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PARISH CLERGY WIVES
IN
ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

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**A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

University of Warwick

Department of History

December 2015

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Acknowledgements

I am most grateful to Peter Marshall for his willingness to believe that some Elizabethan clergy wives were indeed retrievable, for his advice on locating them and for his guidance in telling their stories; his erudition, patience and encouragement have proved invaluable. I am also indebted to Steve Hindle for his suggestion that clergy wives were a suitable subject for an MA dissertation and for his involvement in this project during his time at Warwick. While researching the period between 1560 and 1700, I first became aware that the wives of the Elizabethan clergy were the source of much speculation but unknown as individuals. I am also very grateful to both Eric Carlson and Michelle Wolfe who generously made material available to me and were kind enough to discuss ideas and possible lines of enquiry during the initial stages of my research.

In visiting archives and record offices across so many dioceses and counties, the many individuals who have offered me their assistance are too numerous to mention by name. I therefore extend a general thank you to the staff at the Borthwick Institute for Archives University of York; Hampshire Record Office; Lincolnshire Archives; London Metropolitan Archives; Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office; the Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham; Nottinghamshire Archives; Norfolk Record Office; Northamptonshire Record Office; the Oxford History Centre; the National Archives; Somerset Heritage Centre; Dr Williams's Library and Worcestershire Record Office. I am appreciative of the patience and knowledge of all those who have responded to my various enquiries and requests.

My family has demonstrated considerable forbearance in sharing their lives with so many early modern ministers' wives and in allowing me to talk about them at length. My daughters, Claire and Helen, have offered constant encouragement and Claire has proof read chapters with admirable diligence. Although my husband, Ken, may well have

regretted persuading me to return to academic study, I am so glad that he did. He has been willing to plan excursions to incorporate archival visits and has shown unremitting acceptance of the time spent in research and writing.

Abstract

This study examines the lived experience and perceptions of the wives of the Elizabethan parish clergy following the introduction of clerical marriage. It challenges the widespread, but mistaken conviction that the first ministers' wives have vanished from the historical record and shifts the emphasis from the institution to the individual. This has been achieved by consulting a large and heterogeneous collection of archival material including more than 1000 parish registers, 1000 wills, marriage licences, church court records, memorials and some newly-discovered certificates for ministers' wives. This body of evidence, assembled from twelve dioceses in the southern province and from the archbishopric of York, demonstrates that the story of parish clergy wives can indeed be recovered.

Qualitative and statistical analyses of social origin, considered assessments of the extent and nature of the abuse aimed at minister's wives and a re-evaluation of the persistence, structure and significance of the letter testimonial refute most of the common assumptions about clergy wives derived from speculation and generalization. The impact of clerical marriage on charitable giving is evaluated in relation to the demands of family and the lack of provision for the clergy widow. Scrutiny of clerical courtship, relationships within the clerical household and involvement with her husband's pastoral ministry enables us to chart the emerging importance of the clergy wife and changing attitudes towards her. Engagement with such extensive archival material exposes the close involvement of ministers' wives with the wider community and reveals the agency of the women themselves in the advent and evolution of their role. Women who have hitherto been defined by their supposed obscurity and unsuitability are shown to have anticipated and exhibited the character, virtues and duties associated with the archetypal clergy wife of later centuries. The breadth of this investigation, therefore, uncovers and explores a neglected but crucial aspect of religious, social and women's history.

Declaration

This thesis is the candidate's own work and has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

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Conventions

Where quotations are incorporated into the body of the text, spelling has not been modernized but contractions have been expanded silently. Punctuation has been added, where necessary, to clarify the meaning. The spelling of names within documents has necessitated several editorial decisions. Names in quotations have been left in their original form. Elsewhere, forenames are represented as their modern equivalent or in the English version of the Latinized form. Surnames retain their original spelling and where inconsistencies occur, the most frequently used version or that closest to the modern spelling has been selected. Wherever possible, parishes are given their modern spelling and county although in the case of the Archdeaconry of Northampton the old designation has been retained.

Dating is Old Style, that is, in accordance with the Julian calendar, except that the year is taken to begin on 1 January.

Abbreviations

BI	Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.
CCCC	Corpus Christi College, Cambridge
CCEd	Clergy of the Church of England Database (http://www.theclergydatabase.org.uk)
GA	Gloucestershire Archives
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
KHLC	Kent History and Library Centre
LA	Lincolnshire Archives
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LRO	Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland Record Office
MSC	Manuscripts and Special Collections, University of Nottingham
NA	Nottinghamshire Archives
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
NthRO	Northamptonshire Record Office
OED	Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, online edition, http://www.oed.com)
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (Oxford University Press, online edition, http://www.oxforddnb.com)
OHC	Oxford History Centre
PRS	Parish Register Society
SHC	Somerset Heritage Centre
SEAX	Essex Archives online (seax.essexcc.gov.uk)
TNA	The National Archives
WRO	Worcestershire Record Office

Introduction

The sanctioning of clerical marriage at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth was one of the most notable social and religious changes of the Reformation with visible and significant impact at the parochial level. It ushered in a period of transition and adaptation which has afforded ample scope for enquiry by historians of gender, ecclesiastical and social history, but the wives of the clergy themselves have secured only limited space in the various narratives. Apart from some consideration given to the wives of Elizabethan bishops, discussions of clerical marriage have until now centred on rhetoric and polemic across the confessional divide. Although the presence of the clergy wife within the parish heralded an important social upheaval, consideration as to its impact on individuals and communities has remained unfocussed and incidental. Scholarly references to ministers' wives either speak of them collectively as a homogenous but amorphous body or single out those whose aberrant behaviour has earned them a place in the archive. As a result the women who made up the first cohort of ministers' wives find themselves either stereotyped or ignored.

The wives of clergymen in the seventeenth century have occasioned far more investigation; in part, because there is a comparative wealth of documentary evidence from which to construct a narrative. The status, character and reception of the individual women who took up residence in the Elizabethan parsonage have, by contrast, received little or no attention, chiefly because the evidence is both scattered and obscure. 'I have not found very much on the wives of minsters' declared Roland Bainton almost forty years ago in the preface to his monograph, *Women of the Reformation in France and England*.¹ A decade later, Mary Prior explained that she had concentrated her research on the wives

¹ R. H. Bainton, *Women of the Reformation in France and England* (Minneapolis, 1973), p. 9.

of bishops because ‘the lives of most clergy wives are irretrievably lost to the record’.² A perceived lack of evidence, therefore, rather than the limited significance of the theme or their failure to inspire, accounts for the apparent scholarly indifference to the wives of the first married ministers. The absence of in-depth and targeted research, however, has not prevented this group of women from being the subject of speculation and generalization which, for the most part, has been uncomplimentary.

Historians and Clergy Wives

A survey of the existing literature will set this study in its historiographical context, highlighting the central issues for investigation and the principal areas of contention. Attitudes to clerical marriage and the wives of ministers cannot be appreciated without an understanding of popular perceptions of the women who associated with priests in the pre-Reformation church. The extent, nature and ramifications of late medieval clerical concubinage will, therefore, serve as a prelude to a discussion of the historical research into clerical marriage in general and Elizabethan clergy wives in particular. A brief review of the extensive work undertaken on pastors’ wives in Continental Europe will be included as it places this thesis in a wider perspective.

Clerical Concubinage

From the premature marriages undertaken by reformers in the reign of Henry VIII, through a period of short-lived legality during the reign of Edward VI and on to the grudging acceptance granted by Elizabeth I, clerical marriage remained a contentious issue. However, the ideal of clerical celibacy had never been fully achieved and the perception of the whoring priest, much exploited by Protestant reformers, had its legacy

² M. Prior, ‘Reviled and Crucified Marriages: the Position of Tudor Bishops’ Wives’ in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), p. 118; Bainton, *Women of the Reformation*, pp. 8-9. Bainton too was deeply aware that he had neglected women ‘in the middle brackets of society’, blaming it on the ‘paucity of material’.

in the legislation of both Edward and Elizabeth; clerical marriage was presented as a remedy for fornication among those who could not achieve the ideal of celibacy.³

Within the context of clerical sexual incontinence, several works have addressed the perceived need for the pre-Reformation clergy to live in ‘a higher state of purity than the laity’.⁴ As Peter Marshall has indicated, the possibility that the sacraments as a means to salvation were polluted, and thereby ineffective, should the priest have sexual contact with women, would have been of serious concern to his flock and argues against indifference to clerical incontinence. However, others including Patrick Collinson and Felicity Heal, argue that the situation in practice was less well-defined.⁵ Tim Cooper, in his study of pre-Reformation clergy in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield concurs. He suggests that there was a marked difference in perception among both parishioners and disciplinary courts between ‘isolated incidents of sexual incontinence ... and relationships of sometimes quasi-marital concubinage which involved cohabitation and procreation’. Cooper’s argument for acceptance of concubinage is predicated on the small number of cases actually brought before the courts which in turn often revealed that the relationships had been in existence for many years with no action taken against either the cleric or his ‘wife’. When proceedings were instigated, the initiative did not usually come from parishioners but reflected either a particular drive ‘on the part of the authorities to maintain standards’ or concern over the misappropriation of church funds. Should the accusation appear within a tithe dispute, it was merely one of a ‘host of complaints’ most of which would never have been exposed without the additional causes of friction between the cleric and his charges.⁶

³ H. L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 181.

⁴ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 161-79, quotation, p. 165; P. Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood* (Oxford, 1994), Chapter 5.

⁵ P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 76-9; F. Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 76-9.

⁶ T. Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the early sixteenth century* (Woodbridge, 1999), pp. 171-83.

If the concubines of pre-Reformation clergy received acceptance, why should parishioners feel inclined to object to a married minister? Janelle Werner's recent and detailed study of clerical concubinage may help answer the question. Focussing primarily on the archival records of the diocese of Hereford, she concludes that clerical concubinage in Herefordshire was in reality as widespread as in late medieval Europe and that, as their relationships resembled secular marriages, the couples were 'to some extent, socially and culturally accepted'. The 'wife', however, was not regarded as honourable, was punished more frequently than her partner and was usually of low status; 'clerical concubines were characterized as lecherous, venal women, often equated - both tacitly and explicitly - with prostitutes'.⁷ The debate receives further consideration during the course of this study but Werner's work raises the question of whether any abuse directed at ministers' wives was a continuation of the expectation that only a woman of low social and moral standing would associate with a priest. As will be seen below, much speculation surrounds the social status and motivation of early clergy wives but the extent to which ministers married their concubines and the social origins of their wives more generally, clearly requires further investigation.

Pastors' Wives: The European Context

Werner's contention that clerical concubinage was widespread in England is contrary to the view presented by historians of the Continental Reformation who maintain that greater tolerance existed in the German states where clerical concubinage was received with 'indifference' unless situations were 'openly scandalous'.⁸ The issue is discussed in most works on early modern women or clerical marriage.⁹ Susan Karant-Nunn proposes

⁷ J. Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives': Priests and Concubines in England, 1375-1549" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), pp. iii-iv.

⁸ J. F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 242-3.

⁹ O. Chadwick, *The Early Reformation on the Continent* (Oxford, 2001), p. 145; S. C. Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation: The Parsonage as a Site of Socio-Religious Change', in S. Dixon and L. Schorn-Schutte (eds), *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (New York, 2003), pp. 80-1; M. E. Plummer, "'Partner in his Calamities': Pastors' Wives, Married Nuns and the

that there was a masculine consensus on the irresistible nature of male sexual desire which accorded a degree of understanding of a priest's failure to achieve celibacy. It was also felt that the community was safer if the priest's predatory sexual appetite was restrained within a long-term relationship; a theory which she considers could extend to communities that welcomed clerical marriage.¹⁰

Indeed, considerably more research has so far been directed at clerical marriage and the wives of pastors by those studying the reformers of continental Europe than by historians of the English Reformation. These recent studies have attempted to establish the social status of the women prepared to marry clergy when the institution of clerical marriage was an innovation and its future far from secure. Karant-Nunn's research suggests that 'the provenance of pastors' wives rose rapidly until it was comparable to their husbands', findings which are given support by Schorn-Shütte's study of Braunschweig, where, by the last third of the sixteenth century, half of the wives had middle class backgrounds, a quarter came from artisan and merchant families and one quarter from clerical households.¹¹ However, with many clergy forced to marry their former concubines, as described by Bob Scribner and Kirsi Stjerna, it is not surprising to find that many of the first clergy wives seem to have struggled to achieve social acceptability.¹²

The most recent and detailed investigation of the social origins of clergy wives in the German Reformation has been undertaken by Beth Plummer. Bainton's statement that 'couples married for conviction or convenience' is a contention with which she takes issue.¹³ Plummer believes that a 'declaration of evangelical allegiance' was frequently

Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation', *Gender and History*, 20, 2 (2008), pp. 211-14; K. Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation* (Oxford, 2009), p. 35.

¹⁰ Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family', pp. 80-1.

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 85-6.

¹² R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), p. 253; Stjerna, *Women and the Reformation*, p. 35.

¹³ Plummer, "'Partner in his Calamities'", p. 207.

manufactured to ‘counteract negative attitudes towards clerical wives’ whereas in reality motivation stemmed from ‘a myriad of social, economic and personal reasons’ and represented ‘a dynamic interaction of external pressures, historical circumstances and personal considerations that were neither fully individual nor wholly situational’.¹⁴ In contrast to the vague generalizations which abound in discussions of early English clergy wives, Plummer has identified three distinct phases during each of which the social status and motivation of their German counterparts can be differentiated. Initially, pastors drew their wives from among marginalized women including concubines, ex-nuns and widows. Significantly the pastors themselves preferred women of a higher social standing as marital partners than those whom they had been willing to accept as unofficial wives. However, with so many concubines among this group it was understandable that there was a tendency to assume that all pastors’ wives were of dubious background. Once ‘poor’ but middle class women seized the opportunity to marry, perhaps because they lacked the opportunity to marry elsewhere, marriage to a pastor became acceptable to the middle class as a whole.¹⁵

Clergy Wives: The English Context

Much of the discussion of clerical marriage in England has focussed on the theological and doctrinal debate surrounding the question of sacerdotal celibacy, and has examined the polemic generated by those on either side of the confessional divide. Henry Lea and John Yost adopted this approach.¹⁶ Although their primary emphasis was not on the social consequence of the controversy, they both made some reference to the impact of the final outcome. Helen Parish has undertaken an extensive exploration of the theoretical debate and has evaluated the practical consequences, concluding that the rhetoric, the

¹⁴ Plummer, “‘Partner in his Calamities’”, p. 208.

¹⁵ Ibid., pp. 210-17.

¹⁶ H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (1907); J. K. Yost, ‘The Reformation Defence of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI’, *Church History*, 50 (1981), pp. 152-65.

queen's attitude and the various Injunctions combined to create a 'detrimental' effect on the public perception of clerical marriage. However, using figures from her own detailed study of the dioceses of Winchester, Chichester, Salisbury and Lincoln alongside information from several others, she is able to confirm earlier assertions that the clergy themselves embraced marriage with enthusiasm.¹⁷ Parish's study ends in 1570 and a longer timeframe is required for a full appreciation of reactions to clerical marriage, the chronology of acceptance, changes in social origin and the evolving role of the clergy wife.

General histories and specialist studies alike acknowledge the significance of clerical marriage in terms of its 'profound effect upon English society', though often without amplification.¹⁸ Clerical marriage has been described as 'the greatest single change which the Protestant Reformation made in the status of the clergy and its relation to the laity' and 'among the most revolutionary changes in religion and ethics'.¹⁹ Discussions of clerical marriage frequently venture little further than a consideration of the queen's personal attitude to the issue and the restrictions imposed by Injunction 29 of the Royal Visitation of 1559 (Appendix 1) which required the vetting of prospective clergy brides and the Ipswich Injunction which banned the residence of clerical families within the cathedral close.²⁰ With the notable exception of Eric Carlson, historians have differed only in the degree of animosity towards clerical marriage that they have attributed to Elizabeth herself.²¹ Carlson maintains that, aware of the potential for scandal, the queen's

¹⁷ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 232-4; see also R. O'Day, *The English Parish Clergy* (Leicester, 1979), pp. 20, 162. O'Day investigates the number of clerical marriages in the archdeaconry of Leicester, considers whether obstacles such as the uncertain status of married clergy and the meagre livings acted as a deterrent but concludes that by the 1570s, it was 'normal for the clergy to marry'.

¹⁸ W. J. Sheils, *The English Reformation 1530-1570* (Harlow, 1989), p. 47.

¹⁹ Yost, 'The Reformation Defence of Clerical Marriage', pp. 152-3.

²⁰ For a detailed explanation of Injunction 29, see below, pp. 83-102.

²¹ D. MacCulloch, *Reformation Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London, 2003), p. 290, 'a suspicion'; J. Berlatzky, 'Marriage and Family in a Tudor Elite: Familial Patterns of Elizabethan Bishops', *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), p. 7, 'inimical'; W. P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: the Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 204, 'deep-seated dislike'; Lea, *Sacerdotal Celibacy*, pp. 138, 141 'deep-seated dislike'; Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 204, 'hostile'.

reservations expressed a concern for the stability and credibility of the religious settlement rather than personal dislike of clerical marriage per se.²² This debate has relevance to clergy wives for, as Robert Parkyn's narrative clearly shows, the provinces were remarkably well-informed of the details and subtleties of events taking place in the capital and misgivings attributed to the monarch were likely to reinforce local prejudice and make it harder for ministers' wives to gain acceptance.²³

However, in many such discussions, the wives of ministers themselves simply fail to register a presence and too often the impact of this particular religious change is viewed, if at all, solely in terms of the cleric. When David Palliser writes that 'in Lancashire and Cornwall married ministers were cold-shouldered throughout Elizabeth's reign', there is no acknowledgement that the minister himself was not alone in bearing the brunt of parochial hostility.²⁴ If reference is made to the actual wives, they remain shadowy, nameless women whose role was to 'order his household, tend his poultry and organise his relations with female parishioners'.²⁵ Furthermore many of these references fall back on rather vague generalizations such as 'the first wives were in a deeply ambiguous position' and 'society had great difficulty in adjusting to the new situation'.²⁶

Writers of women's history and historians of gender have sought to render visible the women of the past and to place their experiences in the wider historical and social context: 'it is no longer possible to write history ... without taking gender into account'.²⁷ More than fifty years ago, Margaret Watt recognized that 'little or nothing had been written about her [the parson's wife]' and that 'surprisingly little notice has been taken of

²² E. J. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 58-9, 60-1; E. J. Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), p. 2.

²³ A. G. Dickens, 'Robert Parkyn's Narrative of the Reformation', *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947); Lea, *Sacerdotal Celibacy*, p. 145, describes such influence as being 'of the worst description'.

²⁴ D. M. Palliser, 'Popular Reactions to the Reformation in the Years of Uncertainty 1530-70', in C. Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 100.

²⁵ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn (London, 1989), p. 275.

²⁶ O. Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her. A History of Women in Western Europe. Volume 1 1500-1800* (London, 1996), p. 150.

²⁷ L. L. Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London, 2004), pp. 4, 185.

the personal, domestic troubles which must have followed in the train of religious controversy through the sixteenth century'.²⁸ Watt provides apocryphal descriptions of the wives of Cranmer, Parker and Hooker but her initial foray into this area of research failed to encourage others to follow. Watt's account preceded the explosion in scholarship delineating the history of early modern women but the continued absence of discussion of Elizabethan clergy wives themselves must surely stem from more than a lack of gender awareness.²⁹

Attempts to give women a voice have continued but they tend to focus attention on women in positions of influence and prominence, resulting in what Olwen Hufton describes as 'unbalanced' history. However, when dealing with sixteenth-century clerical marriage, Hufton's own discussion does not venture beyond Margaret Cranmer and Margaret Parker, the wives of two Archbishops of Canterbury.³⁰ Joel Berlatsky and Mary Prior have extended research down the ecclesiastical hierarchy but only as far as the wives of Elizabethan bishops. They discovered that even women married to such prominent churchmen faced problems in defining their roles within the episcopal household, in establishing their status and in receiving provision for themselves as widows.³¹ The inaccessibility of Elizabethan clergy wives within historical sources, to which Prior alluded, is the major factor in explaining why parish clergy wives have remained hidden for so long; so far it has not proved possible for all women to become 'clearly visible in the landscape of history'.³²

A growing awareness of the lack of historical investigation aimed directly at the wives of the parish clergy has produced three particular studies. Anne Barstow's article,

²⁸ M. H. Watt, *The History of the Parson's Wife* (London, 1945), p. 7.

²⁹ M. E. Wiesner, *Gender, Church and State in Early Modern Germany* (London and New York, 1998), p. 1.

³⁰ Hufton, *The Prospect Before Her*, pp. 150-1.

³¹ J. Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family', pp. 6-22; M. Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified Marriages', pp. 120-1, 134, 137.

³² J. Alberti, *Gender and the Historian* (London, 2002), p. 140.

‘The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?’, led the way and is a general survey of early clergy wives but her discussion is based predominantly on secondary material and contains no personal archival research.³³ A more recent unpublished thesis has attempted to fill the gap in the existing narrative. In her MPhil thesis, ‘The Wives of the English Clergy 1540-1640’, Christobel Williams-Mitchell considered bishops’ wives, using the *ODNB* to identify them all, and studied the Chichester rural deanery of Boxgrove. Here she established that marriage among the clergy increased throughout Elizabeth’s reign and that the poverty of the livings was not necessarily a deterrent to marriage. Williams-Mitchell, however, was unable to discover much about individual wives or their lifestyle. Her account also examined the detrimental impact of the church’s traditional teaching about women on clergy wives and gave some consideration to the role of wives within the parish but she relied heavily on secondary material and a few well-known seventeenth-century ministers’ wives. There is little sense of the changing nature of the role or the significance of chronology. Apart from a handful of well-known women, individual ministers’ wives are conspicuous by their absence in this thesis and Williams-Mitchell’s mounting frustration at their reluctance to reveal themselves becomes increasingly apparent; she observes that relevant ‘primary sources are not only sparse but difficult to interrogate’.³⁴

The greater accessibility of the lives of seventeenth-century ministers’ wives has produced a handful of noteworthy studies. Kenneth Charlton, for example, involves them in his discussions on patriarchy and the role of women as educators.³⁵ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, in their study of early modern women, comment on the wives of

³³ A. L. Barstow, ‘The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?’, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 52 (1983), pp. 3-16.

