hartshill and Basford apologised to his parishioners for bringing up a political issue during a general election, but in his view the disestablishment of the Welsh Church must be opposed at all costs.²⁰ Some noted how narrow the church agendas had become and saw it as a sign of the church in decline.²¹

¹⁹ PCC minute books, as successors to Vestry Minute Books, became common from the end of the nineteenth century and Stafford Record Office has a large collection of several hundred.

²⁰ *Hartshill and Basford Parish Magazine*, January 1910, SRO D5762/2/30.

²¹ For instance, Sheppard p185.

In a time of population growth, rapid industrialisation, and huge changes in society, the Anglican Church was becoming more focused on its own needs and put its energy into the protection of its own status. Over the period the attention of the clergy was increasingly reduced to the affairs of the organisation for which they worked, to the exclusion of concerns of a wider nature. By way of example it would be hard to glean from the minutes of church meetings in the twentieth century what were the social and economic needs of a local community, or the national issues of world war or social justice.²²

One consequence of the narrowing of the clergyman's function meant that parish ministry, beyond the congregation, was centred on personal crises. He came into people's lives when there was a specific religious need, perhaps for many limited to the occasional offices of a baptism, a marriage and a funeral. If the clergyman was only involved at these liminal points of life then his relationship as a minister to the parishioner was highly specialised and individualised.²³ The occasional offices are the opportunity to serve the whole population. Indeed Tom Allan in his 1954 clerical manual argues that without the round of baptisms, weddings and funerals the

²² Sheppard (1927) p185 amongst others was very critical of the way the church avoided discussing wider issues.

²³ Wickham (1931) very much regrets this development, pp50-51.

clergymen would not meet his people.²⁴ The occasional offices, which originated in a time when the clergyman knew his parish, had become the only way for some clergy to maintain any kind of contact with people in the parish. This development may have been encouraged by the growing importance of individualism. Whereas the parson related to both the individual and the whole community, the professional was less likely to deal with the full spectrum of community issues.

Parish ministry had a natural focus on the home, which in a pre-industrial society was the main arena for work for many people. As society became more industrialised in the second half of the nineteenth century and the workplace separated from the home there was no consequential shift of focus in ministry. Pastoral care never became fully established by the church in the work place. One exception was chaplaincy that traditionally had a place in educational and medical establishments, though largely because these were places where people lived. Another exception was the later development of industrial mission, which was an attempt to relate to people directly in their work place. Most of the mentors were very critical of ministry beyond the residential parish and saw it as a deflection from the primary task of parochial ministry, and a drain on resources. For example, one influential commentator writing towards the end of the period explained that he was resistant to industrial mission

²⁴ Allan (1954) p115.

because it was an area where the church might taint itself with economics and politics and it was better to concentrate on visiting people in their homes.²⁵ Others complained that in some parishes the population increased dramatically during the working day but this was hardly ever recognised by the diocesan authorities.²⁶

The absence of workplace ministry and the concentration of clergy efforts on the home relate to two other developments. The feminisation of the church, a development in the nineteenth century, partly encouraged by the rise of pietism, was all the more likely when clergy limited their contacts to the domestic setting where women were in the majority and in control.²⁷ The visiting books of clergy recorded how visiting largely involved encounters with the women of the parish and there was much debate at the time of how contact with the men might be established.²⁸ One mentor in the 1890s was very strict about not visiting on washday when the women were busy, and also commented that in Staffordshire because of shift work the clergy might find the men at

²⁵ Hocking (1960) pp184-185.

²⁶ Reindorp (1957) had a parish in London that increased more than four fold in the daytime, p18.

²⁷ Ditchfield (1998) suggests the Evangelical Revival strengthened the place of women in the church, pp101-105.

²⁸ The feminisation of the church may have begun about the mid nineteenth century, see Rosman (2003), and perhaps first apparent in America, see Douglas (1977). Also, see Clark (2001) who sees the development as part of larger change in society. Some attribute a masculine reaction to this development see Bradstock et al (2000) pp166-168.

home.²⁹

The other development that occurred from about the mid nineteenth century was the marginalisation of religion to a leisure pursuit outside the realm of wage earning activity. As clergy provided more religious services and established more church organisations, activities that tended to take place in evenings or at the weekend, and as their finances became more dependent on voluntary giving within the church and through charitable events, their contact with the main economy was weakened.

The persistence of parish visiting as a central feature of parish ministry would seem to contradict a move to a more professional ministry. Certainly it remains a recommendation of virtually all the mentors throughout the period. However, the object of the visiting changes over the period to such an extent that what was known as parish visiting in 1830 is very different from what most clergy would consider was parish visiting in 1960. In the early years such visiting meant calling on every house in the parish, in order to glean information on all parishioners and offer help where needed. The expectation would be that virtually every household would welcome the clergy, to the extent that those that did not were exceptional. In the twentieth century visiting had a different purpose. It was no longer the natural outcome of living and

²⁹ Winington Ingram (1895) pp76-77.

working in a small parish. One mentor, who was an exception to the rest, saw how “the friendly visit of persons already closely connected by local ties has become a system of house-to-house visitation.”³⁰ It was no longer possible to visit the whole parish because the numbers were too great. Visiting was more strategic, limited to church members and associates and those in need of special pastoral care, or those living in a few targeted streets as part of a concentrated mission.³¹

The approach to parish ministry became more structured and organised. This was necessary because parishes were larger units, and society itself was more complex. The introduction of the new church government measures from the end of the nineteenth century, with the parochial church council as the key local body, meant that the clergy had to work in a new way. Some clergy very much resented the imposition of the need for consultation, and they found support in Bishop MacLagan who considered parochial parish councils merely voluntary organisations without any legal status.³² More structure and organisation required a greater degree of delegation because the clergy could no longer be at every committee and club meeting. In the larger parishes elaborate visiting schemes were necessary, and a hierarchical system of pastoral care involving lay parish visitors was needed. Several of the mentors recommend such

³⁰ Rogers (1920) p23.

³¹ Examples of different types of visiting in Staffordshire are given in chapter six.

³² Maclagan (1892) p155.

systems as the way to keep in touch with the parishioners, but few raise the problems of managing such a system. Above all the approach had to be efficient, so that time was freed up for devotion, study and evangelism. “There must be a business side to the life of any priest whether he likes it or not.”³³

The change in the clerical role was matched to some extent by the change in attitudes to church buildings. It was as the professional model was developing that clergy were restoring the churches, and restoring them almost exclusively for sacred functions. This was possible because of the increase in the number of church halls, church schools, and purpose built vicarages that provided room for activities other than worship. Increased building and maintenance costs in the twentieth century had the effect of mitigating this trend as multi-purpose churches were provided where church and church hall could not be afforded as separate buildings. There are examples of these kinds of churches on new estates in Staffordshire as in most parts of England. This does not represent a reversal of the trend since many of the multipurpose churches had designated sacred space often shut away except on Sundays, and very few congregations would have chosen a multi-purpose if single purpose could have been provided. In some ways the closing off of the sanctuary even heightened the division between the sacred and secular.³⁴ Some unknowingly referred back to the parson

³³ Reindorp (1957) p39.

³⁴ The advocates of multi-purpose churches were very conscious that their theological approach was innovative and unpopular, see Jones (1968).

model when they justified the multipurpose church because it helped in outreach to the community.³⁵

Within the professional model the possibility of a dichotomy between the sacred and the profane is more likely. In the ideal the parson would perform his varied tasks recognising that farming the glebe, collecting rent, providing basic medical care and so forth, were no less a spiritual task than taking services or burying the dead. It was Herbert who wrote “Teach me, my God and King, in all things thee to see; and what I do in anything to do it as for thee.”³⁶ The professional would also be involved in many tasks, but most of them would have a direct and practical connection to the church. Ironically, it was the experience of many clergy in the twentieth century that they had to do practical tasks such as cleaning the church, tending to the church garden, and setting up the jumble sale, because there were fewer laity to do these things. However, such tasks were justified because they helped maintain the institution, in a way that the parson’s tasks did not necessarily do so. Some commentators recognised that it was self-defeating for the clergy to spend too much time maintaining the institution.³⁷ However, in a society that was becoming pluralistic and secular the church as an institution needed to be supported more than ever in order to survive. Others saw the

³⁵ This is one of the ways of mission suggested by Cunningham (1932) p63.

³⁶ *New English Hymnal* 456.

³⁷ Hart (1959) p149-51.

chief clerical activity as spiritual and anything beyond this within the community was a distraction and might interfere with the prime function to be “a man of prayer.”³⁸ The tasks define the person, and as the scope of the tasks became narrower a different clerical model was being developed. To lessen and remove the non-religious function of the clergy was to ultimately destroy the parson model.³⁹

Ministering to a Smaller Group of People

The scope of ministry has to some extent always depended upon the interests and skills of the clergyman concerned. There are examples throughout the period of those clergy who considered the congregation as the chief object of their pastoral care and those who sought to include the whole population of the parish and beyond. However, as a general trend it would seem that there is a narrowing tendency of reducing the number of people to whom the clergy minister, certainly beyond the occasional offices. By 1920 one mentor recognised that “the clergy are never really in touch with the people.”

⁴⁰ Those who were not members of the church, although never fully abandoned because of the enduring established church principle that all people had some rights to an Anglican ministry, were no longer a priority for parish ministry. Allan noted how

³⁸ Reindorp (1957) p35.

³⁹ This is argued by Towler and Coxon (1979) p194.

⁴⁰ Rogers (1920) p85.

parish size was no longer relevant when he arrived in a new parish and saw “my meagre resources were exhausted trying to cope with the clamorous demands of my own congregation, and the ten of thousands dwellers in my parish might as well have lived at the other side of the world for all that I could see of them.”⁴¹ Hocking, building on his navy chaplaincy experience, was saddened that he was not the “friend and adviser of all in the parish” and “it was a bitter disillusionment to find that we were almost the last to be consulted”.⁴² Reindorp was similarly disappointed: “it is certainly easier to know intimately a ship’s company of a thousand men, or the folk in a country parish, than the vast numbers which are concentrated in some of our city and urban parishes.”⁴³ Conversely, others wanted to restrict their ministry to those who conformed to church rules. Wickham described how the parish was sometimes seen as a “Public Omnibus” giving free rides to all, a liberty that could only be countered by insisting on moral standards. The example he gave was to refuse marriages of necessity because the couple had obviously not abstained.⁴⁴

Faced with a large parish of several thousand, it was becoming a necessity to prioritise ministry because of limited resources. The mentors in their clergy manuals suggested

⁴¹ An example from Scotland, but relevant because it relates to ministry within an established church, and the author was widely read in England. See Allan (1954) p16.

⁴² Hocking (1960) pp140-141.

⁴³ Reindorp (1957), p18.

⁴⁴ Wickham (1931) p79.

various schemes of efficient parish ministry, using what innovations there were for keeping a track on those connected to the church. The task of ministering effectively to any population over 2,000 was recognised as very difficult if not impossible.

Although the congregational model is counter to the parson model of ministry, clergy were having to face reality and adopt a version of it. Partly this was encouraged by two developments throughout the period. The first was the growing denominationalism that meant that Anglican clergy could recognise that they shared a responsibility for a parish with ministers of other denominations. A large proportion of the population may be Methodist as in some parts of the Potteries. Sometimes this involved a reluctant acceptance of others in the spirit of ecumenism. The other development was the strengthening of parties within the Church of England, and in particular the low church Evangelicals, who established a strong base within Anglicanism in the eighteenth century, and the high church Tractarians or Anglo-Catholics, who emerged at the beginning of the period and reached their zenith about a century later.⁴⁵ Other parties such as the broad church Liberals were of less significance in this respect because their theological basis discouraged a strong distinction between church and society. Even the way the clergy dressed was an indication of their theological approach to their role. “The high churchman is close-shaven, with a collar, high vest and a long coat ... the low churchman, with whiskers and neckerchief, is neatly attired in customary suit of

⁴⁵ See Pickering (1989).

solemn black, desiring to appear, and appearing, more as the minister than the priest ... while the broad churchman desports himself in a straw hat and short jacket ... sometimes adorning his countenance with a huge moustache, and looking like a dragoon on furlough.”⁴⁶ Apparently, both the high church and the low church clergy wanted to emphasise their difference from other men whereas the broad church clergy were content to be mistaken for a layman.

Those who saw the importance of the links beyond the church were very critical of the parties within the church. H. R. Slade, a prominent Anglican in south Staffordshire in the 1840s and a Freemason, wrote privately about his reservations about the “Tractarian abomination.”⁴⁷ He described the Evangelicals as “a rare straight laced set of canting hypocrites”⁴⁸ There is no doubt that the party strife did lead to some breaking of the links with local communities, such as in West Bromwich where there was a long and bitter dispute over the liturgy. The Earl of Dartmouth, as the leading Anglican layman of the area, tried to moderate the effects of this division, but he was unsuccessful.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Referring to the situation as observed in the 1890s and quoted in Brown (1953) p218.

⁴⁷ Letter dated 3 January 1845, Records of the Provincial Grand Secretary, Wolverhampton.

⁴⁸ Letter dated 9 July 1845, Records of the Provincial Grand Secretary, Wolverhampton.

⁴⁹ Trainor (1982) p101.

The partisan spirit had the effect of strengthening the ties between clergy and laity of the same theological persuasion and weakening the ties with the rest of the church and the ordinary people of the parish. There are examples of where a partisan clergyman would seem to have been held in high esteem by the local community, but their ability to minister to the whole population was compromised by a narrowing view of the place of the church in society.⁵⁰ Both Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical theology emphasised the need to be separate from society, thus enhancing the congregational model. De Blank amongst other mentors was very insistent that a broad church served the community best and that parties in the church were a threat to the parish system.⁵¹

There was an acceptance that clergy were ministering to fewer people when clerical deployment began to take into account congregation size as well as parish population. At the beginning of the period the number of people in the congregation was for many clergy an irrelevant issue. The resistance of the clergy to record the size of a congregation was noted in the 1851 census, and worship registers did not become common until the turn of the century. Only when congregational size was recorded could it be used to inform any policy of deployment. Furthermore because

appointments were to some extent dependent on funding, and the source of this funding was increasingly based on the offertory at worship, the importance of the congregation grew in the twentieth century.

The decrease in the importance of the parish reflects changes in society. There was a general move away from the smaller geographic area, which related well in terms of size to many parishes and was held together by ties of deference, personally vested authority and appeals to belief, custom, patronage and duties. There was a move towards a greater interdependence, diversification, and the necessary use of rational systems of control and management.⁵² To adjust to these changes parish ministry had to become more congregationally based and more professional in its approach.

The mentors who deplored this development in their clergy manuals do not ascribe the cause to social trends. Most write about the breakdown of the parson model without analysing why it has happened.⁵³ They tend to see a solution in a more generous deployment of clergy. Allan wrote, “so long as the shortage of clergy exists, the task of

⁵⁰ Staffordshire has its examples of partisan clergy who were well regarded in their communities, and examples are given in chapter six, but they are considered to be exceptional.

⁵¹ De Blank (1954) pp19-20.

⁵² For a fuller outline of this trend see Moody (1992).

⁵³ For example see Allan (1954) and Wickham (1931).

ministry – as it is presently conceived – is impossible to accomplish.”⁵⁴ In the towns where the parishes had high populations congregationalism was seen as inevitable.⁵⁵ Because the deployment of more clergy was not possible the only solution was to limit the scope of ministry to the congregation and those directly associated with the worship life of the church.

The effect of this change on those excluded was a source of regret for other mentors. Dick Sheppard in 1927 noted “with considerable disapproval those who do not find their spiritual life within the walls of their own parish church.”⁵⁶ Similarly de Blank regretted that “the local church has tended to occupy itself more and more with its own concerns and those of its collected members, while largely ignoring the unchurched masses that throng the streets outside.”⁵⁷

The Clericalisation of Clergy

Clergy were always recognised as a separate body of men, able to perform certain duties and expected to live up to certain personal standards. With the emergence of the professional model these differences were sharpened through a rise of what was called

⁵⁴ Allan (1954) p103.

⁵⁵ Cunningham (1932) p52.

⁵⁶ Sheppard (1927) p108.

‘rectory culture’. In the nineteenth century the restrictions on what a clergyman could do in his leisure time were increased. He should not go dancing, or to the races, or just be idle, although Staffordshire provides examples of those who did.⁵⁸ The ‘complacent latitudinarism of the past was being challenged’ and the clergy were more restricted than before.⁵⁹ Clergy began to dress differently, and became more recognisable from their appearance than they had been in previous centuries. Eliot writing from her experience of clergy in and around Staffordshire constructed the Mr. Pugh with his perfect suit of black and polished boots, “an equipment which he probably supposed hieroglyphically to represent the spirit of Christianity to the parishioners.”⁶⁰ The distinctive uniform was developed in the nineteenth century, in part influenced by the dress of Roman Catholic priests and in time adopted by ordained ministers of most denominations. The clerical collar was the sign of a life lived to a high standard.⁶¹ The mentors were critical of those clergy who did not wear them: “I do believe people should know when they are in the company of a priest; and therefore I think it is fair to himself and the laity that even on a holiday abroad the priest should dress as one – at least in the evening”; “if a lay collar is worn, it is at least advisable that the folk in the

⁵⁷ De Blank (1954) p16.