³⁴ C. Williams-Mitchell, ‘The Wives of the English Clergy 1540-1640’ (Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Chichester, 2009), quotation, p. 3.

³⁵ K. Charlton, *Women, Religion and Education in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 1999), pp. 32, 38, 46, 54-5, 170-1, 211, 215-16.

Anglican clergy and Nonconformist ministers of the seventeenth century.³⁶ The availability of diaries and autobiographies for several seventeenth-century ministers has facilitated the study of their wives though only the diaries of Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward are extant for the sixteenth century.³⁷ As most of the ministers' diaries, writings and funeral sermons are typically drawn from among the godly elite, the evidence for the seventeenth century distorts the narrative in favour of women who were, or at least were portrayed as being, tireless supporters of the faith and pious supporters of their minister husbands.

The most detailed study to date of English clergy wives is by Michelle Wolfe in her thesis, 'The Tribe of Levi: Gender, Family and Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714'. This again examines predominantly seventeenth-century ministers' wives. Wolfe discusses the behaviour and role of the wives primarily in terms of their impact on their husbands' ministry. Her account describes the ways in which clerical wives were to be exemplary in their behaviour, could be vulnerable because of their visibility and could derive unofficial influence through both their position and the performance of 'public housekeeping'. The expectations of a minister's wife in demeanour and active involvement in parish life are accorded detailed consideration. Arguably, however, Wolfe is too ready to accept that seventeenth-century clergy wives really were representative of the ideal. She is uncritical of the descriptions presented at funeral sermons and in ministers' diaries, and too willing to see the whole issue in terms of spirituality, with any wife who fails to live up to the ideal being dismissed as an aberration and disappointment to the 'tribe'.³⁸ A perhaps more realistic appraisal of the

³⁶ S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 310-11.

³⁷ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. M. M. Knappen (London, 1933).

³⁸ M. Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi: Gender, Family and Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2004), chapter four in particular.

relationship between various ministers and their wives is portrayed by Bernard Capp in his wider exploration of the female experience of marriage.³⁹

To date, there has been insufficient appreciation in the scholarship that it was not only the cleric who made a decision to marry; there was an element of choice on both sides of the clerical partnership. Dickens wrote that ‘many a mundane glebe-farmer in a country vicarage must have seen marriage in terms of worldly convenience and natural impulse’.⁴⁰ Yost claimed that ‘many priests joined the Reformation movement precisely to escape the restrictions imposed on their domestic life by the old order’ as they could now turn their mistress into ‘an honourable wife’.⁴¹ This lack of recognition that women were also making choices is aptly summed up by Plummer who laments that those who married clergy have received ‘little attention’ other than as ‘passive recipients of their husband’s choice’.⁴² While Plummer has attempted to investigate the social origins of the early German clergy wives, English studies rely too much on assumption and generalization. Barstow, for example, claims that Elizabethan clergy married women ‘*from their own class*’ (her italics) or were able to marry upwards and asserts that ‘English women of all classes were, in fact, willing partners in the new and far from accepted experiment of clerical marriage’.⁴³ Williams-Mitchell also confidently declares that it ‘most certainly was not the case’ that the majority of early clergy wives were of disreputable or lowly origin.⁴⁴ These statements may be accurate but as they are unsupported by documentary evidence, the issue of social status requires more extensive research.

From the fore-going survey of work on clerical marriage and early clergy wives, one could be forgiven for believing that Elizabethan clergy wives have left no trace in the

³⁹ B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet* (Oxford, 2003), chapter six.

⁴⁰ Dickens, *The English Reformation*, p. 275.

⁴¹ Yost, ‘The Reformation Defence of Clerical Marriage’, p. 152.

⁴² Plummer, ‘“Partner in his Calamities”’, p. 208.

⁴³ Barstow, ‘The First Generations’, pp. 6, 12.

⁴⁴ Williams-Mitchell, ‘The Wives of the English Clergy’, p. 121.

archive; fortunately Eric Carlson has proved that is by no means the case. The wives are not the primary focus of his article, 'Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation', but in the discussion of the implementation of Injunction 29, which required the vetting of prospective clergy brides, several named individuals emerge.⁴⁵ He concludes that the laity were keen for the Injunction to be observed but that pragmatism frequently prevailed. The shortage of clergy meant that those who married without permission were unlikely to be deprived and the Injunction was ineffective in the cases of men who were already married prior to ordination. He contends that ecclesiastical courts preferred to encourage clergymen to marry their long term partners or the women they had impregnated, behaviour which obviously rendered a certificate of good character somewhat inappropriate. Carlson's study reveals drunken and violent parsons and equally 'embarrassing' wives but these records have the potential to be so much more than just 'entertaining reading'.⁴⁶ A principal aim of this thesis is to extend the search beyond the diocese of Ely and the Archdiocese of York which were the focus of Carlson's work.

Little consensus has emerged over when and by what means clergy wives achieved respectability. Carlson believes that as early as 1563 'clerical marriage was a secure and unchallengeable feature of the Elizabethan church'.⁴⁷ This, however, says little about the situation within the parish and such optimism is not shared by others. Attitudes to Elizabethan clergy wives are used in broader analyses of the impact and progress of the Reformation.⁴⁸ What emerges, however, is a fragmentary collection of evidence which neither creates a cohesive picture of communal reaction to clerical marriage nor focusses

⁴⁵ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 1-31.

⁴⁶ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 13-20.

⁴⁷ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 28.

⁴⁸ Barstow, 'The First Generations', p. 9; Collinson, *Birthpangs*, pp. 67-8; C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in P. Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, 1997), p. 251; C. Haigh, *The Plain Man's Pathways to Heaven* (Oxford, 2007), pp. 196, 204-5; C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 216; C. Haigh, 'The Church of England', p. 252; P. Marshall, 'Discord and Stability in an Elizabethan Parish: John Otes and Carnaby, 1563-1600', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 71 (1999), p. 196; Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 172; P. Tyler, 'The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy', *Studies in Church History*, 4 (1967), pp. 87-8.

attention primarily on the wives of the parochial clergy. It is impossible to gauge reactions accurately with so much evidence drawn almost exclusively from church court records and without attempting to reconstruct the lived experience of ministers' wives within their communities.

The introduction of clerical marriage in the middle of the sixteenth century had major social repercussions but as the historiography is so often directed at 'clerical marriage' as an institution, the diversity and lives of the women involved remain largely obscure and unexplored. Historians have moved from an inability to recognize that there is a story to be told towards frustration that the evidence necessary to reveal that story remains so fragmentary and so obscure. The first generations of clergy wives deserve better than to be cast simply as the victims of patriarchy or heroines of protestant evangelism. We need to know who they were, why they made their choices, how their role was created and how it evolved. We also need to try to understand the reception and involvement of ministers' wives with the parish and to establish their impact on the conduct of the ministry itself.

Sources

Elizabethan clergy wives and their stories have been condemned to obscurity by the conviction, evident in the preceding overview, that there is a lack of archival material from which to reconstruct a narrative. Although there is no repository of personal correspondence or diaries to facilitate the investigation, by consulting a large number of underused and unexplored sources and by re-evaluating more familiar evidence, this study aims to reassemble the fragments to construct a composite picture of the lived experience of ministers' wives at the parochial level. The nature of the evidence and the need to generate a sufficiently large body of material has dictated the broad geographical range of my research. Rather than undertaking an in-depth study of one or several locales, the decision was made to adopt a more expansive approach. The investigation draws on

archival material from twelve dioceses in the southern province and is supplemented by an extensive body of wills, parish registers and court records from the archbishopric of York. The deficiencies and difficulties associated with specific resources will be discussed throughout the study in relation to particular themes but an initial consideration of some of the more heavily mined resources will give an indication of the types of material encountered and their inherent merits and deficiencies.

Parish Registers

The flourishing public interest in genealogy has improved the accessibility of parish registers. Digital images and transcripts are increasingly, albeit rather unsystematically, available online and local archives house microfilm versions, though much reliance still has to be placed on modern transcripts. A glance along record office shelves quickly reveals that many registers survive only from the seventeenth century. On closer inspection, those which do cover the sixteenth century lack uniformity in their handling of baptisms, marriages and burials, and display the idiosyncrasies of the clergymen who wrote them; some are muddled, others meticulous, some are judgemental, others impersonal. A parson who conscientiously recorded family relationships, commented on the weather, appraised his flock and expressed personal emotion, left to posterity an invaluable resource. Yet such individuals are all too rare and often registers contain nothing more than a perfunctory list of names. This minimalist approach may represent the original format but many registers have been shorn of the supplementary information which historians crave. The denudation of the registers began in the sixteenth century with the requirement that the paper registers be copied on to parchment, itself an expensive material. To save money and time, clergymen frequently succumbed to the

temptation to omit what they perceived to be superfluous detail, thereby leaving the parchment copies ‘mere skeletons of their paper predecessors’.⁴⁹

Despite their shortcomings, parish registers seemed the most obvious place to begin my research with the initial, albeit somewhat limited, aim of establishing whether it was possible simply to name some of the wives of the Elizabethan parish clergy. Examination of over 1000 registers from across the country proved encouraging and enabled the identification of almost 500 ministers’ wives. Indeed, the usefulness of the information contained within these documents exceeded expectations and assisted in the charting of the incidence of clerical marriage. Moreover, from certain registers it proved possible to establish family connections and status, to consider the question of remarriage, to see the minister’s wife acting as a godparent and even to witness expressions of heartfelt emotion.

Church Court Records

My research has drawn heavily on the records of the ecclesiastical courts with extensive use being made of the original manuscripts in the Record Offices at Worcester, Northampton and Winchester. The handwritten deposition books available on microfilm at the London Metropolitan Archive and in Norwich, Leicester and Somerset have also been consulted along with the online cause papers held at the Borthwick Institute, York. The survival and quality of these records vary but collectively they encompass a large geographical area which has been further expanded by the addition of secondary material, for example, from the county of Essex. My survey, therefore, incorporates regions noted for both conservative and reformist views, densely and sparsely populated areas, a mix of rural and urban locations and a combination of old and new dioceses.

⁴⁹ W. Coster, ‘Popular Religion and the Parish Register 1538-1603’, in K. L. French, G. G. Gibbs and B. A. Kumin (eds), *The Parish in English Life 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), p. 98.

The scope of the business covered by the ecclesiastical courts makes them very fertile ground for the study of a host of themes including disciplinary action against clergy and parishioners, immorality, marriage litigation, defamation, tithe disputes and testamentary business.⁵⁰ Scholars who have worked extensively with these documents, however, are acutely aware that they present their own challenges.⁵¹ For example, the historian is rarely privy to the final outcome as cases regularly failed to proceed to a final sentence; some petered out after an out of court settlement, procedural deficiencies in others left judgements unrecorded. Even if a sentence does survive, the judge's reasoning is never given.⁵² The depositions of witnesses are notoriously contradictory so that it is often impossible to ascertain the truth behind conflicting testimonies.⁵³ Apportioning blame, however, is of less importance than the insights afforded by the substance of the case and the attitudes and incidental detail conveyed within the various testimonies. These witness statements are, of course, the product of scribes who, working amid the formalities of the court and the constraints of time, recorded the original depositions. Although filtered and rationalized, the emotions and voices, even accents, of the individual witnesses are nevertheless still discernible in the accounts.

The nature of the work of the church courts themselves raises concerns over typicality. In pursuing moral transgressions, these courts produced a litany of libels, complaint and misdemeanours from which so many of the references to discreditable clergy wives originate. An over-reliance on these records and a failure to question how characteristic these cases actually were, can risk a serious distortion of the historical reality. Bill Sheils, for example, cautioned that 'the sense of confrontation looms large' in these

⁵⁰ L. L. Giese, *London Consistory Court Depositions, 1586-1611: List and Indexes* (London, 1995), p. vii; C. R. Chapman, *Ecclesiastical Courts, their Officials and their Records* (Dursley, 1992), p. 12.

⁵¹ Haigh, *Pathways*, pp. 7-11; M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 20-4, 46.

⁵² R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Florida, 1986), pp. 10-11, 21.

⁵³ D. O'Hara, "'Ruled by my friends': Aspects of Marriage in the Diocese of Canterbury c.1540-1570", *Continuity and Change*, 6 (1991), p. 16; L. L. Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* (London, 2007), pp. 6-7.

documents and Christopher Haigh talked of a ‘misleadingly negative impression’.⁵⁴ The transgressions contained within depositions and cause papers, therefore, have to be measured against the archival silence regarding the mundane and the exemplary. Despite their limitations, church court records have the potential to be ‘among the most illuminating of all early modern sources for social history’ and on questions of marriage, the depositions can justifiably claim to be the ‘most informative and interesting documents which have come down to us’.⁵⁵ With careful and sensitive reading of cases in their entirety, it is possible to observe the details of individual lives, to uncover agency, expectations, perceptions and resentments and to place them all within the wider context.

Wills

Wills were most definitely not written with the needs of future historians and statisticians in mind but the problems associated with their use should not be allowed to overshadow their value as a historical resource. The shortcomings of testamentary evidence are freely acknowledged by those who have based their research upon it, ‘potentially fruitful, but problematic’ in the words of Caroline Litzenberger.⁵⁶ The most heated debate surrounds the use and reliability of preambles as a means of determining confessional identity, something addressed in the first chapter. As the caveats are less relevant to clerical wills, it has been possible to undertake a statistical analysis of the extent to which a clergyman’s

⁵⁴ W. J. Sheils, *The Puritans of the Diocese of Peterborough 1558-1610* (Northampton, 1979), p. 9; Haigh, *Pathways*, p. 7; see also Giese, *Courtships*, pp. 4-5.

⁵⁵ J. Kermode and G. Walker, *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), p. 3; Helmholtz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 19; Giese, *Courtships*, p. 5.

⁵⁶ C. Litzenberger, ‘Computer-based Analysis of Early-modern English wills’, *History and Computing*, 7 (1995), p. 143; Those who have recognized the value of wills as a resource include: N. Goose and N. Evans, ‘Wills as a Historical Source’, in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2004), p. 63; S. E. James, *Women’s Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 281-6; C. Marsh, ‘In the Name of God? Will-Making and Faith in Early Modern England’, in G. H. Martin and P. Spufford (eds), *The Records of the Nation* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 248-9; D. J. Peet, ‘The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy, with particular Consideration of the Dioceses of Norwich and York’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1980), pp. 189-220; M. Prior, ‘Wives and Wills 1558-1700’, in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds), *English Rural Society* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 201; M. M. Sheehan, ‘English Wills and the Records of the Ecclesiastical and Civil Jurisdictions’, *Journal of Mediaeval History*, 14 (1988), p. 3; M. Zell, ‘The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century’, *Bulletin of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), p. 249.

willingness to marry could be equated with Protestant tendencies. Wills are unrepresentative as only the comparatively wealthy made them, a particular concern when scrutinizing wills from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. In an attempt to widen the field and to include clergy from the lower ranks, this study has used testamentary evidence from diocesan courts and, in the archdiocese of York, from the Prerogative and Exchequer courts as well as from the court of Chancery. As a result, around 800 clerical wills have been consulted in manuscript form and these have been supplemented by wills that are available online and in modern printed collections.⁵⁷ In order to identify behaviour specific to the clergy and to observe developments and emerging trends, for example, in patterns of philanthropy, more than 200 contemporary lay wills have also been studied.

Wills are, of course, only a final adjustment of a lifetime's arrangements as most testators produced their final will at a time of crisis or when confronted by the imminence of their own demise.⁵⁸ Testators used their wills to balance lifetime and deathbed gifts and often referred to measures and provisions which were already in place. At the end of his will, for example, Thomas Langley, vicar of Warnborough (Wiltshire), declared that his wife Anne was entrusted with delivering to his children 'such moneye and at such daies and tymes as I have secretlie appointed ... besydes that I have bequeathed'.⁵⁹

As wills exist primarily as a means of transferring property and minimizing conflict, any additional information derived from them must be incidental and, as David Cressy characterizes it, 'narrow, filtered and incomplete'.⁶⁰ Yet wills are more than dry,

⁵⁷ *Surrey and South London Will Abstracts 1470-1858*, <http://www.origins.net> accessed September 2013, now available at <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>; F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Yeomen* (Chelmsford, 1980); F. G. Emmison, *Wills of the County of Essex (England), vols 1-3* (Washington, 1982, 1983, 1986); C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600, 1, Minster Clergy*, (York, 1984); C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600, 2, City Clergy* (York, 1989).

⁵⁸ D. Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), p. 60.

⁵⁹ TNA, PROB 11/64, Thomas Langley, 1582.

⁶⁰ Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin Interaction', p. 61; see also C. Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in M. Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990), p. 15; K. Wrightson, *Ralph Tailor's Summer: A Scrivener, his City and the*

legal documents devoid of emotion and obsessed with silver spoons and featherbeds; evidence of a testator's life and relationships emerges from within complex patterns of bequests. As ministers often wrote their own wills, we are privileged to hear their concerns and considerations unmistakably expressed in their words rather than as interpreted by an intermediary. Even if forced through age or infirmity to rely on a friend, colleague or scrivener to act as an amanuensis, ministers often exercised considerable forethought, avoided formulaic phrases and revealed their personal feelings. For example, in 1600, John Knight, clerk of Cotes (Gloucestershire), used his will to bemoan the ingratitude of his sons for whom he had funded an education and purchased two livings.⁶¹ Even if the intricacies and tensions of family life are not always so plainly stated, they can often be deduced from the tone and nature of the bequests themselves.

Of course, ministers' wives have no voice in these documents so we can only observe them from their husbands' perspective. The regret expressed by Jonathan Willis at the absence of the 'female point of view' is not misplaced but he underestimates the capacity of wills to give 'an intimate picture of the relationships of the first generation of married clergy and their wives'.⁶² Both openly and inadvertently, ministers frequently disclose much about the strength of character, piety, social status, and dependability of their wives and by word and deed, they also lay bare the dynamics at work within their marriages. Where wives have written their own wills, we are closer to hearing their own thoughts but identifying ministers' wives, or more usually widows, in will indexes relies on precise references or prior knowledge. An unusual surname can often be the key but if widows remarried or left the parish, name linkage breaks down and the trail invariably

Plague (New Haven and London, 2011), p. 139; TNA, PROB 11/71, John Stoyte, 1587. Stoyte, parson of Uffington (Lincolnshire), made bequests to his two younger sons 'so that they agree and be content betwixte them selves brother lyke and quietly'. They would, he hoped, refrain from making claims on the farm which was in the hands of their elder brother.

⁶¹ TNA, PROB 11/96, John Knight, 1600.

⁶² J. Willis, "'A guide, a mistress in godliness...': in search of clergy wives in Reformation England", <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/a-guide-a-mistress-in-godliness-in-search-of-clergy-wives-in-reformation-england>, 27 April, 2015.

goes cold. As a further indication of the elusiveness of ministers' wives, only 13 wills made by clergy widows form part of this study compared with those of 767 clerical testators.

In the absence of letters and diaries in which ministers communicate their thoughts directly, wills provide invaluable access to their lives and those of their spouses. All resources can be problematic and historians thrive on dispute, on competing interpretations and on piecing together stories from fragmentary sources. Handled with sensitivity and an awareness of their limitations, wills offer a genuine insight into households and familial partnerships; an appreciation eloquently expressed by Keith Wrightson who equates them with instruments that 'inscribe relationships' through which 'the connective tissue of family and community' is revealed.⁶³

Additional Sources

Letters testimonial or certificates of good character required for prospective clergy brides have been largely overlooked as a resource for studying Elizabethan clergy wives. Until my research uncovered ten letters testimonial in the Worcester archive and one at Gloucester, it was accepted that the only surviving certificates were housed in Lincoln. The poor survival rate has engendered a belief that certificates were either not provided or that they were mere formalities concerned with verifying only honesty and sobriety. Close examination demonstrates that many of these valuable documents do not restrict themselves to the prescribed considerations but reveal the character and background of the women themselves and illustrate communal perceptions of what was required of a parson's wife. The Worcester examples predate those in Lincoln and have permitted a re-examination of the whole procedure behind the making of a clerical marriage. The marriage licence, another form of official document, has survived in larger numbers. As

⁶³ Wrightson, *Ralph Taylor's Summer*, p. 96.

it cost twice as much to marry by licence as by banns, certain social groups, including the clergy, are over-represented among the licence populations.⁶⁴ The dioceses of London and Canterbury possess the most comprehensive lists of marriage licences. Although covering shorter timeframes and recording less additional information, licences also survive from the dioceses of Worcester, Chichester, Ely, Norwich, Exeter and York. Once again, marriage licences enabled the identification of individuals and crucially, where details such as the marital status and the social background of the potential spouse were noted, it is possible to undertake statistical analysis.

Reconstructing the lives of the wives of Elizabethan clergymen requires a willingness to engage with evidence from a wide variety of fragmentary sources, some seemingly unconnected and initially unpromising. All have their specific shortcomings and few allow the women to speak for themselves. But, when woven together and interrogated judiciously, this varied material enables the first generations of clergy wives to begin to emerge from obscurity.

Structure

The evidence generated from such diverse sources does not lend itself to rigid compartmentalisation. Examples of clerical endogamy, for instance, are of relevance to discussions on the choice of marriage partner, the willingness of women to marry clergymen, the remarriage of the clerical widow, and the impact of female literacy and piety.⁶⁵ The letter testimonial was primarily concerned with the making of marriage but has much to say about the characters of the women concerned, the expectations of parishioners and female agency. The role played by a spouse in her husband's pastoral ministry demonstrates involvement in parish life but helps in a reappraisal of attitudes towards clergy wives and is also relevant to the discussion on clerical philanthropy.

⁶⁴ V. Brodsky-Elliott, 'Marriage Licences and the Local Historian', *The Local Historian*, 10 (1973), p. 286.

⁶⁵ See below, pp. 77, 113, 133-8, 242-3.

Individual stories and incidents, therefore, illustrate more than one theme of the thesis. The reluctance of the material to fall into discrete topics has been reconciled with the need for a coherent chapter structure by the imposition of boundaries and extensive cross-referencing. The arrangement of the thesis, therefore, is best envisaged as a series of window panes, each allows us to observe a separate scene, but when overlapped, the wider panorama is revealed.

As Elizabethan clergy wives, not the institution of clerical marriage or the doctrinal debate surrounding its validity, are the focus of this thesis, the primary aim has been to keep the women themselves at the forefront of the discussion. The opening chapter, therefore, is something of an anomaly but its function is to explain the backdrop against which clergy wives established their identity. It examines the extent of clerical marriage and the reasons behind the apparent reluctance of some clergy to marry including a brief consideration of clerical concubinage.

The making of clerical marriages forms the basis of the second chapter. This chapter explores the factors which influenced the choice of a spouse including the need for parity in religious outlook, social and economic status and the importance of affection. The discussion then moves on to the practicalities of contracting marriage with a minister. As Injunction 29 required a letter testimonial to confirm that the prospective spouse was both 'honest' and 'sober', the actual process of obtaining the certificates and the significance of their content has been subjected to greater scrutiny than in previous studies. The chapter concludes by placing the stipulations of the Injunction in the context of traditional marriage customs in an attempt to understand some of the inherent contradictions between legal requirement and common practice. This leads into the third chapter which investigates the social and marital status of clergy brides in an attempt to establish the accuracy of the often expressed view that only women of ill repute or who found themselves in desperate circumstances would consider marriage to a clergyman.

Evidence of social background and marital status found in marriage licences, supplemented by material from other sources including parish registers, allows this supposition to be tested.

The fourth chapter seeks to uncover the precepts behind the role of the minister's wife and to determine how ministers' wives forged an identity which both accorded with communal expectations and complemented their husbands' calling at home and in the parish. The portrayal of clergy wives on memorials is scrutinized and used to augment the more familiar archive material. A survey of the contributions made by clergy wives to the pastoral ministry in the form of caring for the sick and the poor, prepares the ground for the subsequent investigation which, using both qualitative and quantitative analyses of clergy wills, assesses the impact of clerical marriage on hospitality and charitable giving. The final section of this, the fifth chapter, seeks to explain the emphasis that ministers placed upon family provision in relation to the lack of official recognition given to the needs of the clergy widow.

The concluding chapter continues and develops the theme initiated in chapter four by reviewing the reception accorded to clergy wives and the nature of the antagonism which they encountered. A review of the language of abuse and its impact establishes the context for a consideration of clerical marriage as not only a doctrinal change but as a major social innovation. Assumptions that clergy wives were met with deep and enduring hostility are challenged by re-assessing some of the existing evidence and by evaluating material derived from more diverse sources. Examples of ways in which communities demonstrated their acceptance of ministers' wives help to construct a more nuanced interpretation of their lived experience.

Although research has begun to consider the wives of the Elizabethan episcopate, the women who married members of the parish clergy have so far eluded the gaze of historians. Yet, it is impossible to understand the true significance and impact of clerical

marriage while the lives and experience of half the participants in this novel and contentious institution are missing from the discussion. With a willingness to interrogate a large number of sources and an appreciation that each will only provide a fragment of the overall picture, this thesis aims to demonstrate that Elizabethan parish clergy wives have not entirely vanished from the historical record and that their voices can and should be heard.

1. Better to Marry than to Burn?: Attitudes to Clerical Marriage among the Elizabethan clergy

‘Wedlocke is honorable amonge all persons, exceptinge none, neyther Prieste, Monke, nor Fryere’ declared Thomas Becon in his *Boke of Matrimony*.⁶⁶ Although such a confident assertion would appear to have left little room for any misgivings, the validity of clerical marriage was not so easily resolved. Becon repudiated the superiority of a life of virginity and condemned the hypocrisy of those who did not equate a life of celibacy with one of chastity. Not all, however, were convinced that clerical marriage was actually desirable rather than a necessary evil. While evangelical writers and the godly elite continued to engage in theological debate, it is by no means clear to what extent the clergy as a whole agonized over these issues before making their personal decisions. Were those who were quick to marry advocates of Protestantism or simply eager to abandon a life of celibacy? Were ministers who chose to remain unmarried conservative in religion, clinging to established practice or cautious after the upheavals of the preceding years? It is rarely possible to determine the relative importance of these considerations for the individual cleric but an appraisal of the evolving theoretical debate alongside more pragmatic considerations can be attempted. This chapter will examine these competing dynamic forces and in doing so, will engage with current historical debate touching the influence of confessional identity and the extent of clerical concubinage. It serves, therefore, as a prelude to the subsequent investigation of the social world of clergy wives. The discussion will commence with an attempt to gauge both the extent of clerical marriage and the rate at which ministers availed themselves of the opportunity to marry.

⁶⁶ Thomas Becon, ‘The Boke of Matrimony’, *The Worckes of Thomas Becon* (London, 1564), STC 913:01, f. 602r.

The Extent of Clerical Marriage

From the number of deprivations which occurred during the reign of Mary, historians have attempted to establish the extent to which the clergy embraced marriage during its first period of legality. However, the overall proportion of married clergy under Edward VI has not been established with any degree of accuracy and considerable regional variation is evident. Eric Carlson maintains there was ‘surprisingly little’ and in conservative areas this seems to be an accurate assessment for only 10 per cent of the clergy in the diocese of York, and fewer than 5 per cent in Lancashire, were subsequently deprived for marriage. In areas more forward in religion, the percentages are much higher, around 30 per cent in London and 25 per cent in Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. Given the short period of time available for clergymen to acknowledge the legal position, weigh their options, find a suitable spouse and marry, it seems that overall the opportunity to marry had been remarkably well-received.⁶⁷

There have been fewer attempts to ascertain how many or what proportion of clergy married during the reign of Elizabeth. Various scholars have looked at individual dioceses using information drawn from Parker’s diocesan returns at the beginning of the reign. Unfortunately as the areas of study do not correspond to those examined for the Edwardian period, a direct comparison is not possible. The statistics for the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign (Table 1) reveal considerable regional variation with a higher proportion of married clergy to be found in areas where Protestantism had gained a firmer footing. In these areas, many clergy had indeed made a ‘confident decision’ to marry from the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign.⁶⁸ The work of C. W. Foster permits a more detailed

⁶⁷ E. J. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 53; P. Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 166; G. Baskerville, ‘Married Clergy and Pensioned Religious in Norwich Diocese, 1555’, *English Historical Review*, 48 (1933), pp. 45-6; H. E. P. Grieve, ‘The Deprived Married Clergy in Essex, 1553-1561’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 22 (1940), p. 145; R. M. Spielmann, ‘The Beginnings of Clerical Marriage in the English Reformation: The Reigns of Edward and Mary’, *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 56 (1987), p. 259.

⁶⁸ H. L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation: Precedent, Policy and Practice* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 233-4.

Table 1. The Number of Elizabethan Clergy Married by 1561-2

Diocese	Married	Unmarried	Total	Percentage Married
Canterbury	114	75	189	60
Gloucester	59	167	226	26
Lincoln	128	618	746	17
London	78	50	128	61
Norwich	249	446	695	36
Peterborough	30	135	165	18
Rochester	30	41	71	42
Salisbury	82	245	327	25
Bath and Wells	61	65	127	48
Winchester	78	218	296	26
Worcester	28	138	166	17
Overall	937	2198	3136	30

Source: CCCC, Certificates and Returns of the Livings of the Province of Canterbury, 1561-2, MS 97, ff. 21r-31v, 104v-123r, 128r-132r, 184r-249r; MS 122, pp. 78-109, 113-146, 200-67.

C. W. Foster, 'The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln', *Lincoln Record Society*, 23 (1926), p. 455.

Table 2. Percentage of Married and Unmarried Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1560 and 1576

Date	1560		1576	
Archdeaconry	Percentage Married	Percentage Unmarried	Percentage Married	Percentage Unmarried
Cathedral	27	73	-	-
Lincoln	20	80	57	28
Stow	24	76		
Buckingham	16	84	-	-
Leicester	7	93	43	38
Overall	17	80	53	31

Source: C. W. Foster, 'The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln', *Lincoln Record Society*, 23 (1926), p. 455. Foster was unable to include returns for the Archdeaconries of Bedford and Huntingdon as they are missing.

examination of developments within the diocese of Lincoln and has the advantage of pinpointing the number of married clergy at two separate dates. From a low starting point in 1560 when only 18 per cent were married, the Lincoln clergy responded with enthusiasm and by 1576, 64 per cent had taken a wife.⁶⁹ This is a higher proportion than in conservative Cheshire where Patricia Cox found that by 1578 only half the county's incumbents had married.⁷⁰

Regional variation across the diocese of Lincoln (Table 2) highlights the danger of assuming uniformity across large geographical areas. In 1560, only 7 per cent of the clergy in the archdeaconry of Leicester were married, the reasons for which deserve consideration. Hoskins pointed to the 'small' and 'very small' livings on which Leicestershire ministers were struggling to maintain large families as late as the second decade of the seventeenth century.⁷¹ While O'Day considered that 'economic considerations' deterred early marriage, more generally scholars have found that poverty was no bar to marriage. Although initially producing more mouths to feed, for a rural incumbent, who was primarily a farmer, a wife and family were an economic advantage.⁷² An explanation for the reluctance to marry must, therefore, lie elsewhere. One possibility is that the confessional conservatism of the Leicestershire clergy rendered them fundamentally opposed to marriage and the preambles to clerical wills made in the 1560s

⁶⁹ C. W. Foster, 'The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln', *Lincoln Record Society*, 23 (1926), p. 455.

⁷⁰ P. J. Cox, 'Reformation Responses in Tudor Cheshire c. 1500-1577' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2013), p. 377.

⁷¹ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Country Parson', *Transactions of the Leicester Archaeological Society*, 21 (1940-1), pp. 109-10.

⁷² R. O'Day, *The English Clergy*, (Leicester, 1979), p. 162; A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn (London, 1989), p. 275; Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 202; D. J. Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy, with particular Consideration of the Dioceses of Norwich and York' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1980), p. 356. Having analysed the benefices held by over 200 deprived priests, Peet concluded that 'no marked difference can be seen between the distribution of incomes held by married and non-married clergymen'; C. Williams-Mitchell, 'The Wives of the English Clergy 1540-1640' (Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Chichester, 2009), pp. 106-7. In the rural deanery of Boxgrove in the diocese of Chichester, even those in the poorest parishes married although evidence suggests that curates waited until they had a parish before doing so; C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 181.

suggest that this may have been a contributory factor. All the testators were unmarried and their preambles include none with explicit Protestant tendencies but five of a neutral and two of a conservative nature. During the following decade, unmarried clergy wrote six neutral and five Protestant preambles and the one married minister used a neutral preamble. By 1576, 43 per cent of the clergy of the archdeaconry were married which may perhaps reflect a shift in confessional identity or maybe just a growing, if belated, acceptance of clerical marriage itself.

The absence of a core of married clergy in the vicinity could have slowed the uptake of marriage particularly when such a step could be interpreted as an endorsement of doctrinal change. Lacking the example of other married ministers to lend moral support, individuals may have hesitated at taking the initiative themselves. Helen Parish observed that local influences could be a 'powerful' determinant of reaction to religious change and that married clergymen tended to be found in clusters.⁷³ As discussions of clerical marriage so easily become focussed on the men, it is important to remember that reluctance and hesitancy could affect either party. The example of Anne Andrew in Chester in 1549 demonstrates that women also needed to feel that they would not be an isolated object of curiosity or hostility. Contracted in marriage to the clerk Hugh Bunbury, Anne nevertheless asked him to 'tarry, and not to marry her until there were some other priests married'.⁷⁴

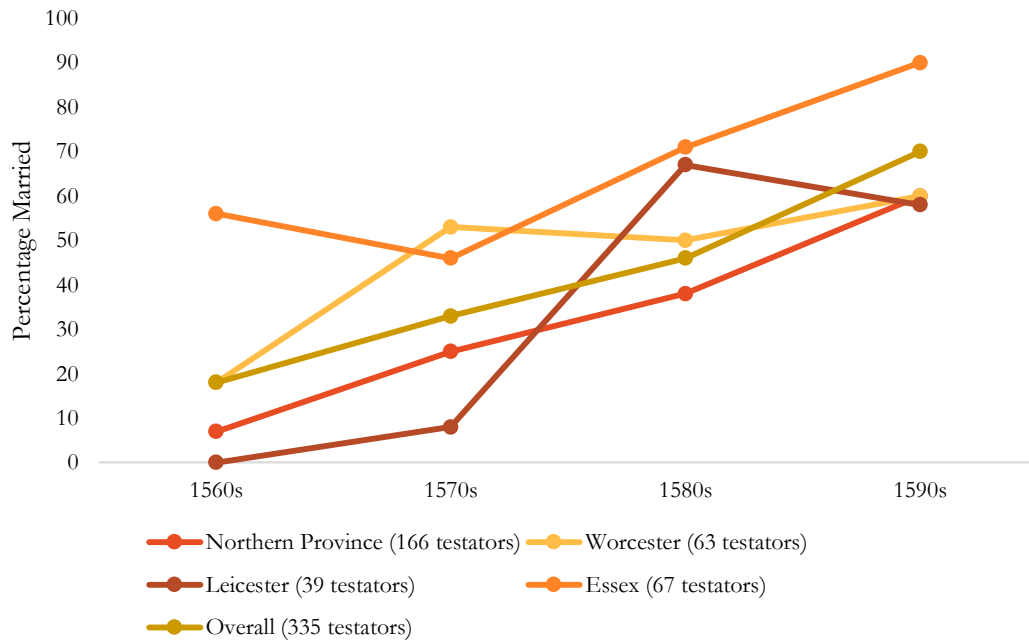
During the early years of the reign, the presence of suspect women in Leicestershire vicarages was of particular concern and may indicate a prevalence of quasi-marital relationships among the clergy which in turn may have obviated the need for

⁷³ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 29, 217-19; Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy', pp. 342, 346. Peet observed a similar phenomenon among married clergy in the first half of the sixteenth century.

⁷⁴ C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 227. Anne subsequently called off the engagement.

marriage.⁷⁵ Whatever their reasons, although still lagging behind the rest of the diocese, the Leicestershire clergy appear gradually to have overcome their reluctance to marry.

Figure 1. **Percentage of Married Clerical Testators**



Sources: PCC, wills; BI, Archbishop's Registers', 30-1; BI Prerogative and Exchequer wills; BI, Chancery wills; WRO, Probate Registry; LRO, Leicestershire wills; C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600, 1, Minster Clergy*, (York, 1984); C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600, 2, City Clergy*, (York, 1989); F. G. Emmison, *Wills of the County of Essex (England), vols 1-3* (Washington, 1982, 1983, 1986).

For all that a lack of data makes it impossible to arrive at extensive and accurate figures for the number of married clergy across the reign as a whole, by analysing the marital status of testators, it is possible to chart the progress of clerical marriage over time and to detect regional variations. The use of the data in this way minimizes the significance of the inherent time lag in the sources, a delay which results from recording marital status at the time of death. Figure 1 indicates that overall there was a steady progression towards a married ministry although the northern clergy, even by the end of the century, remained slightly less eager to marry than their southern colleagues. As in the

⁷⁵ See below, pp. 50-67, for a fuller discussion of clerical concubinage.

Edwardian period, the ministers of Essex seemed well-disposed to the idea of marriage. The apparent willingness of the clergy in Worcestershire to embrace marriage is perhaps surprising in a diocese which, according to Whitgift, was addicted to popery.⁷⁶ However, the Elizabethan cathedral clergy appear to have embraced marriage with enthusiasm which may well have encouraged the lower clergy of the diocese to overcome any personal diffidence.⁷⁷ Across the country in general, the number of married testators appears to parallel the progress of the Reformation both regionally and chronologically.

Clerical Marriage as an Indicator of Reformist Beliefs

The observation made by Dickens that early married clergy comprised ‘an astonishingly mixed group; learned and ignorant, godly and disreputable’ is borne out by the evidence of wills and cases before the church courts. However, his belief that ‘the assumption that married priests necessarily held “advanced” doctrinal opinions would carry us far beyond the evidence and beyond common sense itself’, deserves closer inspection. According to Dickens, neither the deprived clergy of Essex nor those in York, ‘showed any special devotion to the Reformation’, yet at the same time he somewhat incongruously acknowledges the fear and pressure that fostered a spirit of conformity. He dismisses Robert Parkyn’s observations that married clergy ‘made no elevation at masse after consecration’ and that those ‘of hereticall opinions’ had taken wives, on the grounds that Parkyn’s hatred of all things Protestant renders him an unreliable witness.⁷⁸ Although David Palliser maintained that ‘the correlation between the religious outlook of the clergy and their propensity to marriage was not a close one’, recent scholarship has produced a

⁷⁶ J. Strype, *The Life and Acts of the Most Reverend Father in God, John Whitgift* (London, 1718), vol. 1, p. 87.

⁷⁷ D. MacCulloch, ‘Worcester: a Cathedral City in the Reformation’, in P. Collinson and J. Craig (eds), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 110.

⁷⁸ A. G. Dickens, *The Marian Reaction in the Diocese of York, part 1, The Clergy*, (London, 1957), pp. 16, 19 ; A. G. Dickens, ‘Robert Parkyn’s Narrative of the Reformation’, *English Historical Review*, 62 (1947), pp. 68, 79.

more nuanced interpretation.⁷⁹ Peter Marshall takes issue with Dickens's dismissal of the theological aspects of clerical marriage and contends that the higher uptake of marriage within the more Protestant areas of the country indicates that those who married in the Edwardian period 'must have felt that they were making some kind of statement'.⁸⁰ For O'Day, that statement was a rejection of conservatism.⁸¹ After researching the behaviour of the clergy in the dioceses of both York and Norwich, David Peet concluded that although married clergy were neither full-blown Protestants nor overly familiar with the arguments surrounding clerical marriage, they were generally sympathetic to reformist ideas.⁸² Parish cautions that 'any attempt to map evangelical sympathies onto the topography of clerical marriage is fraught with danger' as the personal beliefs of married clergy are 'nigh impossible to fathom'.⁸³ Drawing on her own research into testamentary preambles in the dioceses of Chichester, Winchester, Salisbury and Lincoln, and after an exhaustive survey of the relevant historiography, she advises against claiming that 'married clergy as a group were more sympathetic to the Reformation', preferring instead to observe that 'many evangelical clergy chose to marry'.⁸⁴

The preambles of the clerical wills examined in the course of my research provide a wider geographical spread than in previous studies. The reliability of the preamble as a guide to the religious persuasion of the testator has generated considerable debate with scholars counselling that preambles be viewed with considerable caution.⁸⁵ Their disquiet

⁷⁹ D. M. Palliser, 'Popular Reactions to the Reformation', in C. Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 100.

⁸⁰ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 167.

⁸¹ R. O'Day, *The English Clergy*, p. 26.

⁸² Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy', pp. 272, 277, 342, 349.

⁸³ H. Parish, *Clerical Celibacy in the West: c.1100-1700* (Farnham, 2010), p. 182.

⁸⁴ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 198-211, 217.

⁸⁵ M. Zell, 'The Use of Religious Preambles as a Measure of Religious Belief in the Sixteenth Century', *Bulletin of Historical Research*, 50 (1977), passim; R. O'Day, *The Debate on the English Reformation* (London and New York, 1986), p. 156; C. Marsh, 'In the Name of God? Will-Making and Faith in Early Modern England', in G. H. Martin and P. Spufford (eds), *The Records of the Nation* (Woodbridge, 1990), pp. 216, 225-6, 237, 248-9; Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy', pp. 189-92, 208, 220; R. C. Richardson, 'Wills and Will-makers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: Some Lancashire Evidence', *Local Population Studies*, 9 (1972), pp. 34-5; M. Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), Chapter 13, passim; J. D. Alsop, 'Religious

centres on the actual writing of the document, specifically whether the scrivener merely inserted standardized phrases or used his own favoured wording rather than reflecting the confessional leanings of his client. This problem is less fundamental to the wills of the clergy especially when ministers categorically state that the will is written in their own hand or that local colleagues have penned the document on their behalf. Even where this is not explicitly recorded, it is unlikely that a minister would allow any scribe to include an expression of faith which blatantly contradicted his own doctrinal position. However, in a time of religious uncertainty through which many clergy contrived to retain their livings, individual ministers could perhaps be expected to exercise a degree of caution in the wording of a preamble. Although some may have adopted a neutral preamble to obscure their true doctrinal affinity or as a guarded reaction to years of religious upheaval, the possibility remains that others did so because they felt that the document was concerned primarily with the transfer of property for which a neutral and perfunctory commendation would suffice.⁸⁶

In charting the progress of Protestantism, Litzenberger observed that ‘the process of categorization requires careful thought’.⁸⁷ Although the purpose of this study is to measure the relationship between thought and action rather than to chart the progress of the Reformation, it is still important to strike a fine balance between over-simplification and over-complication. Therefore, following the model advocated by Michael Zell, and mirroring the classification used by Helen Parish in her study of the correlation between religious affiliation and the propensity to marry, only three classifications have been

Preambles in Early Modern English Wills as Formulae’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 40 (1989), passim; L. C. Attreed, ‘Preparation for Death in Sixteenth-century Northern England’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 13 (1982), p. 37; D. Beaver, “‘Sown in dishonour, raised in glory’: Death, Ritual and Social Organization in Northern Gloucestershire, 1590-1690”, *Social History*, 17 (1992), pp. 396-7.

⁸⁶ Peet, ‘The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy’, p. 189.

⁸⁷ C. Litzenberger, ‘Local Responses to Changes in Religious Policy based on Evidence from Gloucestershire Wills (1540-1580)’, *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), p. 420.

employed in my analysis.⁸⁸ As the allocation of preambles very much determines the results of the analysis some explanation of the categorization is required. A preamble in which a testator bequeaths his soul to God and to ‘the whole company of heaven’ or ‘the virgin Mary’ is classed as conservative. Testators who bequeath their soul to almighty God but also make reference to being saved by the merits of Christ alone or to ‘the elect’ are considered to be Protestant. Those which fall into neither of the two categories, in most cases just making a brief commendation of the soul to almighty God, have been placed in the ‘neutral’ group. The word ‘neutral’ has been chosen for want of a more appropriate term for preambles that employed a form of words that was equally acceptable to those on either side of the confessional divide.