⁵⁸ Heeney (1976) p19.

⁵⁹ Towler and Coxon (1979) p15.

⁶⁰ Eliot (1857) p93.

⁶¹ Cunningham (1932) pp24-25.

parish do not see their priest thus garbed.”⁶² However, some saw the disadvantage of the distinctiveness, such as Allan who noted his detachment from his people: “My liturgy, my theology, my prayers, my priestly dress – all cut me off from them and made me a being apart.”⁶³

The sense of vocation to the ordained ministry has always had a place in the selection of men to be ordained.⁶⁴ In 1829 it was certainly seen as essential by some commentators.⁶⁵ Through the influence of church parties such as Evangelicals and Tractarians this need for a vocation was enhanced.⁶⁶ In the 1850s one mentor emphasised how supreme spiritual importance of being a minister: “you will have to give an account of every soul committed to your care, before the judgement seat of Christ.”⁶⁷ Whereas the parson was criticised for being a gentleman who also led the prayers in the church, the professional took on the task of ministry because of his own sense of calling.

This change in the motivation for becoming ordained can be seen in the fall of the

⁶² Underhill (1927) p15; Watkins (1934) p73.

⁶³ Allan (1954) p13.

⁶⁴ For a summary of such development see Turner (1990).

⁶⁵ Such as Bridges (1829) p108.

⁶⁶ Samuel Wilberforce, amongst others was instrumental in establishing the sense of vocation in the mid nineteenth century; see Whitham (1903) p205; see also Bebbington (2000) and Mussell (2001).

number of clergy coming forward from clerical homes. The sense of an inherited ministry, which in some cases was an actual inheritance of the right of presentation to a parish, was becoming rare. The family-owned parish where the son was expected to succeed the father or uncle had virtually vanished from Staffordshire by 1950. The demise of self-recruitment has been researched, estimated at 55% in the second half of the nineteenth century and 22% in the middle of the twentieth century, an exact reversal of what was happening in other comparable occupations.⁶⁸ Others have claimed that the fall was less dramatic but still present.⁶⁹

Growing professionalism was also expressed in the attempts to strengthen the measures that could discipline the clergy. The first of these in this period, the 1840 Church Discipline Act, was part of the general reforms of the Church of England at that time. It was recognised that the clergy could not be wholly independent, especially in the face of misconduct, if the church was to be efficiently run. However, it was apparent, as noted in chapter six, that as a workforce the clergy were difficult to control and that many of them were able to act with comparative impunity, provided that they did not commit gross misconduct. The clergy did not become a self-regulated body as in the case of other professions.

⁶⁷ Heygate (1851) p17.

⁶⁸ Kelsall (1953).

⁶⁹ Towler and Coxon (1979) p80. The trend has also been noted in other

The growing sense of the clerical identity was also encouraged by the increased frequency of clergy gatherings. Staffordshire as part of the Diocese of Lichfield was one the first areas in England to have diocesan and archdeaconry synods. Bishop Selwyn enthusiastically promoted these because of his experience in the mission field in New Zealand where the church was self-governing. The synods were introduced as a way to provide a strategy for the whole diocese, but had no direct influence on the parish clergy. One reason given by one archdeacon for their introduction of synods was that “it would give the laity a voice in Church matters, and feeling this power, they would taken an interest.”⁷⁰ Others saw synods as a threat to the independence of the parish priest. At the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference in 1868 the rural dean read a letter from an absent clergyman who “views with alarm the proposal to revive synods, believing that they would throw undue power into the hands of the bishop, that they would virtually establish an imperium in imperio, and that they would degenerate into moral inquisitions and tend to promote strife in the diocese.”⁷¹ Interestingly the author of the letter was in Torquay living away from his parish for the sake of his health.

Ruridecanal clerical association meetings began in the 1860s with the purpose of the

denominations, see Brown (1988).

⁷⁰ Grier (1889) p267.

⁷¹ *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference, 1860-1886, LRO B/A/24/3/1.*

“maintenance and increase in clerical union and cooperation.”⁷² These were exclusive to the clergy and because they had no legal status, real or assumed, were considered less of a threat by the clergy. At these meetings the clergy wanted to talk about the church and their position in it. They were very defensive about perceived threats, such as the fall in parish income, the lack of commitment of congregations in supporting the clergy, the power that the new synods gave to the bishop and the laity, the unnecessary liturgical innovations, and the threat of the national government to the status of the church. Bishop Maclagan who succeeded Selwyn was very keen on the Clerical Union as a benefit to the clergy. “I heartily believe that within the ranks of the ministry there is room for an inner fellowship,” he declared.⁷³ The fact that the clergy felt that they needed to meet on their own may have been an indication of the growing division between clergy and laity.

In the nineteenth century the Church of England gradually became less involved in civil government and more concerned with its own internal decision making processes.

⁷⁴ This shift of focus had implications for parish ministry by strengthening the vertical relationships of authority within the church at the expense of clerical independence and relationships with the laity. It was an enhancement of the ecclesiastical over the civil

⁷² *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference, 1860-1886*, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

⁷³ Maclagan (1892) p6.

⁷⁴ An argument put forward by Best (1964) amongst others.

because the laity who benefited were those more fully committed to the church, and those laity more loosely connected were excluded. At a national level the introduction of the Church of England National Assembly in 1919 may have done more to marginalize the church than any other single measure because it extracted the church's business from government. This was replicated at the local level where the parochial church council, whose members would have to be on the church electoral roll, was established as the corporate body, which with the incumbent made the decisions that affected the parish church.

As some laity had their power within the church regulated and others saw it disappear, the clergy established a firm control of their specialisms in parish worship and ministry. More regularised through license than ever before, the permission given for the laity to minister in the parish was dependent on the bishop and the parish priest. Offers of help from enthusiastic laymen were not always enthusiastically received. When in 1864 B. Whitehouse of Sedgley wrote to the bishop to ask if he could have permission to help in the parish, he got a cautious reply suggesting that it might be acceptable in certain circumstances: "It cannot but be a cause for thankfulness when lay members of the Church are willing to help the pastor of their Parish in such religious offices as he may commit to them, and as are performed under his direction. In populous or widely scattered Parishes there may be need for such help, and it may

prove an instrument of blessing to many.”⁷⁵ If such an offer was perhaps just acceptable in Sedgley, which was one of the most over populated parishes in Staffordshire, it was unlikely to be welcomed in other places.

There was a sense that the clergy sought to protect their role even when it was controversial. One of the major disputes between the laity and clergy from the 1870s was over the liturgical innovation that some clergy introduced. In certain parishes this created a major schism, such as in Wolverhampton where a letter was sent to 16,000 parishioners by the churchwardens complaining that about the introduction of illegal Roman Catholic practices: “churches have been turned into Mass-houses”, and “in the arbitrary domination of the priest stands the life and force of Popery and all false religion.”⁷⁶ The bishop decided to support the clergy advising them in private to moderate their practices and refusing to meet the demands of the laity. A later example was the famous dispute at St. Andrew’s Church in Walsall, which lasted from 1928 to 1937 and was reported very fully in the local press. The focus for the conflict was the clergyman’s introduction of supposed Roman Catholic practices. The record reveals that both the rural dean and the archdeacon were very supportive of the clergyman in private. They wrote about the bullying tactics of members of the congregation and the

⁷⁵ Letter dated 22 November 1864, SRO D683/4/3/5.

⁷⁶ *Address to Parishioners of Christ Church and St. Andrews, Wolverhampton, 1878*, SRO D3863/4/2.

possibility of bringing in the chancellor of the diocese to frighten the laity into submission.⁷⁷ In the period between the wars the Archdeacon of Stafford dealt with six major disputes, mostly over the use of church funds and liturgical innovation. Nearly always the archdeacon was supportive of the clergyman.⁷⁸ At the meetings of clergy in the mid twentieth century the laity were often blamed for resisting the work of the clergy. In 1959 in Trentham in a debate about the new forms of worship there was some despair over the role of the laity: “Incumbents should be supported, and in short people should ‘back up’ changes.”⁷⁹

However, the introduction of new liturgy was of its very nature considered by some as a sign of increasing clericalisation. The fact that Holy Communion was becoming a more common feature of parish worship meant that there were proportionally fewer services that could be led by a layperson. Introduction of the new prayer book in 1928 was opposed by some of the laity because as an innovation it weakened the links with the community, which is usually liturgically conservative. Rather grandly, the parochial church council at Bishops Wood decided that the new prayer book “would retard true religion and produce friction between the State and the Church of

⁷⁷ St. Andrew’s, Walsall LRO A3/A/1/32.