Table 3. **Confessional Persuasion of Preambles of Clerical and Lay Testators**

Date		Conservative	Neutral	Protestant
1560s	Clergy	25% (26)	51% (54)	24% (25)
	Laity	7.5% (3)	55% (22)	37.5% (15)
1570s	Clergy	4% (7)	56% (88)	39% (61)
	Laity	7% (3)	40% (17)	52% (22)

Source: TNA, PROB.

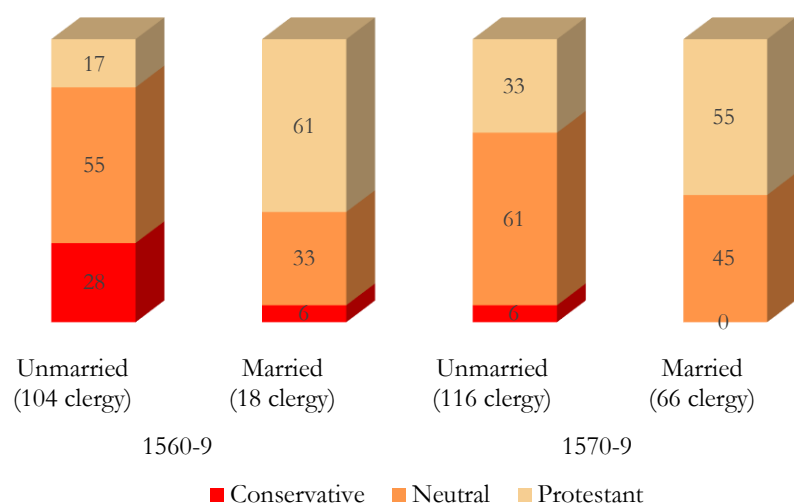
A comparison of clerical and lay wills, the latter chosen for their proximity to the wills of individual ministers, reveals some striking differences in the wording of preambles (Table 3).⁸⁹ ‘Neutral’ preambles predominated among both groups in the earlier decade but the clergy continued to write preambles of this nature. In the 1560s, they were noticeably more inclined to adhere to conservative wording and sentiment than their lay contemporaries and in the 1570s, remained less likely to write an explicitly Protestant

⁸⁸ Zell, ‘The Use of Religious Preambles’, p. 246; Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 210-7; see also G. J. Mayhew, ‘The Progress of the Reformation in East Sussex 1530-1559: the Evidence from Wills’, *Southern History*, 5 (1983), pp. 38-41; C. Litzenberger, ‘Computer-based Analysis of Early-modern English Wills, *History and Computing*, 7 (1995), p. 146.

⁸⁹ The wills used in this comparison were selected exclusively from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.

preamble. It would appear that the clergy, guided by their professional engagement with matters spiritual, used their preambles to make a definite expression of their own confessional stance.⁹⁰

Figure 2. **Tone of Clerical Preambles Differentiated by Marital Status and expressed as a percentage**



Source: TNA, PROB; Diocesan wills from Leicester, Northampton and Worcester; BI, Archbishop's Registers 30-1, Chancery wills, Prerogative and Exchequer wills.

My analysis of preambles has been restricted to the years between 1560 and 1579. This represents the period of transition when a decision to marry was most likely to be influenced by religious persuasion and before gradual acceptance of religious change rendered preambles routinely Protestant in tone. The majority, 261 of the 400 wills examined, are taken from the southern province and most were proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury although 42 are located in the diocesan courts relating to Worcester, Leicester and Northampton. Figure 2 shows that clergy whose traditional beliefs were expressed in their wills were more likely to have remained unmarried. Very few unmarried clergy wrote explicitly Protestant preambles and even after 1570, they were twice as likely

⁹⁰ C. Litzenberger, 'Local Responses', p. 427.

to include a conservative or neutral preamble as one that acknowledged reformist thought. However, in 1568, Richard Poore, vicar choral of Salisbury cathedral, began his will by bequeathing his soul ‘unto almyghty god my creator and redeamer’ and continued by beseeching the ‘blessed virgyn Marye the mother of oure Lorde Jhesus Christe and all the blessed companie of heaven to praye unto almyghtie god for me’. He concluded with bequests ‘upon the poore for the welthe of my sowle’ and it is something of a surprise then to discover that these were also made for the benefit of the soul of Dorothy, his wife.⁹¹ Openly expressed religious conservatism did not necessarily prevent a clergyman from marrying although it does seem to have made it unlikely.⁹² In both decades under review, married clergy were more inclined than their unmarried counterparts to write preambles with unquestionably Protestant expositions of faith. John Lathburye, parson of Todenham (Gloucestershire, 1569), Edward Blenhaiset, rector of Blunham (Bedfordshire, 1569), and John Swayne, parson of Churchstanton (Somerset, 1570), typically referred to Christ’s passion and bloodshedding as the means to remission of their sins.⁹³ All wrote in their own idiosyncratic style but some ministers viewed their wills as a final opportunity to expound their religious convictions and wrote a wordy preamble rather sermon-like in tone. William Cocks, pastor and parson of Ashley (Northamptonshire, 1576), wrote a lengthy preamble in which he trusted to ‘receave the ioyfull sentence of salvacon with the whole electe of god’ in anticipation of the day of resurrection despite being ‘a greate synn[er]’.⁹⁴ But the most elaborate preamble among these early wills is that of Anthony Blake, vicar of Doncaster (Yorkshire). His 1573

⁹¹ TNA, PROB 11/50, Richard Poore, 1568.

⁹² S. E. Lehmborg, *The Reformation of Cathedrals: Cathedrals in English Society, 1485-1603* (Princeton, 1988), p. 184. The Reformation ended the requirement for vicars choral to take holy orders and the twelve vicars choral at Salisbury in 1568 were ‘equally divided between priests and laymen’. The lack of certainty surrounding Poore’s actual status illustrates the problem of identifying clergy at this time.

⁹³ TNA, PROB 11/51, John Lathburye, 1569; TNA, PROB 11/52, Edward Blenhaiset, 1569; TNA, PROB 11/52, John Swayne, 1570; see also TNA, PROB 11/52, Thomas Wythers, 1569; TNA, PROB 11/49, Robert Walmysley, 1567.

⁹⁴ TNA, PROB 11/58, William Cocks, 1576.

preamble occupies twice the space of his decidedly simple list of bequests.⁹⁵ From the evidence presented in Figure 2, it would appear safe to state that those who had married at the beginning of the reign displayed a greater attachment to Protestant ideology than those who had not.⁹⁶

The survey was extended into the 1580s in the archdiocese of York in order to reflect the slower acceptance of clerical marriage in the northern province. Here there was an even more marked tendency for married ministers to reveal an acceptance of reformist ideology. In their preambles, 70 per cent of married clergy used idioms normally associated with Protestantism whereas only 32 per cent of unmarried clergy did so.⁹⁷

Precedent and Prudence

For all that confessional affiliation helped determine reactions to the introduction of clerical marriage, other, non-doctrinal, factors played their part. Few ministers would have made their decisions with complete disregard for the prevailing political and religious climate. Aware that the re-introduction of clerical marriage was not predicated on the queen's whole-hearted support, some clergy could well have felt the need to prevaricate before abandoning a life of celibacy. Most historians disagree only in the degree of animosity which they believe Elizabeth exhibited towards a married ministry.⁹⁸ Carlson and Brett Usher, however, argue that Elizabeth's antipathy has been overstated. While

⁹⁵ C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600, 1, Minster Clergy*, (York, 1984), pp. 110-11; J. Raine, 'Notices of Scoreby and of the Family of Blake', *Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Journal*, 10 (1889), pp. 95, 99. Anthony Blake was also prebendary of Tockington. He was deprived as rector of Whiston and vicar of Doncaster in 1554 on account of his marriage; Dickens, *Marian Reaction*, pp. 12-13, Blake had been separated from his wife, Elizabeth Metcalf, during the reign of Mary.

⁹⁶ A. G. Dickens, *Lollards and Protestants in the Diocese of York* (Oxford, 1959), p. 171.

⁹⁷ Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy', p. 320-2. Peet also observed that in the preambles of the Norfolk clergy, there was a 'marked difference between the religious attitudes of married and non-married clergymen'.

⁹⁸ D. MacCulloch, *Reformation Europe's House Divided 1490-1700* (London, 2003), p. 290; J. Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family in a Tudor Elite: Familial Patterns of Elizabethan Bishops', *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), p. 7; W. P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation: the Struggle for a Stable Settlement of Religion* (Cambridge, 1968), p. 204; H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (1907), pp. 138, 141; Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 204; M. Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified Marriages: the Position of Tudor Bishops' Wives' in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), p. 133; R. L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 19; J. Guy, *Tudor England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 252.

Usher concentrates on the make-up of the episcopal bench, Carlson maintains that Elizabeth's antipathy derived solely from a determination to avoid possible discredit to her church.⁹⁹ Yet, contemporary opinion as expressed by Parker, Cecil and Sandys, all in a position to discern the queen's true feelings, were keenly aware that Elizabeth's support was tenuous. Their well-documented opinions and concerns were unlikely to have remained a secret and, as Robert Parkyn's narrative clearly shows, the provinces were remarkably well-informed on the detail and subtlety of events taking place in both the capital and kingdom at large.¹⁰⁰

Misgivings attributed to the monarch could easily have coloured judgements and reinforced local prejudices. Moreover, the process involved in establishing a married ministry was not entirely conducive to clerical confidence. Although the Injunctions of 1559 confirmed the legality of clerical marriage, the absence of statutory foundation and the banning of clergy families from cathedral and college precincts could have caused some clergy to hesitate, if only temporarily, before committing to marriage.¹⁰¹ However, as Parish perceives, the restoration of married clergy and the sight of so many married men among the upper echelons of the ecclesiastical hierarchy could have offered reassurance that the queen's personal views posed little real danger.¹⁰² The 1563 Articles of Religion stated that it was 'lawful also for them [the clergy], as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness'. It is on this declaration that Carlson bases his judgement that clerical marriage was 'a secure and unchallengeable feature of the Elizabethan church', a security, however,

⁹⁹ B. Usher, 'Queen Elizabeth and Mrs Bishop', in S. Doran and T. S. Freeman (eds), *The Myth of Elizabeth* (Basingstoke, 2003), passim; Carlson, *Marriage*, pp. 59-63; E. J. Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 2, 21.

¹⁰⁰ Dickens, 'Robert Parkyn's Narrative', passim; Lea, *Sacerdotal Celibacy*, p. 145, describes such influence as being 'of the worst description'.

¹⁰¹ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 227-9; M. Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church: Patterns of Change* (1996, Victoria), pp. 69-70.

¹⁰² Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 233-4.

which required Elizabeth's long-term survival.¹⁰³ Only a few years previously, the deprivations of married clergy had shown that reversal in accepted doctrine consequent on regime change could have humiliating and painful results. Eamon Duffy believes that as late as 1560, the clergy and laity alike could be forgiven for remaining confused as to the future direction of the regime's religious policy.¹⁰⁴ Christopher Haigh also talks of the clergy being 'confused by change' and even 'demoralised'.¹⁰⁵ Lea believed that they had been subject to 'too many vicissitudes to feel safe with so slender a guarantee as the Articles afforded'.¹⁰⁶ The spectacle of clerical deprivation, fresh in the collective memory, was kept alive by the presence of women who had been forced to separate from their clerical husbands. It is difficult to establish the ultimate fate of these women, but in his study of the diocese of Norwich, while noting that it was impossible to ascertain what proportion of clergy returned to their wives, Baskerville believed that it was 'usual practice'. Yet, even where this was the case, the reality was beset by complications which defied easy resolution. In West Rudham, a later entry in the register states that the vicar, Peter Stancliff, was 'in the daies of Queen Mary enforced to put away his wife, who thereupon married another man, but when Queen Elizabeth came to the Crown, he took her away again from her second husband'.¹⁰⁷ This somewhat matter-of-fact entry belies the underlying emotional turmoil which presumably accompanied the event. Church court records indicate that for some couples separations did become permanent. In 1561, in Broughton Malherbe (Kent), the parson, Thomas Langley, was said to be married to a woman who was with child in Queen Mary's reign and whose husband was thought to be alive.¹⁰⁸ In 1567, it was reported that Sage Pryce had married Richard Lynsecum in Stoney

¹⁰³ Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 64.

¹⁰⁴ E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven and London, 2005), p. 567.

¹⁰⁵ C. Haigh, *English Reformations*, p. 250.

¹⁰⁶ Lea, *Sacerdotal Celibacy*, pp. 147-8.

¹⁰⁷ G. Baskerville, 'Married Clergy', p. 46.

¹⁰⁸ *Church Life in Kent being the Church Court Records of the Canterbury Diocese 1559-1565*, ed. A. J. Willis (London and Chichester, 1975), p. 13.

Stratford church four or six years previously but that her first husband, the clerk Richard Pryce, was still alive. Sage had married Pryce in Montgomeryshire some eighteen years earlier and the couple had a son.¹⁰⁹

The deprivations themselves were often protracted and degrading. They were not swift, clinical affairs that could easily be forgotten. Even though the wife of John Vincent, vicar of Sheepy Magna (Leicestershire), had died, he was still deprived and his removal had been accompanied by the unedifying spectacle of casuistry on the part of his clerical colleague. Gabriel Raynes, vicar of Tamworth (Staffordshire), gave evidence to the court that Vincent and Joan Standley had not been married, yet from the pulpit of Vincent's own church, he had stated that the couple had been married, that he himself had married them and that it was 'alowed by acte of parliament that prestes shuld marie'.¹¹⁰ In the circumstances, a degree of clerical caution would have been understandable, but those who had married under Edward VI appear to have been ready to do so again under Elizabeth.¹¹¹ Events had certainly not deterred Miles Bennes. In 1570, it was recorded that Alice Brown was married to one Miles 'being parson of Edith Weston' (Rutland) and that 'the said Miles hath another wife'.¹¹² A later entry in the Leicester record, for Bennes was also vicar of Melton Mowbray, clarifies the situation as it states that he 'had a wife in the time of Queen Mary and was divorced and now has another wife'.¹¹³ The legacy of turmoil, alongside continued uncertainty, may have had a greater impact in regions where the Reformation had made fewer inroads and clergy contemplating marriage for the first time may have hesitated, if only briefly.

Recent history and lingering unease do, however, appear to have preyed on the minds of some married clergymen and this manifests itself in the wording of their wills.

¹⁰⁹ LMA, DL/C/210, ff. 86v-88v, 92v-93r.

¹¹⁰ BI, CP.G.3455.

¹¹¹ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 233.

¹¹² NthRO, Peterborough Diocesan Records (PDR), Correction Book, ML 559, f.53v.

¹¹³ LRO, Archdeaconry Court, Act Books, Office Causes, 1D41/13/6/42v.

In 1567, Edmund Pierson, the parson of St Bartholomew the Little, London, desired to be buried ‘nighe unto the grave of my daughter Anne’ and that a stone be laid on his grave ‘engraven with the daye of my deathe, myne age, and that I was lawfully married, and the names of my twoe daughters, Brigitte and Anne’. Pierson desired to make his own statement on the legality of clerical marriage perhaps reflecting a feeling that even in the capital and in 1567 there were those who still doubted that ministers could be ‘lawfully married’. It also represented an expression of uncertainty about the future of Protestantism; a sentiment which he revealed elsewhere in his will. Pierson made generous bequests to the poor and left his household stuff and implements to Jesus Commons as long as it was maintained by ‘syncere preachers of godes word’ but should ‘the sayde howse come into the government of any papiste’ these items were to be removed and put to the use of the poor.¹¹⁴ As late as 1586 Robert Tower, parson of Great Leighs (Essex), had not dismissed the possibility that the country could be returned to Catholicism. He bequeathed a house to his wife and his son and, in the event of their deaths, to Queen’s College to buy land to educate poor men’s children in divinity. However, this final provision was to be rescinded should ‘religion alter and masse be received’.¹¹⁵

Clergymen also sought to establish clearly the identity of their wives and children by the use of aliases, a propensity remarked upon by J. F. Williams in his work on married clergy in the diocese of Norwich.¹¹⁶ By stating the maiden name of his wife as well as her married name and by using both his own and his wife’s names for their children, a cleric was attempting to remove all doubt as to the true identity of his spouse and offspring and

¹¹⁴ TNA, PROB 11/49, Edmund Pierson, 1567; ‘Hospitals: Jesus Commons’ in *A History of the County of London: Volume 1: London within the Bars, Westminster and Southwark* (1909), pp. 551 available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=35383>, accessed 30 January 2012. Jesus Commons was where a number of priests lived together in Dowgate Ward in a house left to them for that purpose. It appears to have died out for lack of members during the reign of Elizabeth.

¹¹⁵ TNA, Probate, 11/69, Robert Tower, 1586.

¹¹⁶ J. F. Williams, ‘The Married Clergy of the Marian Period’, *Norfolk Archaeology*, 32 (1958-61), pp. 91-2.

was endeavouring to eliminate any impediments that could prevent the fulfilment of the intents and purposes of his last will and testament. While some ministers clearly still harboured doubts as to the true legal status of their wives and children, their anxiety could equally be attributed to scepticism as to the extent of public acceptance of clerical marriage and to the security of the institution itself. After such a faltering start, a cautious approach towards the future seemed remarkably persistent. In 1570, Christopher Yaxley, parson of Saint Mary Whitechapel without Aldgate, London, referred to his wife as 'Jane the daughter of the forsaied John Bigges nowe my wife' or 'Jane daughter to John Bigges', an alebrewer, on nineteen separate occasions. His three children, including his daughter Jane, were named as 'Yaxley als Bigges'.¹¹⁷ In 1573, William Woodriffe, parson of Lydeard St Lawrence (Somerset), described all his eight children as 'Wooddriffe als Standred'.¹¹⁸ In the same year, Adrian Hawthorne, minister of Wells (Somerset), made bequests to his son 'Gilbert Hawthorn, my sonne, otherwise called Gilbert Smithe' and to 'Pasca Hawthorne my wieff otherwise called Pasca Smithe'. Hawthorne's brother in law, Walter Bower, clerk and canon of Wells, referred to his wife as Elizabeth Hawthorne alias Bower and he listed his children as Edmund, Thomas and Adrian Hawthorne alias Bower.¹¹⁹ Other instances occur in Devon in 1570, Dorset in 1574, in Rutland in 1582, in London in 1583, and in Dorset and Somerset in 1585. The uses of aliases is also to be found in the wills of testators whose wills were proved in the diocesan courts.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ TNA, PROB 11/52, Christopher Yaxley, 1570.

¹¹⁸ TNA, PROB 11/55, William Wooddroffe or Woodriffe, 1573.

¹¹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/59, Adrian Hawthorn, 1573; TNA, PROB 11/62, Walter Bower, 1580.

¹²⁰ TNA, PROB 11/52, Gregory Dodde, 1570; TNA, PROB 11/56, John Slade, 1574; TNA, PROB 11/64, William Palmer, 1582; TNA, PROB 11/65, George Carewe, 1583; TNA PROB 11/68, William Slade, 1585; TNA, PROB 11/68, Robert Ellyott, 1585. For wills proved in the diocesan courts see WRO, Probate Registry, 1567, John Taylor, 99; BI, Archbishop's Register, 30, f.137r, Edward Maude, 1570; BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, vol. 23, f. 914, Robert Smythe, 1588; BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, John Louthe, 1590.

The final occurrence is in the 1593 will of William Harrison who makes three allusions to his wife's respectable background as well as affirming the legality of his marriage in the eyes of god. The full citation reads:

the sayed Marion Isebrande als Marion Harrison daughter to William Isebrande,
and Ann his wife sometyme of Anderne neere unto Guisnes in Picardie and
whome by the lawes of god I take and repute in all respectes for my true and
lawfull wife together with my sonn Edmund Harrison.

Harrison, minister of Radwinter (Essex) and prebendary of Windsor, had married Marion thirty years before, so why did he feel obliged to include such credentials and emphasize the divine sanction of clerical marriage at such a late date? Harrison's own background and attitudes may well hold the key. As a convert from Catholicism in the reign of Mary, he maintained an intense hatred of papists and remained a strong advocate of the benefits of clerical marriage. In *The Description of England*, he emphasized the positive impact of wives on the ordering of the clerical household but felt obliged to devote more space to defending them against negative perceptions.¹²¹ It is impossible to determine whether his wife had been subject to personal vilification, but the strong recusant presence among his flock and the local magistracy would have added to his sense of insecurity.¹²² Harrison's personal need to continue to defend clerical marriage extended the practice of earlier clergy into a new decade.

Clergy could also emphasize the legality of their marriages by a particular turn of phrase. Anthony Blake, vicar of Doncaster (Yorkshire), in his 1570 will made bequests to his wife Elizabeth with whom he insisted 'coupled in the fere of God and in the

¹²¹ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. G. Edelen (Ithaca, 1968), pp. 37-8; TNA, PROB 11/82, William Harrison, 1593; Glyn Parry, 'Harrison, William (1535-1593)', *ODNB*, William Harrison (1535-1593); doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/12453, accessed 3 September 2014; G. Edelen, 'William Harrison (1535-1593)', *Studies in the Renaissance*, 9 (1962), pp. 259, 261-2.

¹²² G. J. R. Parry, *A Protestant Vision: William Harrison and the Reformation of Elizabethan England* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 159, 261.

honourable state of matrimone'.¹²³ Three other wills, from 1573, 1575 and 1585, make reference to 'true and lawfull' wives while in 1580 William Stanton, parson of Outwell (Norfolk), addressed his wife as 'Rebecca nowe by the lawes of god my wieff'.¹²⁴ The 1579 epitaph of Bishop Nicholas Bullingham in Worcester Cathedral includes the observation that he was 'a man twice married in Godes feare'. Such sentiments indicate that while it is not always possible to separate personal preoccupations and misgivings from wider perceptions, for some clergy, the legality of their marriages remained ideologically charged for longer than is at first apparent. Significantly, however, reservations over the future of clerical marriage or concern over legalities had not deterred these clergymen from marrying.

Conscience and Contradiction

Although they had voted for its adoption in the reign of Edward VI, according to Carlson, the clergy remained ambivalent towards clerical marriage, the polemicists themselves failed to marry and, with the exception of Becon, had little positive to say about marriage itself. It was the failure of writers to embrace the institution with enthusiasm that occasioned the slow acceptance of clerical marriage.¹²⁵ Parish counters that several evangelical writers were indeed married and that although they themselves wrote little in favour of marriage per se, they brought the works of European advocates of marriage to English shores and were in accord with their sentiments.¹²⁶ However, it was the supposed inferiority of marriage to virginity that proved most intractable. Yost maintains that the view of clerical marriage as 'morally and religiously improper continued to trouble the

¹²³ Cross, *York Clergy Wills, Minster*, p. 111.

¹²⁴ TNA, PROB 11/55, Edmond Goldinge, 1573; TNA, PROB 11/57, Thomas Morse (Vicar of Muchdew and Prebendary of Hereford), 1575; TNA, PROB 11/68, John Jackson, 1585; TNA, PROB 11/62, William Stanton, 1580.

¹²⁵ Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 64; Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 2.

¹²⁶ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 9-11.

consciences of married priests'.¹²⁷ Despite their various disclaimers, Muriel Porter also concludes that among Protestant writers, 'a lingering belief in clerical celibacy as spiritually superior remains clearly discernible'.¹²⁸ This was both predictable and understandable for, as Parish indicates, to expect writers to praise marriage over virginity would have required them to abandon the scriptural foundations of their argument. She argues that in honouring marriage as a form of chastity, the reformers viewed both marriage and chastity as commendable and that their views, based on scripture and historical precedent, should be seen in the context of the wider debate.¹²⁹ When answering accusations about his opinions as expressed in a sermon on marriage, Edwin Sandys, Bishop of Worcester, made the point very succinctly. He indignantly explained that 'to make Equality between Matrimony and Virginity, I never did. I am not so ignorant in the Scriptures and Writers'. But he did qualify his statement by observing that neither state assured a place in heaven for that was dependent on 'a lively faith in Christ Jesus'.¹³⁰ Given the lack of scholarly consensus, a re-examination of the issue of clerical celibacy and of attitudes towards marriage as expressed in works published during the reign of Elizabeth, would seem essential to a full understanding of the factors impeding or furthering clerical marriage on the ground.

Thomas Becon, John Veron and Matthew Parker continued the practice of earlier writers in justifying clerical marriage through scripture, the writings of the Church Fathers and historical precedent. They could hardly avoid engaging with biblical texts particularly as theirs was a faith predicated on the importance of the Word. Central to the doctrinal debate was Paul's assertion that 'if they cannot contain, then they should marry, for it is

¹²⁷ J. K. Yost, 'The Reformation Defence of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI', *Church History*, 50 (1981), p. 165.

¹²⁸ Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church*, p. 83.

¹²⁹ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, pp. 9-11.

¹³⁰ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation* (London, 1735), vol. 1, p. 395; *The Sermons of Edwin Sandys*, ed. J. Ayre (Cambridge, 1841), pp. 313-30. The text of the sermon given in Worcester does not survive but it is probable that Sandys was recycling the text of a sermon that he had preached while in Strasbourg. I am grateful to Sarah Barstow for alerting me to the existence of this sermon.

better to marry than to burn'. However, it was difficult to escape the corollary that if marriage was the remedy, then chastity was intrinsically the more virtuous state, a weakness that Catholic polemicists had been quick to exploit. Parker conceded that 'virginitie is an excellent virtue, and that pure chastity and single life without hypocrisie, is more to be wished to priests and ministers in the church, then is matrimonie' and that for some men a single life was a 'snare and most grievous inconvenience'. However, he countered this with Paul's acknowledgement that for some, a wife was 'necessarie for a godly lyfe' and also with Augustine's belief that 'better ... is meke matrimonie, than vaunting virginitie'.¹³¹ John Veron included the problematic verse on his title page and wrote 'it were in deede to be wished, that all they that be called to the ministerye, shoulde be endued wyth that most excellent gyfte'.¹³² However, like Parker, he emphasized the idea of chaste matrimony and directly below his first biblical quotation he placed that of Hebrews 13, 'wedlock is honourable among all, and the bed undefyled'.¹³³ But it was Thomas Becon who engaged most directly with the issue and played down the value of chastity. He stressed that God had never forbidden the marriage of priests but 'hathe rather commaunded it, and honorably set it forth in his dyuine letters'.¹³⁴ He specifically stated that 'virginitie is no better, nor of more perfection in the sight of God than matrimony is, seyng that bothe virginitie and matrimonye are the giftes of God'.¹³⁵ Despite his denials it is possible that Sandys too had gone further than he was prepared to admit. In his Strasbourg sermon, he stated that the marriage of priests in the past and in scripture proved 'the state of marriage to be undoubtedly no less allowable, if not more honourable, than single life'.¹³⁶ While Becon's position was more radical than that of his

¹³¹ Matthew Parker, *A Defence of Priestes Mariages* (1567), STC (2nd edn) 17519, pp.11, 342-3.

¹³² John Veron, *A Stronge Defence of the Maryage of Pryestes*, (London, 1562), STC (2nd edn) 24687, sigs B3v-4r.

¹³³ Parker, *A Defence*, p. 11; Veron, *A Stronge Defence*, title page.

¹³⁴ Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', f. 581r.

¹³⁵ Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', f. 598v.

¹³⁶ *The Sermons of Edwin Sandys*, p. 315.

contemporaries, those seeking a justification for clerical marriage were not short of material which, although unlikely to convince those of a conservative persuasion, could placate the consciences of ministers desirous of marriage.

As with earlier writers, the argument progressed beyond theological justifications and encompassed more practical considerations. To Becon, those who failed in their quest for chastity were ‘stinking and dissembling hipocrits before God, or els vile adulterers and abhominable whormongers before both God and man’.¹³⁷ Here he was employing the familiar evangelical trope that celibacy had proved unattainable and that the degrading spectacle of incontinent priests had brought the priesthood into disrepute. Parker likewise emphasized expediency and targeted Jerome’s view that ‘virgine Priestes’ were not as esteemed as ‘necessarie or nedefull Priestes’.¹³⁸ Concerns over possible family distraction and the neglect of charitable responsibilities occasioned by clerical marriage also had to be addressed and Veron, in particular, devoted considerable space to discrediting such anxieties. The sanctioning of clerical marriage had moved the debate on. Argument was directed at those who accepted that clerical marriage was permissible but who continued to insist that it was better avoided for practical reasons.¹³⁹ Men such as Richard Rogers, lecturer at Wethersfield (Essex), who could not shake off lingering beliefs in the superiority of the single life as they strove to fulfil the needs of their vocation amid the distractions of family life. In his diary, Rogers lamented that his study was ‘much broken in the day time’ which caused him ‘no small grief’. A visit from John Knewstub, rector of Cockfield (Suffolk), proved particularly unsettling, since Rogers envied Knewstub’s ‘contentation in a sol[itary] life’ which allowed him ‘such a constancy in his

¹³⁷ Becon, ‘The Boke of Matrimony’, f. 651r.

¹³⁸ Parker, *A Defence*, p. 7r.

¹³⁹ Veron, *A Stronge Defence*, sigs B3r-8r; Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church*, pp. 71-2; Questions of family provision, hospitality and charitable-giving will be addressed in Chapter 5.

whole course, to walk with the Lord'.¹⁴⁰ Rogers was not alone, for Richard Greenham exhorted his pupils first to consider whether they had the gift of chastity before running 'hastily' into marriage. However, both ministers wrestled such reservations from within their own marriages.¹⁴¹

In the eyes of Becon, praying for the gift of chastity was resistance to God's will.¹⁴² He was the only writer who specifically extolled the joys of marriage and he did so at length. The first part of his *Boke of Matrimony* rehearsed the familiar themes in justification of a married ministry but he then explored marriage as an institution making no distinction between clerical and lay marriages. No doubt influenced by Bullinger's treatise on marriage, to which he had written a preface, Becon commended marriage as a means to a 'life moste happye'.¹⁴³ He contrasted the solitary life which was 'displeasaunt uncomfortable, and utterly estranged from all ioye, solace & plesure' with the married life which was 'full of ioy, comfort, solace, pleasure, and what soever is either profitable or comfortable for the life of man'. Having declared that marriage was 'no hynderaunce to a godly lyfe', he asserted that a true and lawful wife was a 'noble and singular healp ... to a godly husband'.¹⁴⁴ Parker who used his own wife, Margaret, as a positive role model, also extolled the benefits that a wife brought to a minister's life and calling. He observed that 'an honest wife that feareth God ... can not be but an helper to perfourme a godly lyfe'. And that she was also a 'trustie and faythfull frende to beare the burden of all greefes and heavynesse'.¹⁴⁵ While the scriptural precepts could not be ignored, they could be

¹⁴⁰ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. M. M. Knappen (London, 1933), pp. 57, 95-6.

¹⁴¹ E. J. Carlson, "'Practical Divinity" Richard Greenham's Ministry in Elizabethan England', in E. Carlson (ed.), *Religion and the English People 1500-1640, New Voices, New Perspectives* (Missouri, 1998), p. 178; Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 65. Greenham married Katherine Bownd at the age of thirty eight although in Carlson's view, with a 'rather negative view of marriage' and for 'domestic convenience'.

¹⁴² Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', f. 608r.

¹⁴³ Thomas Becon (1512/13-1567): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/1918, accessed 8 August 2014; Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', f. 597v.

¹⁴⁴ Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', ff. 597v, 648v, 650v.

¹⁴⁵ Parker, *A Defence*, pp. 340-1; N. B. Bjorklund, "'A Godly Wyfe is an Helper": Matthew Parker and the Defence of Clerical Marriage', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 32 (2003), pp. 364-5.

mitigated by placing emphasis on the benefits of marriage and the positive contributions that a wife could bring to her husband's ministry.

If the finer points of the debate continued to be of concern to the godly and educated elite, it is less obvious that the majority of clergy remained so preoccupied.¹⁴⁶ When in 1554, Thomas Asley had discovered that Joan Standley was Vincent's wife not his concubine, Vincent replied simply 'that it was better for hyme to marie then to burne'.¹⁴⁷ This may have been his considered view but it is equally possible that Vincent was offering an easily grasped and worldly explanation for his marriage; a premise understood by the laity as marriage was endorsed as a remedy for fornication for all men not just to address the needs of clergy who failed to possess the 'gift'. Ministers could sum up the complexities of precedent and scripture in one simple adage. Ultimately the decision to marry required a balancing of conflicting scriptural interpretations but the extent to which the average clergyman agonized over the relative merits of a life chastity and marriage is impossible to ascertain. There is much to recommend Dickens's view that 'many a mundane glebe-farmer in a country vicarage must have seen marriage in terms of worldly convenience and natural impulse'.¹⁴⁸

Clerical Concubinage

Reformers were eager to castigate the 'fylthy fornicatours, abhominable adulterers, and playn monstures of all unnaturall unclennes' who they claimed had served the unreformed church.¹⁴⁹ Clerical concupiscence was an easy vehicle through which they could attack Catholicism and one that was more readily assimilated by the laity than deeper theological argument. Although the 'statistical significance' of clerical incontinence has been

¹⁴⁶ Peet, 'The Mid-sixteenth Century Parish Clergy', p. 277. Peet maintained that the majority of the Edwardian clergy failed to show 'any evidence of familiarity with arguments from biblical authority or Church tradition in favour of, or in opposition to, the marriage of clergy'.

¹⁴⁷ BI, CP.G.3455.

¹⁴⁸ Dickens, *The English Reformation*, p. 275.

¹⁴⁹ Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', p. 599v.

questioned, reformers would not have been able to exploit this trope had it not resonated plausibly with the laity.¹⁵⁰ It remains as difficult to distinguish between individual acts of sexual misdemeanour and instances of clerical concubinage as to establish the true extent of the problem itself. If incontinence and concubinage were widespread, it would mean that clergymen did not have to marry in order to satisfy their sexual needs. This in turn could have contributed to the lower incidence of marriage in some areas. As the question of concubinage has implications not only for attitudes to marriage but also for perceptions of clergy wives, an appreciation of its prevalence would seem particularly apposite.

Clerical concubinage has a rich historiography of its own but while the 'high degree of tolerance' granted to the long-term sexual relationships of priests on the Continent is widely accepted, the situation in England is less well defined.¹⁵¹ Philippa Maddern, for instance, believes that 'there is little evidence' to suggest that clerical concubinage was common in late medieval England.¹⁵² Citing examples of hostile reaction to long-term clerical relationships, Marshall concludes that the case for lay toleration of clerical concubinage remains unproven especially as the 'practice of concubinage ... could do so much to activate lay anxiety and disapproval'.¹⁵³ This anxiety was prompted by soteriological concerns as abstinence from sexual activity protected the purity of the Eucharist while celibacy and the ability to perform the miracle of the mass distinguished

¹⁵⁰ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 145-6; H. L. Parish, "'It Was Never Good World Sence Minister Must Have Wyves": Clerical Celibacy, Clerical Marriage, and Anticlericalism in Reformation England', *Journal of Religious History*, 36 (2012), p. 54.

¹⁵¹ T. Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 173; M. A. Kelleher, "'Like man and wife": Clerics' Concubines in the Diocese of Barcelona', *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), pp. 352-4; J. F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage in Reformation Germany* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 240, 243, 246, 'many laypersons apparently accepted the practice as unexceptional' even referring to it as 'customary with pastors'; S. C. Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation: The Parsonage as a Site of Socio-Religious Change', in C. Scott Dixon and Luise Schorn-Schutte (eds), *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003), pp. 79-80. Karant-Nunn describes the practice as 'widespread' and although hypocritical, the laity were 'realistic and pragmatic' about it.

¹⁵² P. Maddern, 'Between Households: Children in Blended and Transitional Households in Late-Medieval England', *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* (2010), p. 79.

¹⁵³ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, pp. 151-3, 166.

the priesthood from the laity.¹⁵⁴ The belief that the sacraments, as a means to salvation were polluted, and thereby less effective, should the priest have sexual contact with women, persisted despite the church's repeated insistence that there was no correlation between the moral standing of the priest and the efficacy of the sacrament.¹⁵⁵ For Marshall, the soteriological implications of priestly concubinage militate against its ubiquity.

Other historians, however, consider that the situation in practice was more ambiguous and that more worldly considerations were involved.¹⁵⁶ Stephen Lander argues for the prevalence of clerical concubinage in the diocese of Chichester.¹⁵⁷ Felicity Heal questions the true extent of the concern over sacramental pollution, even in England, when clerical sexuality was tolerated in Wales, Ireland and much of Scotland. She concludes that 'the practice of social relations was more complex, and the process of accommodation between the lay and clerical more malleable than some of the ideological statements of contemporaries would suggest'.¹⁵⁸ Although dating from the 1580s and in a different soteriological climate, the situation within the parish of East Tuddenham (Norfolk) reflects this tractability and suggests that the reaction of parishioners to the behaviour of their minister was far from uniform or predictable. Although Nasshe, their minister, was excommunicated for living incontinently with one Margaret and although the sentence had been read aloud in the parish church, he continued to 'ministre the com[munion] to such as would then receve the same of hym' and had administered the sacrament of baptism. Some parishioners clearly were not offended either by his

¹⁵⁴ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁵ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, pp. 46-50, 159-60; Parish, *Clerical Celibacy*, pp. 128-9; Parish, "'It Was Never Good'", p. 54.

¹⁵⁶ P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 76-9.

¹⁵⁷ S. Lander, 'Church Courts and the Reformation in the Diocese of Chichester', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church of England 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), pp. 215-38.

¹⁵⁸ F. Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 76-9.

excommunication or by his domestic arrangements which had remained unchanged.¹⁵⁹

The reaction to Nasshe's conduct demonstrates that personal and parochial loyalty could transcend both clerical shortcomings as well as the judgement of the ecclesiastical and magisterial hierarchy.

The doctoral study by Janelle Werner is, to date, the most comprehensive work on English clerical concubinage. Drawing on the archival records of the diocese of Hereford, it focusses directly on priests and their concubines between 1375 and 1549. Werner concludes that clerical concubinage in the diocese was in reality as widespread as in other parts of late medieval Europe and that the couples were 'to some extent, socially and culturally accepted' largely because their relationships resembled secular marriages.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, 'many clerical relationships went either undetected or unprosecuted' and the numbers recorded in the court books were 'minimal'. She attributes the acceptability of these relationships to their stability and to their similarity to secular marriages even though the 'wife' was sometimes domiciled in a separate dwelling or even parish. She maintains that church officers made a 'clear distinction between incontinent and "married" clergy, and they expected that parishioners did too'.¹⁶¹ Werner acknowledges that the proximity of the diocese to Wales, where lay concubinage was recognized and where rights of inheritance were extended to concubines and their children, may have contributed to high levels of clerical concubinage in the adjacent English county.¹⁶² However, the particular significance of her work to this discussion lies in the accepted and unreported nature of the practice.

¹⁵⁹ NRO, DN/DEP19/20, 1581-2, ff. 87r-90r.

¹⁶⁰ J. Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives': Priests and Concubines in England, 1375-1549" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), pp. iii-iv, 170, 205; J. Werner, 'Promiscuous Priests and Vicarage Children: Clerical Sexuality and Masculinity in Late Medieval England', in J. D. Thibodeaux (ed.), *Negotiating Clerical Identities: Priests, Monks and Masculinity in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, 2010), p. 166.

¹⁶¹ Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives'", pp. 188, 218-19.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 215.

While Marshall sees the presentments for concubinage as evidence of popular and episcopal opposition, Tim Cooper, in his study of pre-Reformation clergy in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, uses the paucity of such cases to argue that the practice was condoned. As the relationships described had often been in existence for many years with no complaint made or action taken against either the cleric or his 'wife', their quasi-marital arrangement had not scandalized parishioners.¹⁶³ Although churchwardens might report concubinary priests for fear of not doing so, accusations of concubinage usually signalled the existence of a personal or parochial dispute.¹⁶⁴ Cooper argues that sexual relationships of this nature rather than creating distance between the priest and his flock actually testified to the social integration of the priest within the community. Jennifer Thibodeaux goes further and suggests that they enabled priests to equate their masculinity with that of secular men.¹⁶⁵ This tacit abjuration of clerical celibacy amounted to a recognition of the discernible distinction between 'the behaviour of the clergy as private individuals, and their activities as priests'.¹⁶⁶ In addition, acceptance of quasi-marital relationships could represent an awareness that concubinary priests posed less of a threat to the wider community than the predatory cleric whose behaviour directly threatened the women of the parish and by implication their menfolk.¹⁶⁷ All these considerations are accepted by David Loades who argues that parishioners accepted their priests for what they were, usually local men with minimal education and training, of whom only a minority were celibate. He emphasizes complacency as the primary explanation, for as long as the priest

¹⁶³ Cooper, *The Last Generation*, pp. 171-83; see also M. A. Kelleher, "'Like man and wife'", p. 355; P. Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London, 1969), p. 106.

¹⁶⁴ C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 242.

¹⁶⁵ Cooper, *The Last Generation*, p. 172; J. D. Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church, or Man of the Village? Gender and the Parish Clergy in Medieval Normandy', *Gender History*, 18 (2006), p. 387.

¹⁶⁶ R. N. Swanson, 'Problems of the Priesthood in Pre-Reformation England', *English Historical Review*, 105 (1990), pp. 848, 861.

¹⁶⁷ Thibodeaux, 'Man of the Church', p. 387; Cooper, *The Last Generation*, p. 171; Heath, *The English Parish Clergy*, p. 108; Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 150.

provided for his wife and children, parishioners' families were safe from his predations.¹⁶⁸

It is possible to see, therefore, how the common-law wives of priests had indeed become 'an accepted part of the parochial scene'.¹⁶⁹

Although as it appears, clerical concubinage was quietly practised and aroused little comment, incontrovertible evidence of clerical concubinage is difficult to obtain except, as Werner and Cooper have demonstrated, when court cases exposed relationships after years of cohabitation. A case from Yorkshire in 1552 demonstrates that instances of this nature were not confined to the medieval church. Henry Maleverer, rector of Thurnscoe, was believed locally to have lived incontinently within the parsonage with Margaret Burton for the previous seven years. Witnesses remarked that Margaret's apparel resembled that of a gentlewoman and far exceeded her status and her absent husband's means. Whether her apparel or a further accusation of incontinence with Maleverer's servant pushed local sensibilities to expose the longstanding relationship is not known but the rector's domestic arrangements had been tolerated for many years.¹⁷⁰ Further evidence of acceptance of clerical concubinage is apparent in Thomas Asley's casual enquiry as to whether whether Joan Standley was Vincent's wife or concubine. Joan had apparently experienced difficulty in convincing those in the locality of Sheepy Magna that she was in fact Mistress Vincent not 'good wif Standley', a misperception which had not hindered her integration into the female parish network.¹⁷¹

Some, although limited, additional evidence can be found among clergy wills. These have been examined primarily for evidence of clergy wives but the wills of unmarried clergymen have also come under scrutiny. The only specific reference to a

¹⁶⁸ D. M. Loades, 'Anticlericalism in the Church of England before 1558: "An eating canker"?', in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c. 1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), pp. 4, 15 fn. 20.

¹⁶⁹ C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 50; Parish, "'It Was Never Good'", p. 46, refers to the 'quasi-legitimate' status of such longstanding relationships within some communities.

¹⁷⁰ BI, CP.G.893.