⁷⁸ Archdeaconry Records LRO A3/A/3/1-11.

⁷⁹ *Minutes of the Trentham Rural Deanery Conference, 1950-1969*, LRO B/A/25/3/3.

England.”⁸⁰

In some parishes the clergy and laity could not contain their dislike of each other. For example, at the Bushbury Vestry Meeting in 1909 D. C. O’Connor faced a vote of censure for his “sarcastic comments in the Parish Magazine” about irregular attendance at Holy Communion, poor giving, misbehaviour in services, and criticism of the vicar. When the vote was about to be taken the lights went out and the meeting ended in confusion.⁸¹ At the induction of the new vicar the bishop “advised the people of Bushbury to trust and love their new vicar, for a divided parish was a miserable one.”⁸² At Armitage in 1944 there was a frank exchange in the parochial church council where the rector made it very clear that “the incumbent was not a servant of the Council ... he did not take orders from them, nor was he answerable to them, being responsible only to his bishop ... Armitage, added the Rector, was a parish where nothing was done for the Incumbent, [whereas] most other parishes did something.”⁸³ This clergyman wanted the laity to serve him, and needless to say he moved on to another living in the following year.

There have always been distinctions between clergy and laity, but as the clergy became

⁸⁰ *Bishops Wood Parochial Church Council Minutes, 1908-1955, SRO D6039/3/1/2.*

⁸¹ *The Midland Evening News, 27 April 1909.*

⁸² *The Midland Evening News, 21 November 1914.*

more professional the differences seemed to increase. It was not so much just a difference of function but one of attitude to the church: the clergy saw themselves as the main worker within the church, the person with vision who looked for development and innovation. Very often in the view of the clergy, and presumably because of their experience, the laity were only interested in retention. A. T. Bennett, echoed many comments made to the bishop when in 1940 he despaired over the laity who were more interested in the extension of the churchyard than they were in the building of a new church.⁸⁴

The office of Lay Reader, re-established in the 1860s, would appear to mark a renaissance in lay ministry, although its role was limited at first to mission buildings. As a development it was a recognition of the need for some lay leadership in worship, but was tightly controlled through licence and dependent on the goodwill of the clergy. In the same way lay visitors were necessary to meet the visiting demands of a large parish, but again they worked under the close supervision of the clergy. Several of the larger parishes in Staffordshire developed teams of lay visitors from the 1870s onwards.⁸⁵ It was assumed that if there was any particularly difficult or an important matter it would be referred to the clergy.

⁸³ *Armitage Minute Book*, 1942-1947, SRO D3266/3/2.

⁸⁴ Administration Records of the Archdeaconry of Stafford 1939-1942, LRO A3/A/1/32.

⁸⁵ Two main examples in Staffordshire are the large parishes of St Peter, Stoke on Trent and St Peter, Wolverhampton.

Another way that clergy were gaining control of the church was through the transfer of patronage to clergy. In the first part of the period, particularly when it was necessary to have the financial support of the laity to build churches and establish new parishes, lay patronage was encouraged in Staffordshire.⁸⁶ From the mid nineteenth century this policy was reversed, with the increase in Episcopal patronage, and limitation of some lay patronage to life interest only. There were some particular cases where laity had shown themselves to be inadequate or corrupt patrons. It was considered that deployment would function better if the bishop or diocesan committee had the power of appointment. This process of takeover would have been all the more rapid had the right of patronage not been protected as a legal property right and the resistance not so strong. By the end of the period lay patronage, although still common in name, had become of little consequence, because the financial independence of most parishes had been eroded.

The introduction of specialised training for clergy, principally through the theological colleges, was not available until the mid nineteenth century, and then only in a few dioceses. Staffordshire had one of the first theological colleges when Lichfield Theological College was established in 1857 amidst some controversy that it would

⁸⁶ Patronage was discussed in chapter five.

produce clergy who were partisan.⁸⁷ By the end of the nineteenth century, although it would be almost two decades before residence at a theological college was a requirement for ordination, most new clergy had spent some time in such establishments. Bishop MacLagan thought that graduate status alone was insufficient: “Many of them are fine fellows, fair scholars and cultured gentlemen. But what has been their definite preparation for the most difficult work on earth?”⁸⁸ It has been argued that the clergy needed specialist training in religious matters because the laity were better educated.⁸⁹ With the decrease in graduate clergy Staffordshire relied more on the Lichfield College to provide non-graduate clergy. However, many of these clergy would only have an adult education formed almost wholly in a church dominated environment. They were trained for the purpose of ministry, without the benefit of a general education in the arts or sciences. More significantly such clergy would have had fewer experiences of studying alongside those who were going to be lay members of the church, and those who were on the margins of the church. This did not enhance their ability or desire to relate to the wider society and would have encouraged a more introverted attitude. This kind of training was making clergy a caste apart, which some regretted deeply.⁹⁰ Conversely, it could be argued that clergy

⁸⁷ See Denison (1868).

⁸⁸ Maclagan (1892) p56.

⁸⁹ Heeney (1976) p96.

⁹⁰ Heeney (1976) p51; Barry (1935) was very opposed to the idea of a clerical caste because it encouraged secularisation.

drawn from the local area, probably including significant numbers of school teachers as in Staffordshire, would have enabled them to be more integrated with local society, albeit at a less elevated level.

The Parsonage

The clerical specialisation came to be expressed in the building of parsonages as well. The very character of the building needed to show who lived there: “The practice of designing the residence of a clergyman with reference to the characteristics of the church to which it belongs, is desirable, not only as it relates to tasteful advantage, but as it becomes another and visible link of connection between the church itself and the pastor who was devoted to its duties; and also leads the spectator very naturally from contemplating the dwelling to regard the pious character of its inhabitant.”⁹¹ Whereas the home of the parson might appear much the same as other houses of gentlemen in the parish, the home of the professional was to be distinctive in its character and function.⁹² “The Georgian rectory could be any Georgian gentleman’s house, the Victorian rectory could not possibly be anything else.”⁹³

⁹¹ *Papeworth’s Book of Designs*, 1818, quoted in Brown (1953) p129-130.

⁹² Brown (1953), p133.

Through an analysis of the plans of Staffordshire parsonages over the period from the early nineteenth century to mid twentieth century two trends emerge. The parsonage at Ashley was old and thatched but large, “containing a dining room, drawing room and study, kitchen, back pantry and dairy, with six bedrooms.”⁹⁴ The new parsonage at Burslem in 1815 cost £1,200 and had a dining room and drawing room each 12 feet by 15 feet, while the new parsonage at Blithfield, built by the patron for his nephew in 1807, had a drawing room 28 feet by 22 feet, a library 25 feet square and a dining room 22 feet square.⁹⁵ At Thorpe Constantine, a moderately wealthy benefice, the parsonage was three times larger than the church. These were grand houses fitting for clergy of a high social status. The parishioners of Christ Church, Stone, were petitioned to raise funds for “an appropriate Dwelling for the Minister” because the current house was unsuitable.⁹⁶ In many parishes an appropriate dwelling was not available and this was a major reason for non-residency.⁹⁷ In the 1838 Parsonages Act bishops were given the authority to have houses built or improved in benefices worth £100 or more, and support for this came from the Bounty, which contributed £1m by 1847. Many of these grants were used to increase the size of the houses, indicating the

⁹³ Savidge (1969) p xv.

⁹⁴ *Ashley Terriers*, 1845, SRO D5724/1/2/1.

⁹⁵ SRO D1428/4/2/1-5, D1386/2/2.

⁹⁶ *An Appeal for Parsonage* (1839?), SRO D4242/14/1.

⁹⁷ In 1835 the Ecclesiastical Revenues Commission found that out of 10,540 parish returns for the country 2,878 claimed that there was no house and another 1,735 stated that the house was unfit.

rise in the social status of the clergy, although it has to be noted that generally housing conditions were improving.⁹⁸

By the mid nineteenth century the parsonages were somewhat smaller and yet still expensive. There was an increasing degree of functionalism, an expectation that a clergyman was expected to share his house with his parishioners.⁹⁹ Many parishes in Staffordshire had a new parsonage built between 1840 and 1880, usually well built and in the rural areas often sited outside the village.¹⁰⁰ The Commissioners recommended large reception rooms and at least six bedrooms.¹⁰¹ These large parsonages were built to show a commitment to a residential ministry but often were symbols at first of wealth and status and later of decline and decay.¹⁰² At Milwich in 1851 the vicarage had a dining room and drawing room each 16 feet by 15 feet, a study 13 feet by 12 feet, stabling for two horses and a coach house.¹⁰³ At Colwich in 1844 a modest sized house was built at the cost of £906.¹⁰⁴ No expense was spared at Seighford where the new vicarage was built with elaborate gothic gables and bay windows in 1878-1880 at

⁹⁸ Farmers, as well as the gentry, were improving their houses, and the clergy as a social group would be expected to do the same even their incomes had not increased.

⁹⁹ Davidoff and Hall (1987) p123

¹⁰⁰ The placing of parsonages outside the village is a featured noted at Onecote and Ipstones, amongst many other examples.

¹⁰¹ Brown (1953) p151.

¹⁰² Lee (2006) p188.

¹⁰³ SRO D917/3/2.

¹⁰⁴ SRO D3636/2/10/1.

cost of £2902.¹⁰⁵ One of the last great gothic parsonages to be built in England was at Tunstall in 1883. Between 1866 and 1882 the Commissioners gave £1.7m for parsonages.¹⁰⁶ They were “like one of those large clouds we sometimes see on a fine day, travelling from East to West, taking up with itself the rich moisture of the land in Durham, and dropping it unexpectedly in Lancashire or Staffordshire.”¹⁰⁷ Also, there was considerable financial support from the clergy themselves, from their own private wealth. At Colton when F. P. Parker arrived in 1874 “he found the rectory house in a bad condition and spent a large sum of money in renovating and improving it”, and at Baswich where the Inge family spend £300 on the vicarage in 1902.¹⁰⁸ In Staffordshire by 1901 only 37 parishes out of 348 did not provide a suitable parsonage.¹⁰⁹

By the turn of the century parsonages had become modest and more functional. The newer designs inevitably included a study sited close to the front door and in some cases a purpose built parish room.¹¹⁰ In the new designs and refurbishments the private areas of the house had become separated to some degree from those rooms associated with the clergyman’s duties. After the First World War three receptions and five bedrooms was still the norm, but by the 1930s servants’ accommodation was no longer

¹⁰⁵ SRO D731/17/1-3.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, p208

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Best (1964) p441.

¹⁰⁸ Note on vicarage improvements, 1902, SRO D3361/2/37.

¹⁰⁹ *Lichfield Church Calendar and Almanac 1902*

included.¹¹¹ The need to replace the parsonage is an indication of the change in the role of the clergy, testified by the various Parsonages Measures, 1930, 1938, 1947 and 1960. Many parsonages were sold at an increasing rate. It was 17 a year between 1900 and 1914, 58 a year between 1919 and 1930 and by 1938 90 a year. The sale figures only point to a part of the problem, since the Bounty and the Commissioners reported in 1934 that over 2,000 parsonages were unsuitable but only half could be sold.¹¹²

Parsonages were too large and reflected a former era. One commentator wrote that it was “an undeniable handicap if the vicarage is four times larger than any other house in the parish, or was built at a time when vicars were gentlemen of ample means and followed the same mode of life as the country gentry.”¹¹³ The expense of repairs and putting right the dilapidations had become prohibitive and because it was the responsibility of the parish it affected the value of the living, and increasingly the clergy could not afford to maintain them from their own resources. Rather than proclaiming the social status of the clergy the large house inadequately furnished, heated and maintained came to symbolise just how much the clergy had apparently fallen in social status.

¹¹⁰ SRO D3361/2/37, D3775/3/24, D3940/1/12-13,17.

¹¹¹ Savidge (1969) p169-170.

¹¹² Brown (1953) p167.

At Little Aston in 1929 the Parochial Church Council had to pay almost £700 for repairs to the vicarage.¹¹⁴ Sixteen years later they bought a water heater for the vicarage, and at about the same time at Bishops Wood the parochial church council voted £44 to install hot and cold water in their vicarage.¹¹⁵ Often the clergy were expected to meet the costs, as at Alrewas where the parochial church council in 1922 decided to charge the deceased vicar's executors £100 because of dilapidation at the vicarage.¹¹⁶ At Armitage in the 1940s the rector complained that he had to bear all such costs as well as contributions to his pension fund.¹¹⁷ At Betley in 1941 they did a door-to-door collection around the village to pay for the installation of electricity in the vicarage.¹¹⁸ At Ashley in 1946 "the Rector mentioned that the cost of interior redecoration and exterior repairs at the Rectory had been a severe strain on his finances and thought that church people, as such, should bear part of the expenses of Church property."¹¹⁹ At Ipstones the costs of parsonage dilapidations impinged on stipend, which in 1948 failed to reach the diocesan minimum of £400.¹²⁰ By 1960 the clergy

¹¹³ Hunter (1931) p210.

¹¹⁴ *Little Aston Minute Book*, 1919-1929, SRO D4150/6/1.

¹¹⁵ *Minutes of the Parochial Church Council of Little Aston*, 1939-1951, SRO D4150/6/3; *Bishops Wood Parochial Church Council Minutes*, 1908-1955, D6039/3/1/2.

¹¹⁶ *Alrewas Church Council Minute Book*, 1920, SRO D783/4/1.

¹¹⁷ *Armitage Minute Book*, 1942-1947, SRO D3266/3/2.

¹¹⁸ *Betley Vestry and Parochial Church Council Minutes*, 1865-1962, SRO D3479/4/2.

¹¹⁹ *Ashley Church Minute Book*, 1860-1967, SRO D3173/2/1.

¹²⁰ *Ipstones Parochial Church Council Minute Book*, 1943-1953, SRO D5617/3/2.

could not afford to live in large parsonages – it was beyond their means, even though their job demanded the space. A comment in the 1960s “the imposing parsonage, like the imposing parson ... is on the way out.”¹²¹

It is interesting to note that the price of new parsonages built in the second half of the twentieth century was equivalent in monetary value to those built in the nineteenth century.¹²² With an adjustment for real value this is an indication of a very significant fall in the value of parsonages over the period.

The evidence suggests two main trends in parsonages over the period, which were a decline in size from grand houses to modest dwellings and an increasing functionalism where rooms were set aside for the duties of the clergyman.

Competing with Other Service Providers

The growing denominational identity of the Church of England was a consequence of the disappearance of its ministerial monopoly. The monopoly was not universal even at the beginning of the period, since there were some parishes where other denominations were dominant. Examples include the Methodist Church, in one of its

¹²¹ Savidge (1969) p199.

types, in some parts of the Potteries, and the Roman Catholic Church in a few estate villages and in some parts of urban areas such as Wolverhampton. In these places the Anglican clergyman could not claim convincingly to have the pastoral responsibility for the majority of the population. In later years this sense of competition was extended to other parishes, as other denominations grew in strength either by becoming more distinctive and separate from the Anglicans, as the Methodists did, or more established as a revitalised or new church, as in the case of the Roman Catholics. The latter did trouble the Church of England in Staffordshire as elsewhere. For instance, St. Giles' Church, Newcastle, employed an Irish speaking Protestant Lay Reader in 1856 to evangelise amongst the Roman Catholic Irish population of the parish.¹²³ At Colwich the district visitors were told to report on any "Protestants joining to the Romanish Chapel, visited by the Priest, or sending children to the Romanish School."¹²⁴ Sister Dora and the members of her Anglican Sisterhood were mistaken for Roman Catholics when they first started work in Walsall in the 1860s, and had horse dung thrown at them and were abused as "Papist bitches."¹²⁵ The tension was heightened by the fact that the 1851 religious census revealed how in Staffordshire more people attended the non-Anglican churches.

¹²² SRO D3433/1/8, D1428/4/2/5, D1157/1/2/11.

¹²³ Briggs (1980) p69.

¹²⁴ *Colwich Memorandum Book*, 1851-1886, SRO D874/2/27.

In the second half of the nineteenth century the sense of competitiveness is shown in the minutes of clergy meetings, where the Roman Catholics priests and Nonconformist ministers were perceived as a threat.¹²⁶ One focus for the distrust of other ordained ministers was the Burials Bill in 1875, the opposition to which was led by Bishop Selwyn.¹²⁷ A little later the strength of other denominations was underlined in the 1881 Potteries religious census, where in some parishes the Anglicans were poorly represented. Education was another focus for denominational rivalry, forcefully expressed in the early years of the twentieth century. This point probably marks the high tide of denominational rivalry before the decline of Nonconformity from the end of the nineteenth century lessened the threat. Roman Catholicism was to grow in strength right through until the end of the period, but the virulent opposition expressed by the Anglicans was considerably moderated in the twentieth century.

The fall in the status of the clergy, emphasised by the fall in their income and influence, may have encouraged the need to be more denominational. Seeing others as

¹²⁵ Symonds (1993) p196.