¹⁷¹ BI, CP.G.3455; see below p. 252.

long-term quasi-marital relationship which has come to light occurs in the 1575 will of Robert Hollande, clerk of Skinningrove (Yorkshire). Hollande made Jane Lam[b]e his sole executrix and recipient of 'all & singuler goodes that is myn at hower of deathe'. He described her simply and unambiguously as 'my bedfello'. His directness indicates both a lack of shame and widespread local knowledge of the relationship. He was clearly on good terms with Jane's family for John Lambe witnessed his will and he and five other members of the Lambe family received bequests. He was also well-integrated into his community, leaving one penny to each of ten parishioners and gifts of fish, salt and clothing to twelve others. Remarkably and with no hints as to why, nearly two decades after the introduction of clerical marriage, Hollande had refrained from marrying his 'bedfello'.¹⁷²

Other testamentary evidence is less conclusive. Some unmarried clergy were particularly generous to female servants which could represent gratitude and friendship rather than a quasi-marital relationship. However, the wording of some wills does at least arouse suspicion. In 1567, among a long list of bequests, John Okeley, the unmarried parson of Throllesworth (Leicestershire), was very generous to his housekeeper Alice Johnson and her niece Joan Steven. Okeley recorded that Alice 'had been a frendable wooman' to him but what form that friendship took cannot be determined.¹⁷³ Robert Shawe, the unmarried parson of Stansfield (Suffolk) made his servant, Alice Parman, his sole executrix and she received the residue of his estate, lands and property.¹⁷⁴ In his will of 1599, William Ricarde, parson of Grateley (Hampshire), left his estate, apart from ten pounds, his wind instruments and books, to Barbara Granger whom he described as his 'faythefull and trustie servant'. Barbara was made his sole executrix and the hope that his

¹⁷² BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, vol. 19, f. 806, Robert Hollande, 1575.

¹⁷³ TNA, PROB 11/49, John Okeley, 1567.

¹⁷⁴ TNA, PROB 11/67, Robert Shawe, 1584.

overseer 'be friendly and faithfull' to her echoes the pleas made by married clergy on behalf of their wives.¹⁷⁵

Perhaps wills were not the medium through which clergy made provision for women with whom they had had an irregular relationship, preferring instead to make arrangements elsewhere. Clergy could have been reluctant to spell out the nature of these relationships in a will but the reference to 'servants' and 'maidservants' ties in with the findings of Simone Laqua in relation to concubinage in early modern Münster. Not only did the authorities categorize priests' partners simply as 'plain servant girls', the clergymen themselves referred to them in a similar way or as carers in old age, conveniently ignoring the role which they had played over previous decades.¹⁷⁶ In some wills, clergy left bequests to women who had cared for them during their final illness which in the light of continental experience could imply that the women had played a more long term and wider role in the clergyman's life. In 1569, Thomas Clayton, parson of Walsoken (Norfolk), made bequests to his wider family, including £100 to a nephew but he also appointed his maid, Helen Plomer, joint executor of his will. The generous provision made for her included dwellings, household stuff and extensive lands which far exceeded the single cow given to his other servants. He was also concerned about her future marriage.¹⁷⁷ Whether Helen was a much appreciated servant, a relative, a mistress or a daughter remains unclear. When testators were normally eager to spell out a relationship and made bequests equivalent in position, wording and nature to those made by married clergy to their wives and children, a degree of suspicion is aroused.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ TNA, PROB 11/93, Willyam Ricarde, 1599.

¹⁷⁶ S. Laqua, 'Concubinage and the Church, in Early Modern Munster', in R. Harris and L. Roper (eds), *The Art of Survival: Gender and History in Europe, 1450-2000* (Oxford, 2006), pp. 77, 86, 92.

¹⁷⁷ TNA, PROB 11/51, Thomas Clayton, 1569. It was, of course, common for family members to act as servants but the relationship was normally stated which is not the case in Clayton's will.

¹⁷⁸ Suspicion also falls on wills that contain bequests to children when no reference is made to their mother. As legal documents, wills normally delineated the exact nature of relationships and place of residence with precision. The aftermath of Marian deprivations further complicates the issue and without corroborating evidence any inferences must remain decidedly tentative; BI, Archbishop's Register 30, f. 166, William Knagges, 1569; BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, vol. 18, f. 112, William Sawcie, 1569.

Some clergy were very open about past misdemeanours and left money to their illegitimate children. From testamentary evidence it is impossible to determine whether these children were the product of a long-term relationship or of a single transgression. In 1568, Richard Monax, vicar of Grimley and Hallow (Worcestershire), apparently unmarried, left to 'John, my base Sone iiij li' and all his 'weringe Rayment'.¹⁷⁹ In 1575, Thomas Gravinor, parson of Whitney (Hereford), left £24 to his wife and each of his five children but also £10 to his 'base son'.¹⁸⁰ Two years later, Robert Kynsey, parson of Bartholmey (Cheshire), left twenty marks to each of his three daughters but £20 to Richard his 'basterd sonne'.¹⁸¹ Thomas Prise, parson of Hopesay (Shropshire), bequeathed his best yoke of oxen to his son Nicholas Keysall.¹⁸² In 1572, Roger Banyster, clerk of Appleby (Leicestershire), left George Wilkes, his 'base sonne', six lambs and twenty shillings.¹⁸³ Paul Mayson, curate of St Mary's, Castlegate, York, made bequests to his wife and children but also left a ewe and a lamb to Ann, his 'base begotten doughter'.¹⁸⁴ The nonchalance with which illegitimate children are acknowledged in these wills ties in with Heath's observation that the children of illicit clerical relationships were accepted by society 'without much difficulty or embarrassment'.¹⁸⁵ Indeed, Macfarlane states that bastardy in general was 'not greatly disapproved of, as long as the child was maintained'.¹⁸⁶

The introduction of clerical marriage provided the ideal opportunity for a priest to turn his mistress into a spouse. Yost asserted that 'many priests joined the Reformation movement precisely to escape the restrictions imposed on their domestic life by the old

Both Knagges, clerk of Cloughton (Yorkshire) and Sawcie, clerk of Ruddington (Nottinghamshire), made significant bequests to a family group whose connection to the testator is unspecified.

¹⁷⁹ WRO, PR, 1568, Richard Monax, 10.

¹⁸⁰ TNA, PROB 11/57, Thomas Gravinor, 1575.

¹⁸¹ TNA, PROB 11/59, Robert Kynsey, 1577.

¹⁸² TNA, PROB 11/72, Thomas Prise, 1558.

¹⁸³ TNA, PROB 11/54, Roger Banyster, 1572.

¹⁸⁴ C. Cross, *York Clergy Wills 1520-1600*, 2, *City Clergy*, (York, 1989), p. 95.

¹⁸⁵ Heath, *The English Parish Clergy*, p. 106.

¹⁸⁶ A. Macfarlane, 'Illegitimacy and Illegitimates in English History', in P. Laslett, K. Oosterveen and R. M. Smith (eds), *Bastardy and its Comparative History* (London, 1980), p. 75.

order' as it 'enabled a priest who had a mistress to turn her into an honourable wife'.¹⁸⁷ Some clergymen presumably did marry women with whom they had established quasi-marital relationships but the evidence for this is hard to establish as such marriages would simply merge into the records, a problem compounded by the particularly fragmentary and sparse nature of the historical archive for the 1560s. Accusations against Richard Holywell, vicar of Benhall (Suffolk), would suggest that he did indeed take advantage of the opportunity to regularize his existing relationship. However, it appears to have taken him a while to do so and there is no way of determining what occasioned the delay. In what was a 1572 tithe case, William Newson claimed that Holywell had admitted that 'he had ij children by her that is nowe his wyffe before suche tyme as he was married unto her'.¹⁸⁸ The presence of multiple children suggests a long-term concubinary relationship rather than a wife who was already pregnant at the time of marriage as a result of traditional marriage practice.¹⁸⁹

There were clergy who had negotiated domestic arrangements to suit their personal needs and were happy to continue to do so. Joye had alleged that priests found it less expensive to enjoy the pleasures of other men's wives than to have their own, thereby avoiding the burdens of a shrewish wife and household cares.¹⁹⁰ Although this jibe was just another weapon in the evangelical arsenal, well into the reign of Elizabeth incidences of such relationships do occur. In 1561, the parson of Poyntington (Dorset) was accused of a long term relationship with Agnes Chapman, his farmer's wife, and when he called her a whore, she retorted that 'she was no mans whore butt his'.¹⁹¹ In 1575, the

¹⁸⁷ Yost, 'The Reformation Defence', p. 152.

¹⁸⁸ NRO, DN/DEP15/15, 1572-3, ff. 231v-237r.

¹⁸⁹ Traditional marriage practice is explored at length in Chapter 2.

¹⁹⁰ George Joye, *The Defence of the Marriage of Priestes* (London, 1541), STC (2nd edn) 21804, sigs B8-C2.

¹⁹¹ SHC, Diocesan Act Book, D\D/cd/10.

wife of Richard Cutt of Hambleton was suspected of living incontinently with Sir Edmund Persgrave, curate of Castor (Northamptonshire).¹⁹²

More common among the archives, however, were cases where clergymen refused to honour promises of marriage to women with whom they had sexual relationships. The ensuing court cases laid their domestic circumstances open to scrutiny. The 1571 suit against Hugh Tunckes, rector of Penton Mewsey (Hampshire), is one such example. Tunckes declared that he was ‘called papist and so hooted at that now I am disposed to marry’. This is normally cited as evidence that the clergy were expected to marry and that their marriage signalled their acceptance of confessional change.¹⁹³ Tunckes had indeed come under pressure to marry claiming ‘I am so driven by my Lord Bishop and others that I must needs marry’ but the case is in fact, more complex and revealing. His proposed bride was his maid, Lucy Deane. Her brother claimed that the common fame was that the couple lived as ‘man and wife together and divers folks thought that they had been married’ and that Tunckes had had ‘carnal knowledge of her body under promise of marriage.’ It appears that episcopal pressure was aimed at a marriage, not primarily for its own sake, but to end an illicit and, in the eyes of authority, scandalous relationship. Witnesses suspected that Tunckes lacked sincerity and intended to renege on the planned nuptials but the reasons for his reluctance to marry are unclear.¹⁹⁴ That he had doubted that Lucy was of good character and had required a letter to verify her integrity before initially employing her as a servant raises the intriguing possibility that he deemed her suitable to be his maid and concubine but not his wife.

¹⁹² NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/11, ff. 8v, 26r; R. L. Greaves, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 95. Greaves cites one John Wainhouse, rector of Kirk Smeaton (Yorkshire), who ‘haith been suspected to lyve incontinently with one Perkins wif’.

¹⁹³ This quotation is widely used but the full context is not given. H. Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 232; Carlson, ‘Clerical marriage’, p. 27; Haigh, *The Plain Man’s Pathways to Heaven*, p. 196.

¹⁹⁴ *Winchester Consistory Court Depositions 1561-1602*, ed. A. J. Willis (Lyminge, 1960), pp. 20, 27, 61; TNA, PROB 11/62, Hugh Tunckes 1580. There is no mention of a wife in his will.

Tunckes was not alone in preferring to remain unmarried but not chaste. On his death in 1581, Anthony Wyclif, parson of Kirkby in Ashfield (Nottinghamshire), bequeathed a cow and a bay mare to Isabell Lime. The residue of his goods went to Thomas, his servant and Isabell's husband, and to Thomas's two daughters, Margaret and Joan, all three of whom were made executors. Thomas was said to have 'taken great paines' with Wyclif 'all his lyfe tyme' but the will forms only part of this complex tale as archival complementarity reveals that between 1570 and 1572, Wyclif appeared repeatedly before the archidiaconal court until the case was passed up to the High Commission. From the age of fifteen, Isabell had been Wyclif's housekeeper and he was accused of 'usinge and medlinge with her in suche sorte for the gettinge of children and so shamefully untyll shee was marryed as ys not to bee rehearsed'. After her marriage, Isabell was sent away into 'the northe countrey' with her husband Thomas and a patent worth 40 shillings a year. Despite Wyclif's assurances to his neighbours that Isabell should 'not come within tenn miles' of him, Isabell had returned and it was alleged that their relationship had resumed but more openly than before.¹⁹⁵

Even by the 1570s, therefore, some clergy seemingly maintained a concubine but resisted marriage. Their motives can only be surmised; perhaps they could not overcome their confessional conservatism, or perhaps Joye had a point and they did not want the responsibilities and restrictions of marriage. Wyclif's religious leanings may have prevented his marrying Isabell but his reluctance may equally derive from his own social standing and influential connections. Wyclif's brother, Christopher, was described as a gentleman and Wyclif appointed Christopher Wray, the chief justice of England, as

¹⁹⁵ BI, York's Archbishop's Register, 31, f. 93v, Anthony Wycliff, 1581; BI, HC.CP.1571/3. In the parish church, Isabell had accused Wyclif of hypocrisy and called him a 'whoremaster preeste'. Wyclif was also charged with failing in his ministerial duties by administering communion to young people who could not say the Ten Commandments in English, by not reading homilies and by not holding services on Wednesdays and Fridays.

supervisor of his will. While Isabell was suitable as a hearthmate, she may not have been socially acceptable as Wyclif's wife.¹⁹⁶

The cases of Tunckes and Wyclif raise the possibility that ministers differentiated between the women they maintained as concubines and those they took as wives, something which has interesting implications for what constituted the ideal clergy wife. However, as will be discussed in a subsequent chapter, the term 'maidservant' should not automatically be equated with women of low social status. Domestic service was a normal part of adolescence for women from a wide range of social backgrounds.¹⁹⁷ Yet pre-Reformation women who entered into relationships with clergy are normally castigated as loose women of low standing. Laqua has shown that in Germany, the concubine was considered 'a servant to love' rather than a lover.¹⁹⁸ In medieval English literature and popular perception, Werner discerned that women in relationships were presented as predominantly marginal figures of low status who were frequently vilified for their venality.¹⁹⁹ More investigative research is needed before definitive conclusions can be drawn as to the true identity of these women in the English context.

A 1572 case from York demonstrates that not all women who associated with priests outside marriage were from the margins of society. The events which included the intimidation of witnesses, considerable debate over alleged tokens and the supposed goings-on behind an open or closed study door, reveal why one clergyman refused to marry. The clerk Robert Mell had resisted all attempts by friends of Alice Steel to secure

¹⁹⁶ BI, Archbishop's Register, 31, f. 93v, will of Anthony Wycliff; BI, Archbishop's Register, 30, f. 54v; G. O. Wray, 'Family and Pedigree of Wray', *The Genealogist*, 4 (1880), pp. 278-85. The second husband of Christopher Wray's mother was one John Wycliffe; BI, HC.CP.1571/3. The case dragged on for two years and was passed up to the Archbishop by John Louth, archdeacon of Nottingham, because Wyclif 'seekethe delays and putteth in dilatory pleyes which we for want of advocates and procters heare can not well heare and determine iudicially'. Sometimes only the higher courts could bring the influential to heel.

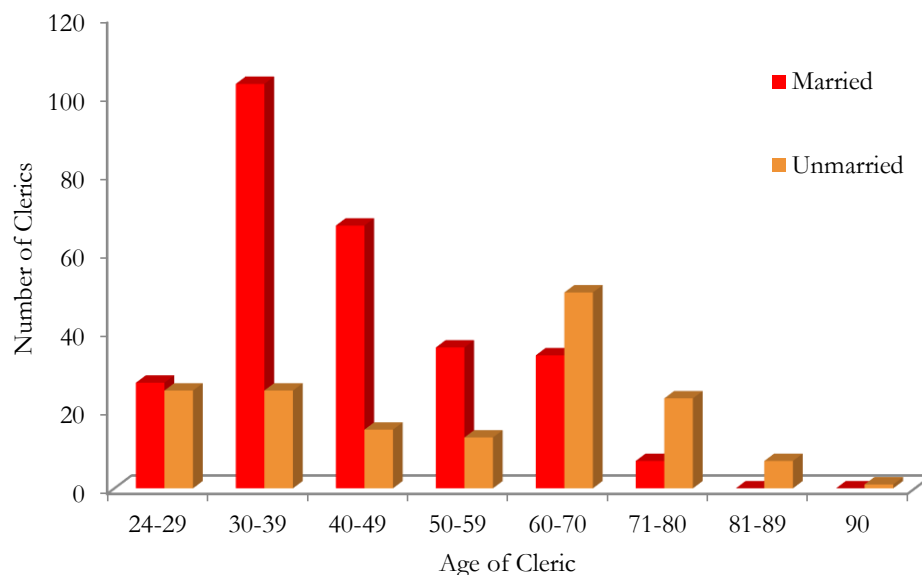
¹⁹⁷ See below, pp. 122-7.

¹⁹⁸ Laqua, 'Concubinage and the Church', pp. 77, 92-3.

¹⁹⁹ Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives'", p. 265. Attitudes to clerical concubines as individuals will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6.

a marriage. Alice, a respectable and well-connected gentlewoman and widow, alleged that Mell has promised to marry her, had carnal knowledge of her body and had offered to supply a drink ‘to dispatch the matter’ should she find herself with child. Alice’s friends, including various clergymen, confronted Mell and secured a promise that he would indeed marry her. Although doubting that he would honour his word, they had ensured that witnesses were present. As they had feared, Mell did not keep his word. He explained his reluctance to marry, claiming that he was too old, being apparently sixty-eight years of age. He also worried that Alice’s son would make claims on her lands, and assurances that bonds were in place could not assuage his fear that he would be embroiled in lawsuits. For Mell, personal and pragmatic considerations dissuaded him from marriage.²⁰⁰

Figure 3. **Age Profile of Married and Unmarried Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln in 1576**



Source: C. W. Foster, ‘The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln’, *Lincoln Record Society*, 23 (1926), p. 455.

²⁰⁰ BI, CP.G.1555; Cross, *York Clergy Wills, Minster Clergy*, p. 120, Mell was described as being 44 years of age in 1548.

Older clergy like Mell may well have felt that it was too late to change the habits of a lifetime, although some may have taken a wife as a nursemaid in old age.²⁰¹ In the diocese of Lincoln, the age profile of those who married (Figure 3) indicates that by 1576, those aged between thirty and fifty were most likely to be married. By this date, three quarters of clergy in their fifties had married, but those over sixty were significantly less likely to have taken a wife. Of those at the other end of the age profile, only just over half in their later twenties were married, which suggests that ministers sought a degree of financial security before seeking a wife. The clergy were, therefore, slightly later in marrying than the lay male population who were generally in their mid to late twenties at the time of marriage.²⁰²

Reformers had believed that once clergy could marry, clerical incontinence would cease to be a source of scandal to the church. Parker claimed that clerical marriage had led to improved morality among the clergy remarking in 1567 on ‘howe fewe concubinaries, howe fewe fornicators, how fewe adulterers ... be detected and proved’.²⁰³ Ralph Houlbrooke has maintained that, as a result of ‘the very rapid spread of marriage among the clergy after Elizabeth’s accession’, clerical incontinence, which he considered ‘the most prominent disciplinary problem on the eve of the Reformation’, was rendered ‘one of the least important’.²⁰⁴ However, evidence of continuing clerical sexual misdemeanours litters the archive and can even be found in parish registers. In the parish of Alstonefield (Staffordshire), the burial of Joan, daughter of the clerk William Burton

²⁰¹ This tendency is documented for two seventeenth-century clergymen. *Two East Anglian Diaries, 1641-1729: Isaac Archer and William Coe*; ed. M. Storey (Woodbridge, 1994), p. 183. Isaac Archer, had acted in this way and had specifically chosen a wife to act as a nurse in his later years which gave a young woman the opportunity to marry above her station; Samuel Clarke, *The Lives of Sundry Eminent Persons in this Later Age* (London, 1683), p. 176, Samuel Fairclough, rector of Barnardiston, had married his third wife, Mary Brooke, to secure a nurse for himself in old age.

²⁰² R. Houlbrooke, ‘The Making of Marriage in Mid-Tudor England: Evidence from the Records of Matrimonial Contract Litigation’, *Journal of Family History*, 10 (1985), p. 342.

²⁰³ Parker, *A Defence*, p. 339.

²⁰⁴ R. Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation 1520-1570* (Oxford, 1979), p. 183.

and Ellen Norman, was recorded in 1588. A decade later Alice daughter of James Broster, clerk, and Margaret Gryce was baptised with her illegitimacy noted by the word ‘spurii’.²⁰⁵ Between 1564 and 1604, the vicar was Robert Aston who had no degree, was unlicensed to preach and was described as ‘a grievous swearer, whoremaster, and drunkard, and very unlearned’.²⁰⁶

In Alstonefield, a remote parish in a very conservative area, although the curate, Francis Paddy, was married, the Reformation seems to have made only limited inroads.²⁰⁷ Here clerical concubinage seems to have been an ingrained practice and one which the frank entries in the parish register suggest carried no particular shame. The parish register of Pilton (Northamptonshire) records that Judith Hilton alias Hurst, the daughter of clerk Mathew Hilton, ‘born in fornication’, was baptised in 1579.²⁰⁸ The issue of ‘suspect’ women within the parsonage continued to exercise the minds of the episcopate and throughout the second half of the sixteenth century churchwardens responded with their suspicions to the specific enquiries of visitation articles.²⁰⁹ The 1572 case of the vicar of Scalford (Leicestershire) demonstrates how gossip and speculation arose, but does not help us ascertain whether it was justified. The churchwardens presented Christopher Bersay for he and ‘Mary at the parsonage is slaundererously spoken of & not without suspission’ and it was said that he ‘bought her a hatt pryse - ijs and an aperne of double

²⁰⁵ *Alstonefield Parish Register, vol. 1*, ed. W. P. W. Phillimore, *Staffordshire Parish Register Society*, (London, 1902), pp. 45, 101. Elsewhere in the register, illegitimate daughters are recorded as ‘spuriae’.

²⁰⁶ *Victoria County History, A History of the County of Stafford: Volume 7: Leek and the Moorlands*, ed. C. R. J. Curries and M. W. Greenslade (London, 1996), pp. 8-27, available at <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/vch/staffs/vol7/pp8-27>, accessed 13 August 2014.

²⁰⁷ *Alstonefield Parish Register, vol. 1*, p. 40, Anne, wife of Francis Paddy, buried 1582, p. 129, Paddy married Elizabeth Crycheloe of Hartington, 1586.

²⁰⁸ NthRO, *Transcript of the Register of Pilton*, 68P/1, p. 3.