¹²⁶ Minutes of the *Stone Ruridecanal Association* 1843-1860, LRO B/A/25/2/1; *Stafford Archidiaconal Conference Minute Book*, from 1869, LRO A3/A/1/20; *Minutes of the Proceedings of Rural Deans of Archdeaconry of Stafford and Stoke on Trent*, 1880-1909 LRO B/A/25/2; *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference* 1860-1886, 1886-1899, LRO B/A/24/3/2, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

¹²⁷ There was a unanimous decision to oppose the bill and support the petition being organised by the Church Defence Institution, *Minutes of the Trentham Ruridecanal Conference* 1860-1886, LRO B/A/24/3/1.

inferior, whether they are a Methodist minister or a Roman Catholic priest, would have helped to confirm the Anglican clergy in their supposed superior position, and this was all the more necessary if that position was under threat.

However, it was the competition from outside of the church that helped to heighten the competition between the churches. Anglicans had to increasingly share ministerial responsibility with other churches as the period progressed, but the greatest loss was that to secular authority. The effect of the civil registration of births, marriages and deaths from 1837, the growth of state schools from 1870, and the rise of medical and legal professions and the way they became more firmly linked to the needs of the general population, were all developments that eroded the basis of the parson model. In the face of this competition the professional model encouraged clergy to offer something more distinctive. By the twentieth century clergy were beginning to borrow the jargon of the market place, and referred to the need to “attract customers.”¹²⁸

Furthermore, the retreat into religious functions was encouraged by the failure of the church to positively engage with modern ideology. The debate over evolution, the refusal to accept the philosophical consequences of the developments in Biblical criticism, and the denial of the place of contraception, were signs that the Church of

¹²⁸ Reindorp (1957) p45.

England in the nineteenth century was being marginalized. It is important not to attribute resistance to the new developments to the whole church, but certain notorious examples, such as the exchange between Huxley and Wilberforce, and the prosecution of Bishop Colenso, indicate that much of the church was slow to accept new ideology.¹²⁹ Others were engaged in the advancement of knowledge, not least the parish clergy who were keen naturalists and antiquarians.¹³⁰ The parliamentary debate on the Clerical Subscription Act of 1865 highlighted how intellectuals were becoming estranged from the clergy.¹³¹ Many of the manuals of 1890 onwards deal with intellectual problems. Unable to adequately answer the questions posed by modern society the church found comfort and safety in orthodoxy. In terms of parish ministry this meant offering something that was specialised and distinctive, and the very busyness of the role gave the clergy less time for keeping up-to-date with intellectual developments.¹³²

The parson model cannot tolerate competition in either the secular or religious roles. It is dependent on a monopoly so that the clergyman can function in general and

¹²⁹ See Parsons, G., 'Biblical Criticism in Victorian Britain: From Controversy to Acceptance' in Parsons (1988), vol. 3., and Altholz (1994). Also, see Brooke (1991) who suggests the 'conflict thesis' was a later construction. For the most recent review of the nineteenth century controversies see Larsen (2004).

¹³⁰ Armstrong (2000).

¹³¹ Crowther (1970), p146-7.

¹³² Crowther (1970), p171.

religious ways to the whole population. Where the role is shared with others it is likely that the role of the clergyman will become more specialised, or he will be forced to offer something more distinctive and less general. The parson model could only survive intact where the smallness of the parish meant that there were no other churches, few other social organisations and no other professionals.

Competition from other professionals affected the clergy in another way. The emergence of the new professions meant that there were fewer candidates willing to come forward for ordination, a competition made all the stronger if such professionals were better paid, and their work more intellectually satisfying or simply more exciting. When the future Rector of Haughton was at Marlborough College at around the turn of the century, he had a conversation with a fellow schoolboy: "I said I was going to be a parson. 'What?' said the boy from my house, 'if I had your brains, Royds, I'd go for something really decent like the Indian Civil'." ¹³³

Conclusions

In the early years of the twentieth century the Bishop of Lichfield wrote, "No doubt the priesthood is a profession with a science and art of its own: the minister of Christ must

¹³³ Royds (1953) p23.

not be a futile amateur; yet it is even worse if he takes the airs and graces of professional dignity and merges his manhood in the officialism of a clerical caste.”¹³⁴ Forty years later another mentor wrote of the danger that ministers were becoming “more clerical, more ‘ecclesiastical’ in tone, less in touch with the life of the community.”¹³⁵ He went on to suggest that the voluntary or secular priesthood “would do more to bridge the gulf between parson and people and to rescue the Church from clericalism.”¹³⁶ This is the only recourse for those who wished to preserve the parson model since there was no financial hope of sustaining a clerical ministry in small parishes in any other way.¹³⁷

It is clear that in the period 1830 to 1960 the clergy as a group were adopting some of the features common to the emerging professions. The ministerial task had become more specialised and limited to a more closely defined group of people, the clergy were developing a system of specialised training and were meeting in groups for encouragement and support. However, vital characteristics of a modern profession were not present. The discipline of clergy was always difficult to enforce, largely because they retained autonomy in their work. Clergy were not fully managed, and indeed most incumbents were left alone to do their work in their parish with very little

¹³⁴ Kempstone (1919) pp24-25.

¹³⁵ Barry (1960) p54.

¹³⁶ Barry (1960) pp90-91.

inference from the bishop or other authority. The deployment of clergy was never completely in the power of the church leaders. Haig describes the clergy developing into “rather awkward and shabby professionals.”¹³⁸

Two circumstances were pushing the clergy to be professional. The size of parishes, when they exceeded the 2,000 population level, required a new approach to ministry. It was no longer possible to relate to all the people in the way clergy could in small parishes. The reliance on the congregation for funding, although always present to some extent throughout the period, was becoming the main source, and this meant that the focus of ministry shifted to the defined group who attended the church, a development all the more likely because parish populations had grown. However reluctantly, the clergy were becoming more professional. Whether the process could be completed depended upon the abandonment of the parochial system and the very different approaches to ministry that had been inherited.

¹³⁷ Russell (1980) is also very much in favour of the voluntary priest solution.

¹³⁸ Haig (1984) p361.

Chapter Eight

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The study of the place of the clergy in their communities in Staffordshire over 130 years has led to some important conclusions. The underlying assumption remains that the relationship between the clergy and the people is a vital indication of the position of the church in society, and in particular the degree to which it has become marginalised. As such, this study is a contribution to the ongoing debate about the extent and nature of secularisation in Britain.

Over the period 1830 to 1960 there was a considerable development in the relationship of the Anglican clergy to local society. The clergy became more limited in their scope, both in terms of what they did and whom they encountered. They became more specialised in religious tasks, not necessarily because more religious tasks were undertaken, but because fewer non-religious duties were associated with the core role. The laity in the congregations and the clerical hierarchy required greater justification for involvement outside ecclesiastical matters. This reflected and affected a change in the behaviour of clergy as a more defined clerical culture developed,

expressed in a uniform, a specially designed dwelling, and closer associations, both informally and legally, with other clergy. The marginalisation brought parish ministry into a state of crisis, with many of the clergy experiencing the “isolation of those who sense that they are being squeezed out of society.”¹

The process was apparent from the beginning of the period, although the evidence suggests that there were three important stages. The first was in the last quarter of the nineteenth century when the depreciating financial position of the Church of England, and in particular the increasing need to rely on congregational support, along with a growing competition from other denominations and an urban situation in which the parish system was failing, eroded the societal place of Anglican clergy. At the same time the Church of England was losing its influence through the emasculation of church rates and the establishment of secular local government. The clergy were ceasing to be, as certainly they had been in the earlier years of the century, instruments of authority applying national and regional policy at the local level.² By this point even in many rural areas the parson ministry had become unworkable.³ This first stage was the most important because it is when major breaks occurred in the relationship between the clergy and their communities. Other studies have

¹ Card (1988) p100.

² Lee (2006) p197.

suggested that the last two decades of the nineteenth century was the crucial period of change for the church.⁴

The second stage was after World War One when the introduction of an explicit membership and new internal church government structures, as well as increased financial pressures, were indications that the church was becoming more marginalized. The third stage comes at the end of the period in the 1960s when significant ecclesiastical reforms are about to be put through and the very basis of parochial ministry, epitomised by the slogan “one man, one parish”, was abandoned as unworkable.

Because the clergy were the servants of the church their marginalisation within society is indicated by the fall in church attendance. It is recognised that this does not necessarily relate to the religious beliefs of either individuals or communities. What is remarkable, and quite unnoticed by most other commentators, is that over the period there was little change in the size of the core membership, as expressed by the number of regular and frequent communicants as a percentage of the overall population, which remained fairly constant. What is apparent is the significant drop in the number

³ Jessop (1890) although committed to the ideal recognises its impossibility.