²⁰⁹ *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation, 1559-1575* (London, 1910), ed. W. H. Frere and W. P. M. Kennedy, pp. 41, 45, 102, 167, 211, 224, 262, 309, 321; Articles to be enquired off, within the prouince of Yorke, 1577, STC (2nd edn) 10376, Item 10; Articles to be enquired of, by the Church Wardens and Swornemen within the Archdeaconrie of Middlesex, 1582, STC (2nd edn) 10275, Item 15; Articles to be inquired of in the ordinarie visitation of the right reuerende father in God, William lorde bishop of Couentre and Lichfelde, 1584, STC (2nd edn) 10224, Item 10; Articles ecclesiasticall to be inquired of by the churchwardens and the sworne-men within the dioces of Hereford, 1586, STC (2nd edn) 10215, Item 24; Articles to be enquired of within the dioces of London, 1598, STC (2nd edn) 10253, Item 25.

woosted pryse - vijs'.²¹⁰ Not all responses can be taken at face value for accusations of misdemeanour were not always well-founded and could result from malicious intent. In 1576, in Sudborough (Northamptonshire), Agnes Dust confessed that she had 'wrongfullie and uniustlie' claimed that the parson, Mr Sadler, was the father of her child and had been 'moved urged and therunto forced by threatning persuasions & sinister dealinges of others'.²¹¹ When in 1579 the Northamptonshire clerk, Theodore Whitton, was accused of having fathered the child of his maid, the churchwardens felt compelled to write in his defence:

This shalbe to let youre worshipes to understande thatt our curat Aboutt lames is wiffe diede and A time affter that he toke in a girll to tente his childrene wiche taryed wt him but thre wickes ande ande (sic) at her ptying away she slanderd him And sayd that he hade to do wt her ... she shulde not be cr[e]dabell.

Undeterred by their lack of ease with the written word, the churchwardens were eager to set the record straight.²¹²

In Northamptonshire, the correction books indicate continuing concern, time and effort spent in tackling clerical incontinence.²¹³ In Leicestershire, the early 1570s saw

²¹⁰ LRO, 1D41/13/8/22b.

²¹¹ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, f. 48v.

²¹² NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, 1579 ff. 156v, 166v, 167r. Letter, f. 147a; R. Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 31. Whiting describes a similar scenario where 'at Honiton Clyst in 1568, an unmarried woman was pressurized by several local people into falsely naming a cleric as the father of her child'.

²¹³ NthRO, PDR, ML556, f.242v, 1561, William Role, rector of St Peter accused of adultery; ML559, f.85r, 1571, Thomas Dene, vicar of Holpton accused of adultery; Miscellaneous Book 5, Consistory Court Book 1571-2, f. 7, 1571, the curate of Kislingbury 'did haunt the companie of a woman verie suspiciouslye & to the example of other light persons'; X607/6, f. 19v, 1572, the curate of Bugbrooke 'kepeth a woman in his howse suspiciously'; X607/6, ff. 21r, 26r, 49v, 1572, the vicar of Evenley, William Turner, 'hath had to doo with Margerie Hopcroft' of Evenley; X607/6, f. 39r, 1572, the curate of Collyweston, 'he hath gotten a maid with child'; X607/7, f. 11v, 1573, Thomas Dudley, vicar of Harrowden, the fame is that 'he has gotten Elyth Love with child'; X607/7, f. 60v, 1573, Thomas Clark, vicar of Rothersthorpe, 'he is suspected to be a man of evell livinge and kepeth in his house one John Baselies wiff to doe his busines which is theare at unlawfull howres and saith he will kepe her in despiht of the hole towne'; X607/7, ff. 114r, 117r, 1573, Symons, rector of Slapton, committed adultery with Elen Fletcher of Slapton; X607/8, f.89r, 1574, Robert Browne, curate of Creaton, the fame is that 'he haith carnall knowledge with one Joane late of Spratton'; X607/8, f. 100v, 1574, Joseph Overton, rector of Edgecote, 'lyveth incontinently with a naughtie woman'; X607/10, f. 18v, 1574, Roger Hodgeson, clerk of Wellingborough, lived incontinently with Audret Barnes; X607/13, f. 101v, 1577, Thomas Dudley lived incontinently with a woman at Harrowden; X607/14, f.13r, 1577, the curate of Castor was

several clergymen ordered to remove women from their households on pain of suspension.²¹⁴ The ecclesiastical authorities were keen to avoid the risk of scandal but the presentments may be closely allied to a reluctance of some clergy to embrace marriage and legitimize their relationships. The persistent problem of women in the parsonages of the archdeaconry of Leicester needs to be viewed against the very low uptake of clerical marriage there.²¹⁵ The authorities may well have been actively trying to wean clergy away from their time-honoured ways as well as minimizing the potential for rumour and scandal. Haigh remarked of Lancashire during the Edwardian period that the clergy were willing to acquire mistresses but could not bring themselves to make an 'open breach of the age-old prohibition of marriage'.²¹⁶ In 1565, in the diocese of Bangor, it was observed that the clergy continued to maintain their concubines 'notwithstanding the Liberty of Mariage granted'.²¹⁷ While clerical incontinence may have figured less highly in the list of post-reformation ecclesiastical priorities, it had most certainly not gone away.

There is a postscript to this study. The introduction of clerical marriage certainly did not eradicate the type of minister who, as a sexual predator, menaced the female population and exasperated the local community. It did, however, provide these ministers with a means of seduction and one which could replace that of the lost confessional.²¹⁸ In 1587, several women attested to the unwelcome attentions of Christopher Priorman, curate of

accused of incontinence with Agnes Wilson; X607/14, f. 126v, 1579, George Bennet, vicar, 'useth the company of the said Jane Tailor suspiciously'; X607/15, f. 5v, 1577, rector Thomas Marston of Aston, a maid in his house was with child and he was suspected to be the father.

²¹⁴ LRO, 1D41/13/6/22r. In 1570, the rector of Narborough had 'women in his house'; 1D41/13/6/22v, the rector of Leire had women in his house who were to be expelled by 4 August 1570; 1D41/13/6/23r, 1570, the rector of Willoughby had his mother and two servants in his house and had two months to remove the women or be suspended from office; 1D41/13/6/25r, John Andrewes, curate of Wigston was to expel his maid by 27 August; 1D41/13/6/34v, the vicar of Ashby Folville was to expel the women in his house; 1D41/13/6/49v, 1571, one Leystre, vicar of Claybrooke, had women in his house; 1D41/13/6/50r, 1571, the rector of Cotesbach, had women in his house.

²¹⁵ See above, pp. 29-31; in clerical wills from Leicestershire, married ministers were very much in the minority.

²¹⁶ Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance*, p. 181.

²¹⁷ J. Strype, *The Life and Acts of Mathew Parker* (London, 1711), p. 203.

²¹⁸ S. Haliczer, *Sexuality in the Confessional* (Oxford, 1996), chapter five passim.

Hatfield (Yorkshire), but the deposition of Margaret Node is particularly revealing. Priorman, ‘a man of lewde and an unhonest lyfe’, had enticed Margaret into his ‘laith’ on the grounds that he would teach her the catechism which she had missed due to her absence from church. When she successfully repulsed his violent advances, he offered her a groat, a piece of bacon and ‘also to marrie her and to make her a gentlewoman’. An offer of marriage seemed to be a regular ploy for he had proffered the same to his servant, Elizabeth Banckes, when she refused to allow him into her bed.²¹⁹ Priorman was not alone in making use of this tactic. In Worcestershire, William Addams, vicar of Cropthorne, wearied parishioners with a series of women whom he entertained in his dwelling. By 1578, their patience was finally at an end and he found himself before the church courts. He had procured Elenor Barker to stay with him, had given her gifts and an undertaking that ‘yf he ... did gett her with childe then he promysed to marry [her]’.²²⁰ Those who had devoted so many words in support of a married ministry could not have foreseen that it would be used as a tool of seduction by unscrupulous members of their profession.

Conclusion

Although evangelical writers continued to wrestle with scriptural precepts suggesting that chastity was superior to marriage, especially for members of the priesthood, by 1560, the debate had evolved. Greater emphasis was now placed on countering arguments that clerical marriage would have a negative impact on the ministry by promoting the value of marriage, by minimizing the distractions of family life and by emphasizing the contributions that a wife could make to her husband’s calling. As the debate widened to

²¹⁹ BI, CP.G.2277.

²²⁰ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/2, ff. 250r-51r, 254v-270r, 282, 284r-285r. Addams had a reputation for living incontinently ‘with evry whore that will cosent unto him’. He had acquired the French pox which had caused a hole in the roof of his mouth and consequently, for the previous five years, he had used two communion cups, one for himself and one for his parishioners although divers parishioners ‘wolde never receave at his handes by cause of his deceasses’; F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life, vol. 2, Morals and the Church Courts* (Chelmsford, 1973), pp. 212-13. In 1570, Thomas Sayer, parson of Wrabness (Essex), had said that he would marry his maidservant should his wife die in childbirth.

embrace more practical issues, it came closer to the factors which motivated and were of more pressing concern to the parochial clergy. While those of a godly persuasion continued to agonize over the superiority of virginity over marriage, often from within their own marriage, it is by no means clear that this was a preoccupation of the clergy as a whole. In the first two decades of the reign, preambles to clerical wills suggest that those who exhibited beliefs compatible with protestant doctrine were more likely to have embraced marriage. This correlation as well as the geographical and chronological patterns of clerical marriage reflect the progress of the Reformation itself. However, a complex web of personal considerations helped determine the conjugal choices of individual ministers. While a reluctance to marry may well reflect confessional conservatism, reservations of a non-theological nature such as a lack of encouragement from others or contentment with the status quo cannot be discounted. Although ambiguity surrounds the extent of clerical concubinage, it appears that the practice was by no means eradicated in the Elizabethan Church and may have caused some clergy to eschew marriage in favour of their existing domestic arrangements. Although a married ministry was not established overnight, the Elizabethan clergy embraced the opportunity to marry, even in areas that were initially slower to react. It is against this backdrop that the stories of the women who became clergy wives can emerge, be told and understood.

2. The Making of Clerical Marriages

Injunction 29 of the Royal Visitation of 1559 laid out the legal framework in which a clerical marriage was to be realized but behind its precepts were individuals who were subject to the same emotions, expectations and constraints as their lay contemporaries. The formation of all early modern marriages was a process involving words and rituals which took the couple through courtship, betrothal and finally to solemnization in church. This chapter will begin at the start of this process with an attempt to understand what drew clerical couples together and the considerations which lay behind their choice of marriage partner. At the same time, it will seek to place their decision-making within the context of wider marriage formation. The remainder of the discussion will centre on Injunction 29 which differentiated clerical marriage from its lay equivalent. It will seek to determine why so few of the resulting certificates or letters testimonial appear to have survived and to examine more closely those which have. This is necessary as the letters themselves have been the subject of only passing comment in the historical literature. The discovery of further examples, hitherto unrecognized and from a decade prior to the previously known set, permits comparisons of content and a re-evaluation of earlier conclusions. The discussion will conclude with a consideration of why some clergy failed to obtain letters testimonial and an evaluation of the weaknesses inherent within the system of regulation of clerical marriage.

Clerical Courtship

Research into the nature of marriage in this period has been dominated by the legacy of Lawrence Stone. Recent studies have exposed his exaggeration of parental involvement and his unwarranted disregard for the importance of affection between marriage

partners.¹ Subsequent scholars have highlighted the numerous considerations which lay behind the choice of a spouse and have tried to assess the relative weight apportioned to individual factors. Martin Ingram, basing his assessment on the views of contemporary moralists, has emphasized the need for parity between partners in birth and breeding, wealth, credit, age and religious commitment although such parity was not a 'rigid imperative'. Keith Wrightson has also recognized that there was room for individual flexibility in the relative significance placed on social, personal and economic considerations.² While accepting the concept of parity, Diana O'Hara has modified Stone's position by stressing the importance of economic factors and of the 'imperceptible but very real' internalised family values which predisposed individuals to fall in love.³ In court cases, witnesses reported declarations of love and suitors could be rejected for want of affection.⁴ Based on depositions made before the London Consistory Court, Loreen Giese discovered a pattern of frequency among the multiple considerations of suitability in which worth (wealth, status and occupation) was the main factor followed by personal affection, age, character and marital status.⁵ Contemporaries, therefore, recognized the significance of personal attraction but were anxious that it should not override 'prudential considerations'. With so many competing impulses and constraints, it is unsurprising that Ingram concluded that the making of marriage displayed both 'complexity and flexibility'.⁶

Writing as recently as 2008, and about early clerical wives in Germany, Beth Plummer has complained that 'little attention has been given to the women who married

¹ L. Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage in England 1500-1800* (London, 1979), pp. 102-5.

² M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 136, 140; K. Wrightson, *English Society, 1580-1680* (London, 1982), pp. 88, 94-5.

³ D. O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 215-17, 239.

⁴ R. Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage in Mid-Tudor England: Evidence from the Records of Matrimonial Contract Litigation', *Journal of Family History*, 10 (1985), p. 346.

⁵ L. L. Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* (London, 2007), p. 53.

⁶ Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 141-2.

clergy other than as passive recipients of their husbands' choice'.⁷ The same could be said of their English counterparts, a situation explained in part by the fact that Elizabethan clergy wives have left no written accounts to explain why they entered into marriage; their husbands are almost equally reticent. Assumptions and generalizations about the reception of clergy wives have led to speculation about the motivation of women who took the 'radical step' of becoming a clergy wife before 1600 risking, it is claimed, 'social suicide' in the process.⁸ When one Sir Peter approached Joan Gonan of Middlezoy (Somerset) as a suitor in 1579, she was adamant that she did not wish to become a minister's wife stating colourfully that she 'would not marry with a minister and that she had lether have to doe with as manie men as coulde stande in an half acre of lande then marrie with hym'.⁹ This is the only rebuttal of a suitor which can be directly attributed to his clerical status. Whether this represents merely the sensibilities of one individual (whose confessional leanings can only be guessed at) or a more widely held attitude awaits further research. However, my examination of the social status of those marrying ministers undertaken in the subsequent chapter, will show that by no means only those with little to lose were prepared to marry ministers.

The affectionless marriage of Stone's interpretation has been replaced by an understanding that love and affection could develop within and be fashioned by personal and social requirements.¹⁰ Christabel Williams-Mitchell correctly surmises that 'devotion to the individual or his cause, or both' would have influenced women in selecting a

⁷ M. E. Plummer, "'Partner in his Calamities': Pastors' Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation", *Gender and History*, 20, 2 (2008), p. 208.

⁸ C. Williams-Mitchell, 'The Wives of the English Clergy 1540-1640' (Unpublished MPhil Thesis, University of Chichester, 2009), p. 26.

⁹ SHC, Act Book, D\D/ca/61. The first entry accuses Joan of uttering 'reprochfull words saienge that she had lever have to doe meaninge in adulterie with as manie men as can stand in the churchyard rather then to be a priestes wyfe'.

¹⁰ L. Stone, *The Family Sex and Marriage*, p. 5; M. Chaytor, 'Household and Kinship: Ryton in the late 16th and early 17th centuries', *History Workshop Journal*, 10 (1980), p. 42; J. A. Sharpe, 'Plebeian Marriage in Stuart England: Some Evidence from Popular Literature', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985), p. 73; A. Macfarlane, *Marriage and Love in England: Modes of Reproduction 1300-1840* (Oxford, 1986), p. 181.

clergyman as a partner but perhaps underplays such considerations.¹¹ Occasional glimpses reinforce the view that mutual personal attraction was a ‘generally recognized criterion’ among clerical spouses as in the wider population.¹² The vicar of Otley, although not contemplating his own marriage, urged Sybil Brodley, ‘you must lie your hand upon youre owne harte and tell youre owne mynde therein’ rather than simply accept her friends’ recommendation as to a suitable husband.¹³ Mrs May, wife of the Bishop of Carlisle, declared that her daughter was free to marry as she liked for ‘love must be free neither depending upon a father’s nor mother’s mind’.¹⁴ In 1569, Miles Downham, vicar of Hinxton (Cambridgeshire), did indeed profess his love for Helen Gipps although subsequently he sought to disentangle himself from the contract when his friends disapproved of his choice.¹⁵ The role of friends in vetting a suitor could play a vital part in decision-making and it has been declared that opposition from friends or family was ‘the most important single identifiable reason’ for such changes of mind.¹⁶ The courtship of Richard Sowden and Anne Norris, future wife of the clerk William Osburne, appears to have faltered for material reasons as Anne stated that ‘Sowdens ffrendes wold looke for more substance than her ffrendes wold geve her’.¹⁷ Christian Wysdom asked the minister Thomas Nicholls if he would ‘forsake all other women for her’ but also sought reassurance over her children’s legacies.¹⁸ The need for love was accepted but had to be balanced against more practical concerns.

Two clergymen offer some insight into those concerns. The diary of Richard Rogers, lecturer at Wethersfield (Essex), records his constant battle to devote himself to

¹¹ Williams-Mitchell, ‘The Wives of the English Clergy’, p. 27.

¹² M. Ingram, ‘Spousals Litigation in the English Ecclesiastical Courts, c.1350-1640’, in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), p. 50.

¹³ BI, CP.G.537.

¹⁴ E. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 101.

¹⁵ E. Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 118-19.

¹⁶ Houlbrooke, ‘The Making of Marriage’, p. 347.

¹⁷ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/3, ff. 282r, 296r, 298-9r, 308r.

¹⁸ OHC, Oxford Diocesan Papers, c. 21, f. 348.

his vocation amid the distractions of family life. His diary entry for August 1587 noted that when ministers married and acquired families ‘much of their delight is employed upon them which was wont to be given to the Lord’ and he lamented that his study was ‘much broken in the day time’ which caused him ‘no small grief’.¹⁹ A visit from John Knewstub, rector of Cockfield (Suffolk), proved particularly unsettling, since Rogers envied Knewstub’s ‘contentation in a sol[itary] life’ which allowed him ‘such a constancy in his whole course, to walk with the Lord’.²⁰ However, when fearful of his wife’s death in imminent childbirth, Rogers concluded that remarriage was a ‘dangerous’ but unavoidable necessity. He fails to explain what personal qualities had attracted him to Barbara, his wife, but lists his reasons for seeking her successor. As points in favour of remarriage he included ‘foregoeing so fitt a companion for religion, husewifry and other comf[orts]’; the ‘care of household matters’ placed upon him; ‘care and looking after children; ‘neglect of study’; the loss of his boarders and of the ‘freendship among her kinred’.²¹ Rogers made no overt reference to affection, but beyond the fulfilment of household and economic duties, he emphasized that his wife should be his spiritual companion.

In what is believed to be the earliest surviving letter of proposal penned by a clergyman (Appendix 2), an array of personal and complementary factors are apparent. These provide not only an insight into his thoughts but also reflect what he believed would be of most concern to his intended spouse. The author, the evangelical preacher Edward Dering, was addressing the object of his affection, Anne Locke, after a courtship which relied on Mistress Martin, a noted Puritan, to act as intermediary. A wealthy widow ten years his senior and an admirer of John Knox, Anne was one of a group of godly

¹⁹ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. M. M. Knappen (London, 1933), p. 96. Similar references can be found on pp. 68, 81, 85, 89, 97.

²⁰ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, p. 95.

²¹ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, pp. 73-4.

women who relied heavily on Dering's spiritual support. In the letter, Dering displays a wealth of emotion of great intensity interspersed with considerations of a more practical nature.²²

The letter opens with Dering's assertion, maybe a reassurance, that marriage to himself as a minister, 'ys verye lafull'. He continues with a declaration that he has no designs on the worldly estate of either Anne or her children and concludes with his own expectations of an elderly uncle. As noted, financial security was an essential part of marriage negotiations. The reference to Anne as a 'good possession' at first glance appears a little clumsy and materialistic although not if he were using 'possession' in its earlier meaning of 'friend' or 'lover'.²³ Anne could have been in no doubt of the depth of his affection for he declared that it was so great that 'nether as I am I wolde remove it unto any, nether yet if I were as highe as in the world I colde rise, I would change it from you'. This proposal, therefore, fits neatly into the mould of the conventional marriage which Houlbrooke characterizes as resting on 'mutual love or affection as well as secure economic foundations'.²⁴ Most extant allusions to affection between clerical spouses occur in their wills. Gregory Dodde, for example, repeatedly referred to his wife Elizabeth as 'my wyffe alias my lover and companyon' recognizing the multiplicity of roles and emotions within all marital relationships.²⁵

Dering's anticipation of Anne's acceptance as 'nether the first nor the gretest benefit that I have receavid' from the Lord could probably have been appreciated only by one who shared his spiritual intensity. Dering, however, was obviously nervous about broaching the subject of marriage and somewhat fearful of rejection but he graciously

²² KHLc, U350/C1/2 ff.28v-29r; P. Collinson, *Godly People* (London, 1983), pp. 283-4; ODNB, Edward Dering (c.1540-1576): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/7530, accessed 19 August 2015; ODNB, Anne Locke (c.1530-1590x1607): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/69054, accessed 19 August 2015.

²³ *Middle English Dictionary* at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med>, accessed 20 June 2015.

²⁴ Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage', p. 346.

²⁵ TNA, PROB 11/52, Gregory Dodde, Dean of Exeter, 1570.

eased the way for Anne should she wish to decline his offer. All decisions were made with divine guidance and an acceptance of God's will and comfort in his faith would, he assured her, lessen the disappointment of such an outcome. Indeed, references to Providentialism and the support of the Lord pervade almost every sentence and it is clear that Anne was in harmony with such beliefs. The letter was received favourably as the couple were married in 1572.²⁶

While some women exhibited a spiritual dependency which marriage to a minister could alleviate, comparability in religious commitment was one of the criteria recognized by contemporaries as making a good match.²⁷ The clergy themselves assumed that a woman brought up in a clerical family would be imbued with a deep religious conviction. John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, for example, wrote to Josiah Simler in 1574 asking him to 'look out for' a wife for the returning Rodolph Gualter and suggested Dorothea Bullinger as a suitable candidate on the grounds that she was 'pious, and, like our friend, the offspring of pious parents'.²⁸ Elizabeth Calton, an orphan brought up in a minister's house, was suggested as a suitable wife for the celebrated puritan minister William Gouge.²⁹ According to the sermon preached at her funeral, 'after some mutual conferences one with another, they took such a liking one of another' and Elizabeth remarked 'I am so far from disliking a man of that profession ... I most desire an husband, being otherwise well qualified, of that function'.³⁰ The desire for such compatibility was not the exclusive preserve of the hotter Protestants, pious women, particularly those who

²⁶ Collinson, *Godly People*, pp. 283-4.