⁴ See Cox (1982) and Morris (1992) and more recently Freeman (2003) p39 and Lee

of those on the fringe of the church, the very group who attended the non-Eucharistic services and who became excluded through the greater infrequency of such services. The membership of the Church of England became more clearly defined as befits a denominational organisation, particularly after the introduction of electoral rolls. At the same time the church had to supplement traditional methods of financial support, which had enhanced the relationship of the clergy with a cross section of the community, and financially became more reliant on the membership. At the beginning of the period a minority of Anglican churches depended on pew rents and very few had regular collections during services to benefit the clergy. By 1960 almost all clergy needed the congregation to make regular payments through the offertory in order that their ministry be viably sustained.

There are several reasons that account for the change in the position of the church in society. Many have commentated on how industrialisation, urbanisation and rationalisation have marginalized the church, although the precise relationship of these processes to secularisation has been keenly debated.⁵ This study would support, in line with the work of Durkheim, that 'structural differentiation' has had a key

(2006) p179-p181.

⁵ See McLeod (1974), Gilbert (1976), Yeo (1976), Cox (1982), Hobsbawm (1984) and Chadwick (1987) for the basis for this debate.

detrimental effect upon the church, and thus the role of the clergy. ⁶ Furthermore, the dating of this change to the last two decades of the nineteenth century would also be supported by this study. ⁷ Much of the function, and consequently the relevance and status of the clergy, was ‘relocated’ to other professionals and within other institutions. The traditional societal structure that had benefited the Church of England, and which was epitomised in the estate villages where it lingered, could not be maintained in the new towns and cities. The association of the clergy with the old order of status and wealth was damaging not only because it created conflict within communities but also because it was an order in decline itself. There was a growing ‘cultural collision’ between the clergy and the people in the parish. ⁸ The inability of the Anglican church to be involved in the new economic activities, particularly those associated with men, restricted the encounters of clergy to the domestic and leisure spheres. Clergy increasingly worked with women rather than men, as indicated by membership returns in the urban and larger parishes in particular. At the end of the period it was this group who finally abandoned the church and ushered in a new stage of secularisation. ⁹

⁶ Durkheim (1971 and 1984).

⁷ Cox (1982).

⁸ Lee (2006) p189.

⁹ Brown (2001).

If differentiation has been significant in the marginalisation of the clergy this study has shown how in certain contexts the process has been encouraged. The community size of the parish has affected the way that clergy can minister, for any population over 2,000 people needs a different approach to ministry. Most commentators throughout the period saw populations above this figure as a problem for the traditional model of ministry.¹⁰ Modern innovations, such as the printed magazine and the motorcar, may have provided the means to reach more people, but as the pastoral relationship depends upon personal encounter there can be no substitute for the direct relationship of the clergy to the parishioners. The clerical mentors realised the importance of parish visiting as an essential element in the parson model. When this was no longer possible because of the size of the parish population, strategic and delegated visiting were not adequate alternatives. The parson's necessary personal knowledge of the people cannot be achieved in the medium and large communities. Rogers wrote in 1920, "the ideal parish is one large enough to call forth a man's best energies, but not too large to prevent the vicar from becoming personally acquainted with every member of his flock."¹¹ The sheer size of a parish population was detrimental to the maintenance of a traditional parson ministry.

¹⁰ For example Horace Mann in 1854, Winnington Ingram in 1895, and most recently Bruce (1996) who attributes secularisation at least in part to spatial reasons, p41. See also Melinsky (1992) p215.

¹¹ Rogers (1920) p61.

Interestingly, this study did reveal that although no large parish could sustain the parson model, neither could some of the smaller ones. In a few cases where the population size was low the indications of clerical influence, such as church attendance and membership, were also low. This contradiction may partly be explained by exceptional circumstances, including the presence of competing churches, especially where these had support from influential figures in the community, and the fragile nature of the community either because it was sparsely populated over a large area or newly developed with a fast growing population. The ideal type of parish where the community is closely bound by economic and social factors, as occurred in the estate villages, nearly always had high indications of clerical influence and in them the parson model flourished. In every case of estate villages the population size was low and had it been much greater than 2,000, despite all other factors, it would be supposed that the influence of the clergy would have been lessened.

The second factor that this study has highlighted as a determinant of pastoral ministry is the financial aspect of church life. When the clergy were funded through local taxation, however much it was resented, it brought them into a relationship with much of the community. The connection between the earnings of the clergyman and the local economy strengthened the relationship between the clergy and the people. At times it led to dispute, but this in itself kept the church at the centre of local society. With the reforms of clerical funding the disconnection with the local community provided a less controversial system but severed the economic relationship that helped to root the clergy in their parishes. As clergy ceased to be landowners, landlords and farmers, they became more specialised in their religious tasks. The shift of financial dependence to the worshipping community meant that the core membership of the church had greater power to control the clergy and understandably required the clergy to spend more time on ecclesiastical matters. This study reveals that the financial affairs of the church are both an indication of secularisation and a cause. Had the tithes been remodelled as an ecclesiastical local income tax, and had the clerical incomes remained more closely related to the local economy, it can be supposed that the clergy would have maintained a more important position in local society.

The geographical and financial changes encouraged the development of the professional model as the appropriate vehicle for parish ministry. One mentor writing in the 1920s regretted the “sinister sound” of the word ‘professional’ but suggested that the professional minister would be more competent, confident and successful than those who rejected professional qualities.¹² The comparison with the other professions, which were created in response to the needs of a more complex society, is both natural and in part unhelpful. Professionalism might disregard the distinctive nature of the ordained ministry, in particular the prime task of pastoral care for individuals in a specific and non-discriminatory way. Later mentors saw the danger of the impersonalisation of the professional model, which was a denial of the essence of pastoral ministry. Leech argued against the professional model not because of its use of modern technology or the way it encouraged pastoral competence, efficient organisation and set necessary boundaries, but rather because “personal involvement is clearly controlled, confined within clearly defined limits.”¹³

¹² Underhill (1927) p16.

¹³ Leech (2001) p197-198.

The parson model was not lightly abandoned. It remained the ideal throughout the period regardless of how impractical it had become in most of the parishes. The clerical mentors continued to recommend the parson model, or some adaptation of it, as the basis for a successful ministry. One in the 1950s wrote of “houses and homesteads nestled around the church like so many chickens around the mother hen ... no neighbourhood felt complete which did not have its own church and parson.”¹⁴ Manifestly it still worked to some extent in some parishes, particularly the small parishes, either rural or urban. It remained influential because it worked well in the wealthiest and seemingly most successful parishes. However, even in the early nineteenth century “the moral impossibility of penetrating the dense mass of the population” in the larger parishes was recognised¹⁵. Such places made the pastoral relationship “scarcely more than nominal.”¹⁶

¹⁴ De Blank (1954) p170.

¹⁵ Bridges (1829) p104.

¹⁶ Blunt (1872) p73.

One way of recreating the situation where the model could work was to subdivide the parish into manageable units, delegating pastoral oversight to curates or lay people. This solution was popular throughout the period, present in the nineteenth century in large urban parishes staffed with three, four or more assistant clergy and in the twentieth century in schemes which used street wardens and set up house or cell churches. One clergy mentor wrote in the 1950s that “in the house-church we realise a bit more of what it means to be a parochial church, the church of a specific area: this is the basis of our mission as Anglicans.”¹⁷ The setting up of sub-parishes was the most popular solution given by most of the twentieth century mentors.

Another way of enabling the parson model was to consider the congregation as the actual pastoral unit, which allowed the clergyman to work as the parson to the relatively small and well-defined group who were the worshipping community. This kind of congregational ministry, although running counter to the basis of parish ministry within an Established Church, was adopted, either consciously or subconsciously, by many of the clergy. Faced with the impossibility of ministering to thousands it was feasible to work with the hundred or so who chose to have close

¹⁷ Southcott (1956) p126; similarly see Wickham (1931) pp27-28, Allan (1954) p56, and de Blank (1954) p45.

associations with the church. The strength of the parson model, and probably the main reason for its persistence, was the centrality of the pastoral relationship between clergyman as practitioner and people as client group. Because this relationship was the essence of local ministry, it was vital that the client group remained small.

A major issue arising from the persistence of the parson model is the consequence of the promotion of the unobtainable ideal. As long as the Church of England remained an Established Church with some kind of responsibility for the whole community, excepting those who had opted out, and as long as the resources to provide such care were hugely inadequate, the parson model was to be a fantasy in all but a few situations. The pressure on the clergy to perform to a dysfunctional model led to a sense of failure and despondency. Even the clergy mentors who had made a success of their ministry admitted that at times it was difficult, such as Hocking who wrote of the nightmare of realising that he had the cure of 6,000 souls.¹⁸ Others sought to blame the clergy for being incompetent or complaining too much. Some members of the ecclesiastical hierarchy expressed a view, directly and through national reports, that the clergy were the cause of the failure. In 1930 the Lambeth Conference chastised those who made too much of the problems: “the petty hardships of the parson’s life have loomed too large and have to some extent obscured the higher ideal of the

ministry.”¹⁹ Most clergy mentors offered the task of pastoral visiting of the whole parish as the panacea, which because it was usually impossible to achieve could not be shown to be ineffective. Experiencing a reducing influence in the community and greater tasks within the church, and presented with an unobtainable ideal, the clergy were in a very uncomfortable position.

Furthermore, within the organisation the continued idealisation of the parson model led to inefficiency in deployment because smaller parishes, where the model had some hope of being achieved, received greater attention. This imbalance of resources may have contributed to the way the church lost touch with many of the under-staffed urban parishes. The Church of England was firmly rooted in its rural mentality well into the twentieth century.²⁰ The inability to link up with new sources of wealth present in the larger industrialised and urban parishes starved the church of potential financial support and the opportunities of a relationship with the new vibrant sectors of local communities. The parson model, with its image founded on Herbert and his small rural parish, did not equip the church for engagement within the structures of modern society.

¹⁸ Hocking (1960) p78.

¹⁹ Quoted by Cunningham (1932) p5 in his defence of the parson model.

The development of the professional model meant that clergy became more specialised, an introversion that reflects a particular theological view of the role of the church in the world. The sacralisation of the clerical role is a response to the supposed secularisation of society, but it is also likely to reinforce such a development. The tendency is understandable as the clergy as members of an institution became less certain of their position in society and considered themselves as under threat from other organisations. Sacralisation made the clergy specialists of their tasks at a time when their specialisms became less relevant to the population at large. It restricted their encounters to fewer people, most of whom were members of the worshipping community. In as much as they had contact beyond this group it became limited to very specific tasks, such as the occasional offices of weddings and funerals. Such restrictions were always likely to marginalise the church, as was predicted by one mentor at the end of the period: “any policy which tends to accentuate the division between the inner circle and the outer circle must lead to consequences that are disastrous.”²¹

²⁰ Brown (2001) p19-20.

²¹ Mayfield (1958) p56.

What was said of Nonconformist ministers in the 1930s became increasingly true of Anglican clergy: “In their own now smaller world ministers remained as important, as loved and as abused as they had always been. In the wider world, if still respected, they were a marginal concern.”²² The withdrawal from the political realm both locally and nationally had an impact, encouraging not only marginalisation from society but also internal strife within the institution.²³ As Martin Thornton suggested the professional model is most appropriate for a dwindling church with a remnant mentality.²⁴

Conversely, the church in order to be incarnational depends upon a dialogue with the world, translating the message of the Gospel for every generation and place. The introverted church with its increasingly defined membership cannot do this and therefore will fail in its prime task. The parson model is essentially incarnational, because it assumes that the clergy are in contact with the whole community. It works best when there is an encounter at all levels, including the social, political and economic areas of life. The professional model, where it is an expression of the church’s limited encounter with these areas of life, cannot be incarnational in the same way. As a model it has the tendency to curtail the clergy in a restricted ministry,

²² Brown (1988) p234.

²³ Best (1964).

relating to just a worshipping community and meeting only a few particular needs of those beyond.

What was the alternative to the development of the professional model of ministry in the changing society of nineteenth and twentieth century England? A greater realisation of the importance of the pastoral relationship between clergy and people, and how this is affected by practical issues, might have enabled those who determined church policy to find ways to preserve the parson model. Almost certainly, given the financial constraints, this would have required a wholesale introduction of voluntary ministry at the parish level supported by an organisational and managerial structure appropriate to a voluntary body. Thus an ordained minister may have been possible in every parish, however small. In such a setup larger parishes, which were needed in order to finance the local clergy, would be less necessary. Whether enough people would be available to suit such a voluntary role is unknown.

²⁴ Thornton (1956).

It was as late as 1970 that the Church of England officially recognised and allowed voluntary or non-stipendiary ordained parish ministry and its implementation since then has varied enormously between dioceses. In some places such schemes have been adopted enthusiastically only to be downscaled at a later date.²⁵ This is probably because there was not a full appreciation of the theological issues involved in such a change in local ministry, all part of "a determined resistance to re-examining fundamental questions."²⁶ The indecision as to the nature of the appropriate model for parish ministry has remained. Greenwood commented in 1994 that "one of the most obvious stumbling blocks in the years ahead will be the absence of a plausible and coherent theological statement of what is now meant by the expression 'parish priest'."

²⁷

The essence of the parson model, that is the essential pastoral relationship between the clergy and the people, would be adequately provided for by the non-stipendiary minister. Indeed, as has been noted, many of the clergymen of the nineteenth century, because of their low stipends and private wealth, were almost non-stipendiary. The

²⁵ For instance such ministry was pioneered in the Diocese of Lincoln in the 1970s, a policy that was reversed in subsequent decades.

²⁶ Greenwood (2006) p15.

²⁷ Greenwood (1994) p3.

non-stipendiary minister is considered amateur in the best sense of the word.²⁸ Russell expressed a hope that the introduction of non-stipendiary ministry would encourage “a re-interpretation of the whole nature of ministry.”²⁹ However, the church, both in the hierarchy and in the parishes, has found it difficult to fully support such a model, probably because it has been seduced by the concept of the professional minister which has been promoted as appropriate for parish ministry for nearly two centuries.

Modern commentators are beginning to assert, and in so doing repeat the many who have stated this before, that the key to parish ministry is the pastoral relationship. Hence there has arisen a new emphasis on local ministry, be it ordained or lay. The relationship of the minister to the people of the parish is considered crucial, all the more so in dysfunctional communities. The most modern mentors, like the vast majority of their predecessors, view parish visiting as the basis for a good parish ministry. Collaborative ministry is promoted and pastoral responsibilities are to be shared with the laity in order to serve a community.³⁰ Whether the Church of England has retained enough of its sense of responsibility for whole parish populations, and would thus want to implement a voluntary parson ministry, remains to be seen.

²⁸ Baelz and Jacob (1985); Hacking (1990). See also Fuller and Vaughan (1986).

²⁹ Russell (1980) p287.

The consideration of the geographical and economic factors on the models of ministry raises the important point that a theological understanding of ministry and its practical expression are dependent on circumstances. It has always been noted that the practical context affects ministry, although the full implications of this have not always been recognised.³¹

In the same way circumstance have driven others to different conclusions. Whereas the parson model may remain the ideal, the professional model as the practical alternative has shaped the ministry of most clergy who have ministered in parishes. Many have had to live with a dilemma where their theological view of the church as the centre of the community is not matched by their experience. This contradiction may go unrecognised and the clergy minister under the illusion that they have a pivotal role in the parish. Alternatively, the clergy may arrive at new theological understandings that define the church as reduced in size and societal influence but with special vicarious or remnant functions. There is plenty of biblical support for such positions, from the Flood, the Israelites in the wilderness, the Exile and Return,

³⁰ Percy (2006) p87; Torry (2004) p168.

³¹ Mackie (1969) p16.

the protestations of the prophets, and the persecuted early Church.³² Some modern commentators on the role of parish clergy have subrogated mission for ministry, as befits those venturing out into an alien and hostile territory. The associational model has supplanted the communal model of church.³³ The parish system is seen as "a possible snare ... because it can distance us from ... the proper marginalization of the Church of the crucified Jesus."³⁴ The 'mission-shaped church' and the 'missionary congregation' are considered necessary in the modern era, and clergy are the "sustainers of missionary communities through word and sacrament."³⁵ The occasional offices are seen as a vehicle to get to people outside the church, not as a means of serving a local community.³⁶ The concept of the prime place of the faithful core of believers within a population of non-believers is well served by the professional model, and far removed from the ideal put forward by Herbert and others as the basis for Anglican parish ministry.

³² References include Genesis 6; Exodus 14; Nehemiah 1; Amos 3:15, Isaiah 6:13, Micah 2:12; Matthew 20:14-16, Luke 17:2, Romans 9-11, Revelation 2-3.

³³ Melinsky (1992) p207.

³⁴ Torry (2004) p11.

³⁵ Croft (2006) p84.

³⁶ Ison (2005) p77.

In 1960 Barry felt he was able to triumphantly proclaim, “the Church is not in retreat, it is advancing.”³⁷ For the Church of England in terms of a professional ministry, increasingly marginalised but prophetically serving a faithful remnant, this was true, for the parson had virtually vanished from parish ministry. However, there remains the hope that such an incarnation model might one day be reborn, when the church rediscovers the primacy of the relationship between the ordained minister and every member of the community in which he or she serves.

³⁷ Barry (1960) p50-51.

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