²⁷ S. M. Felch, 'The Rhetoric of Biblical Authority: John Knox and the Question of Women', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 26 (1995), p. 809; P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 76; P. Collinson, *Godly People*, (London, 1983), p. 279; C. Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women, Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 319-20.

²⁸ *Zurich Letters 1558-1579*, ed. H. Robinson (Cambridge, 1842), p. 305; J. Willis, "'A guide, a mistress in godliness...': in search of clergy wives in reformation England", <https://manyheadedmonster.wordpress.com/2015/04/27/a-guide-a-mistress-in-godliness-in-search-of-clergy-wives-in-reformation-england/>, 27 April, 2015.

²⁹ ODNB, William Gouge (1575-1653): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/11133 accessed 14 July 2015.

³⁰ Nicholas Guy, *Pieties pillar: or, A sermon preached at the funerall of mistresse Elizabeth Gouge, late wife of Mr. William Gouge* (1626), STC (2nd edn) 12543, pp. 38-41.

had embraced the Protestant cause, may well have actively sought marriage to a clergyman.

Indeed, the ordering of a godly household in which spirituality encompassed every aspect of daily life and where the day was punctuated by family and private devotions could have presented difficulties to those unaccustomed to such rigours. For example, when Rogers undertook a journey with his wife, they indulged in ‘needless speech’ rather than passing the time ‘profitably’ in contemplation. He was subsequently consumed by intense guilt which only a day of fasting could assuage.³¹ Only an understanding and acceptance of the pre-eminence of spiritual devotion could render such committed behaviour explicable and bearable. This in part is an explanation for the extensive clerical endogamy remarked upon by both contemporaries and subsequent scholars.

The daughters of clergymen brought up in pious households, had personal awareness of the role which they were required to perform and the scrutiny under which they would live their lives. The women themselves had most likely internalised family values in the manner described by O’Hara so that their upbringing both limited the choice of acceptable suitors and directed them towards men in their fathers’ profession.³² Ministers’ daughters were also marked out by their literacy, something exemplified by bequests of books to wives and daughters found in clerical wills. In 1563, for example, William Atkinson, minister of Saint Antholin, London, left books to all his six children including his daughter Jane who received his embossed Testament, his Geneva Psalter, Becon’s *Sicke Man’s Salve* and Beza’s Confession of the Faith.³³ Acquaintance with works of this nature would make them ideal spiritual partners while their literacy elevated them above and differentiated them from other members of the local community. Positioned

³¹ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, p. 61.

³² O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, pp. 215-17, 239.

³³ TNA, PROB 11/46, William Atkinson, 1563.

above the status of the bulk of the parishioners but falling somewhat short of the local gentry, it is easy to see how the daughters of clergymen would have gravitated towards men in their fathers' profession when seeking husbands.³⁴

This trend was further encouraged by clerical sociability which brought the daughters of clergy into the wider clerical community, enhancing their opportunity of finding marriage partners with whom they were socially and spiritually in harmony. The will of John Howseman, rector of Englefield (Berkshire), reveals an extensive web of clerical social interaction. He made bequests to seven clergymen and his gifts included a bushel of wheat to Agnes, the wife of the vicar of Bressenden, twelve pence to his goddaughter, the daughter of the parson of Longley, whose wife also received a turned chair and a cushion.³⁵ The extent of social interaction among the local clergy in one area of Dorset is evident in the will of Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall, and that of Avice, his widow. Henry Helme listed ten pounds owed to him by Thomas Genge, the vicar of Puddletown, and he left books, quantities of wheat and malt, clothing and money to John Cavilion, minister of Corfe, to John Marynier, minister of Hamworthy, and to John Brekehill also described as a minister.³⁶ Avice remembered with small items the wife and two daughters of William Lillington, parson of Lytchett Matravers. She doubted that her executors and overseers would see that her wishes were fully adhered to and designated her beloved and trusty friend William Lillington to be a 'helper' to them to ensure that her will was 'truely and faithfullye executed according to her meaning'.³⁷ Perhaps, therefore, it should come as no surprise that her daughter, Avys Rumsey, found a suitable husband from among the clerical profession and wed the minister William

³⁴ P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), p. 96, especially fn. 9. The tendency of social groups, trades and occupations to marry among themselves is discussed below in Chapter 3.

³⁵ TNA, PROB 11/72, John Howseman, 1588.

³⁶ TNA, PROB 11/64, Henry Helme, 1582.

³⁷ TNA, PROB 11/68, Avice Helme, 1585.

Hodder in 1586.³⁸ Common interests, education and the ambiguity of their position within the local hierarchy accordingly encouraged the clergy to socialise among themselves in an act of ‘collective self-consciousness’.³⁹

Courtships, however, did not always progress smoothly or have a happy outcome and the clergy were not immune to the ‘transient passions, disquieting discoveries ... [and] hopes of better matches’ which could derail any relationship.⁴⁰ What occasioned a change of heart by John Barlow, vicar of Alton (Hampshire), is unknown. He denied that had made any promise or contract of matrimony with Elizabeth Lanman of East Tisted. Elizabeth’s version of events is not recorded but as plaintiff she obviously felt that their exchanges amounted to more than what Barlow viewed merely as ‘some fryvelous communicacon of love between him & her abowt marriadge’.⁴¹ However, from negative experiences it is possible to reconstruct the commonplace.

The disputed courtship in 1587 between Christopher English, vicar of Humbleton (Yorkshire), and Margaret Plumpton also arose from cooling ardour but provides us with an insight into one clerical relationship.⁴² Although the various precepts surrounding marriage are complex, it was alarmingly easy for a couple to form an indissoluble union. Under English marriage law, an agreement to marry made by a couple without coercion and in words *de praesenti*, even without witnesses, constituted a valid contract. In his *Treatise of Spousals*, Henry Swinburne stated categorically that a man and woman who contracted a spousal in this form ‘be very husband and wife in respect of the knot or bond of matrimony’.⁴³ Indeed, participants did not view the spousal or hand-fasting as an initial step but rather the ‘vital event’ in creating the marriage. A betrothal or

³⁸ *The Registers of Sturminster Marshall, Dorset 1563-1812*, transcribed by E. Hobday (1901), p. 84.

³⁹ Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, p. 114.

⁴⁰ Houlbrooke, ‘The Making of Marriage’, p. 347.

⁴¹ HRO, Instance Act Book, 21M65/C2/21.

⁴² BI, CP.G.2286.

⁴³ Henry Swinburne, *A Treatise of Spousals or Matrimonial Contracts*, 2nd edn (London, 1711), pp. 13, 104.

agreement in words *de futuro*, could be dissolved at any time by mutual consent or by a subsequent *de praesenti* contract unless it was followed by sexual intercourse in which case, the contract became binding. Without witnesses it was difficult to prove a contract at law but the exchange of tokens was often cited as proof of intent.⁴⁴ Both types of contract could have conditions attached and be dependent on the goodwill of parents or specific financial provisions. Marriages made in this way, by spousal or handfasting, should have been followed by solemnization.⁴⁵ Increasingly the church expected that these contracts be made before witnesses (the defining feature of irregular marriages being their lack of publicity) and stressed that solemnization in the face of the church was the only guarantee of a socially and legally acceptable marriage.⁴⁶

The depositions recorded in the case of Margaret Plumpton and Christopher English place such legal niceties in a very human context. As in all contested cases, the judge had the difficult task of weighing the conflicting evidence and assessing the credibility of witnesses, a feat which historians four hundred years later must accept that they cannot hope to replicate. However, as O'Hara identifies, whether we believe one account or another is 'not crucial, because what is revealed is not the whole truth about an individual experience but the structure within which it is incorporated'.⁴⁷ This does not, however, render the voices superfluous because through the words of those involved we can begin to appreciate agency, motivation, process and structure.⁴⁸ Although the

⁴⁴ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 190; R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 1996), p. 92.

⁴⁵ R. B. Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage in England 1500-1850* (London, 1995), pp. xiii-xv, 20, 38; For further explanation of marriage law and practice see Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, p. 142; Carlson, *Marriage*, pp. 20-1, 123; R. H. Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation in Medieval England* (Florida, 1986), pp. 26-31; R. Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation 1520-1570* (Oxford, 1979), p. 57; Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage', pp. 340-1; M. Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation in the English Ecclesiastical Courts, c.1350-1640', in R. B. Outhwaite (ed.), *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage* (London, 1981), pp. 37-40; Ingram, *Church Courts*, p.190; A. Tarver, *Church Court Records: An Introduction for Family and Local Historians* (Chichester, 1995), p. 83.

⁴⁶ Helmholz, *Marriage Litigation*, p. 27; Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 219.

⁴⁷ D. O'Hara, "'Ruled by my friends": Aspects of Marriage in the Diocese of Canterbury c.1540-1570', *Continuity and Change*, 6 (1991), p. 16.

⁴⁸ G. Walker, *Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 8.

marriage process was not completed in these cases, it was the interruption not the process that was remarkable and the participants give no indication that their behaviour prior to that point was in any way unusual.⁴⁹

Margaret Plumpton and Christopher English first encountered each other at a christening. This was in itself a suitable occasion for a minister to meet a potential bride given that alehouses and more frivolous social events were deemed inappropriate to one of his calling. After their first meeting, according to Michael Forest, English ‘fell in love with her’ and as he was ‘wonderfull desirous to talke with her from tyme to tyme’. Margaret reciprocated his feelings, and there was ‘love and lykinge between them in the way of maryage’. They met on two or three occasions at Forest’s house and Margaret dispatched friends to talk to English ‘for matrimony to be had between him’ and herself. Francis Grimston acting in Margaret’s interests as her employer, wanted English to ‘make some end of the matter’ one way or another before she left his service and departed for her mother’s house.

The story then follows the pattern described in so many depositions. English assured Forest and Grimston that they were both ‘already agreed between them selves and then took Margaret by the hand’ and a contract was made. The witnesses rehearsed the exact wording used by the couple in the plighting of their troths and described how they drank a cup of ale together ‘in most famylier manner’, that they ‘kyssed together’ and that they declared that they were husband and wife ‘before god’, after which English said he would marry Margaret in the face of the church at Candlemas. English’s later enquiry as to whether Margaret was with child indicates that the marriage had been consummated. Margaret returned to the house of her mother and father-in-law where she received three pence and apples, and her mother was sent a piece of broken silver. In return, Margaret

⁴⁹ O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 13

sent English a handkerchief which he received 'willingly'. The couple met again at Forest's house where Margaret said 'I do seke nothinge but yor selfe according to your promyse'. To this English declared 'thowe shall have my hand, my harte and my purse' but added that he could not marry her for 'two or thre yeres', a delay which Margaret was apparently prepared to accept. The couple 'talked alone together in the garden a good space and drank together and satt uppe together the most parte of that nyght'.

All this was behaviour typical to accounts of early modern courtship ritual and marriage formation in which English's clerical status seems to have occasioned no discernible deviation from the norm. The case came to court in 1587 as English ultimately reneged on his promise and 'did utterlie denye' any talk of matrimony. As the marriage contract had been made in front of witnesses English could not easily disavow its existence but by discrediting the impartiality and the character of the witnesses, he succeeded in undermining their evidence.⁵⁰ At this distance it is not possible to ascertain the veracity of Grimston and Forest's testimonies but the incidental detail of the story is historically more significant than its outcome. Beyond the particulars of the actual marriage contract, it reveals the way in which a minister could meet a partner, the open expression of affection, the verbal promises, the exchange of tokens, the role of friends including Margaret's employer acting *in loco parentis* and the commencement of a sexual relationship before solemnization, all of which were characteristic of the marriage process. Significantly nowhere is there acknowledgement of a need for a certificate of good character for Margaret. Yet it was this feature, the requirement of Injunction 29, which ought to have marked the divergence of clerical marriages from lay practice.

⁵⁰ The failure of Margaret, as plaintiff, to succeed with her suit was very much in keeping with the statistics, Ingram, 'Spousals Litigation', pp. 52-3

The Implementation of Injunction 29

In 1560, Thomas Bentham, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, adjudged Elizabeth Thickyns to be ‘an honest and sobre woman and suche a one that for her conditions is worthye to be cowpled with some honest and discrete mate’.⁵¹ Injunction 29 of the Royal Visitation of 1559 (Appendix 1) instigated a vetting procedure for all prospective clergy wives and this entry in Bentham’s Letter Book represents the earliest surviving example of its implementation. The 1559 proclamation deemed the measure necessary, as ‘there hath grown offense and some slander to the church by lack of discreet and sober behaviour in many ministers of the church, both in choosing of their wives and in indiscreet living with them’. To avoid future scandal, a minister could not marry until his intended wife had received the approval of the bishop of the diocese. This authorization was to be based on a letter testimonial provided by two justices of the peace ‘of the same shire dwelling next to the place where the same woman hath made her most abode’. It was to be made with the consent of her parents, if alive, and if not, then with the agreement of two of her next of kin or of her master or mistress.⁵²

Despite widespread recognition of the significance and impact at parochial level of the introduction of a married clergy, the letters testimonial which accompanied the process have been accorded scant attention within the scholarship on the Elizabethan Church. Michelle Wolfe refers to the ‘one surviving set’ in the diocese of Lincoln and quotes from three examples as she monitors, from 1590 and on through the seventeenth century, the increasing identification of the clergy wife with her husband’s profession.⁵³ This collection contains thirty six certificates from justices of the peace covering the

⁵¹ *The Letter Book of Thomas Bentham, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1560-61*, eds. R. O’Day and J. Berlatsky, Camden Society, 4th series, 29 (1979), p. 130.

⁵² *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. 2, The Later Tudors, 1553-1587*, eds. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (New Haven and London, 1969), p. 125; Appendix 1.

⁵³ M. Wolfe, ‘The Tribe Of Levi: Gender, Family And Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2004), p. 41.

period between 1593 and 1613, six letters from parents supporting the intended marriage and eleven letters apparently unconnected with the clergy.⁵⁴ Helen Parish also considered these letters to be ‘a unique collection of such material’. From their content she tried to establish the number of widows marrying ministers and pointed out that none of the letters suggests that the woman concerned was an inappropriate choice of clerical spouse. Parish points out that the Injunction sent an ambivalent message about clergy wives. On the one hand, a public endorsement of good character strengthened the perception of the minister’s wife within the local community, the harlots and strumpets of past portrayals being supplanted by exemplars of the godly life. However, that such vetting was undertaken at all, suggested that the implications of a married priesthood were still feared by church and state alike.⁵⁵ Eric Carlson, in his article on clerical marriage, has looked more closely at the Injunction itself. He demonstrates that the Injunction was observed but concludes that it achieved limited success in ensuring that only women of upright character entered the vicarage as ministers’ wives.⁵⁶ In the case of an earlier historian, H. C. Lea, a misunderstanding of the wording of the Thirty Nine Articles creates the impression that the Injunction ceased to have meaning after 1563. Lea declared that by allowing priests ‘to marry at their own discretion’ much had been done ‘to relieve them from the degrading conditions laid down by the Queen’. Yet ‘discretion’ was in the choice between marriage and celibacy rather than a personal and unrestricted choice of bride.⁵⁷

⁵⁴ LA, DIOC/CER W/1-7, 9-18, 22-3, 26-8, 30-50. From circumstantial evidence, one undated letter from a father and neighbours, LA, DIOC/CER W/1, must have been issued between 1580 and 1584. An additional three, DIOC/CER W/48-50, are also undated although one can be placed in the reign of James I.

⁵⁵ H. L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 230-1.

⁵⁶ E. J. Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 1-31.

⁵⁷ H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (New York, 1907), p. 140; this error is repeated in J. Werner, ‘“Just as the priests have their wives”: Priests and Concubines in England, 1375-1549’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), pp. 81-2; The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, <https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/book-of-common-prayer/articles-of-religion.aspx#XXXII>, accessed 29 October 2015.

Had the certificates for ministers' wives survived in larger numbers then perhaps they would have drawn more attention, which begs the question as to why there are so few letters testimonial available for study. The most obvious explanation for the paucity of letters establishing the good character of would-be clergy wives is that the Injunction itself was largely ignored. Evidence from a case brought before the High Commission of York in 1588 suggests that this may well have been the situation at least in one area. Although Tristram Janson, clerk of Aysgarth (Yorkshire), accepted that he had married Jane Spence without a certificate of good character from two justices of the peace or the permission of the Bishop, he insisted that he had acquainted Mr Parkinson, commissary of Richmondshire, with his intentions. He claimed that the Archdeaconry of Richmond did not comply with the formalities of the Injunction and that he knew 'diverse beneficed men dwelling within the same Archdeaconry married without licence or approbacon as by the quenes maties iniunctyones is required'.⁵⁸ This statement leads Carlson to postulate that simply informing one's superior and proceeding unless instructed otherwise 'may have been more common than we have suspected because it would leave no traces in the records'.⁵⁹

This may well have been the case in some areas, but sporadic references to the Injunction occur in an array of sources from across the country and indeed throughout the reign. Carlson himself concludes that this vetting procedure was 'enforced right up to Elizabeth's death' and cites several instances drawn from the diaries of two justices of the peace, parish registers, court rolls and visitation material.⁶⁰ Parish concurs that in Lincoln 'most of the diocesan clergy appear to have complied with the 1559 legislation' with those who failed being subject to prosecution.⁶¹ Additional references to the observance of the

⁵⁸ BI, CP.1588/2; Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 16.

⁵⁹ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 16-17.

⁶⁰ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 13-16.

⁶¹ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 231.

Injunction reinforce this conclusion. In 1602, the churchwardens of Pickering (Yorkshire) queried whether the wife of their vicar, Edward Mylls, was commended by justices and whether Mylls was 'licenced to marrye hir according to hir maiesties iniunctions'.⁶² This disquiet could represent continued resistance in principle to the presence of a minister's spouse within the parish or could imply shortcomings on the part of a particular wife; visitation material, however, is not usually reticent on specifics should this be the case. That Mylls was deprived in 1615 for a failure to preach may be of significance as concern over the legality of a cleric's marriage often surfaced as just one of a catalogue of complaints levelled against an unpopular or inadequate minister.

This was indeed the situation in the Jansen case cited above and in a simony case from Yorkshire in 1599. In addition to the main complaint, witnesses declared that Oliver Sykes had brought a heavily pregnant woman to the rectory of Hooton Roberts, married her and acknowledged the child as his. Sykes insisted that before his marriage in 1596 he had obtained 'a lawfull Testimony of two of her majesties Justices of Peace within the Westriding of Yorke of the honest conversacon of the said woman with the probacon and lawfull licence of the ordinary (the bandes of matrimony being published accordinge to the tenor of the said licence)'.⁶³ A third case from Yorkshire, that of William Beard, rector of Kirk Smeaton, demonstrates the capacity of complainants to compile an all-embracing list of grievances against their minister. Beard was pursued between 1593 and 1595 for dilapidations but was also accused of drinking excessively to the extent that he 'had not the right and perfect use of his senses to the great perill and daunger of his owne soule and the evell and pernicious example of others'. In addition, the legality of his marriage to Barbara Cappe came into question. Pregnant at the time of solemnization, the marriage was deemed by parishioners to have been 'not according to her majesties

⁶² T. M. Fallow, 'Some Elizabethan Visitations of the Churches Belonging to the Peculiar of the Dean of York', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 18 (1905), pp. 205-6, 339.

⁶³ BI, CP.G.3085.

injunctions in that behalfe made and established'. The parish had a long memory for Beard's marriage had taken place seventeen years before.⁶⁴ The significance of these pronouncements, however, lies in the parochial expectations that Injunction 29 be observed.

The continued preoccupation with the 1559 Injunction should not be dismissed as persistent hostility to clerical marriage peculiar to the conservative north. For evidence suggests that communities elsewhere were equally insistent that its provisions should be met. In 1561, there was concern in Boughton Malherbe (Kent) that the parson, Thomas Langley, was married to a woman who was with child in Queen Mary's day and whose husband was thought to be alive, with additional doubt expressed that the banns had been called and that two justices had given approval.⁶⁵ Early in the reign such instances could be associated with a particular zeal to follow the new requirements, as clerical marriage itself was a very visible and possibly unwelcome indication of religious change within the parish. However, in the court of the peculiar of Dorchester (Oxfordshire) in 1592, William Coxson, curate of Benson, was cited for having married in irregular circumstances in that his banns had only been read twice, and as he confessed, 'he had not the hands of two Justices of peace concerning her good Conuersacion according to the statute in that behalf provided nether had he the consent of his ordinarie thereunto'.⁶⁶ The Injunction was not merely invoked as additional ammunition against failing clerics, for instances of a more affirmative nature can be traced too. In 1598 in the diocese of Durham, for example, John Hedworth and Richard Bellasis recommended approval of

⁶⁴ BI, CP.G.2646.

⁶⁵ *Church Life in Kent being the Church Court Records of the Canterbury Diocese 1559-1565*, ed. A. J. Willis, (London and Chichester, 1975), no. 63, p. 13.

⁶⁶ D. M. Barratt, 'The Condition of the Parish Clergy between the Reformation and 1660, with Special Reference to the Dioceses of Oxford, Worcester, and Gloucester' (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1949), p. 348.

the marriage of Richard Fawcett, rector of Boldon, to the widowed Eleanor Blakiston of Hedley based on their judgement that she was of 'honest conversation and virtuous life'.⁶⁷

Registers of marriage licences provide further indications of the Injunction being applied. In 1571, the marriage of Joan Piggott to William Yomans, rector of Stoke Goldington (Buckinghamshire), was given official sanction and a marriage licence granted after receipt of testimony of her 'laudable conversation, morals, honesty and uprightness'.⁶⁸ A licence from 1586 for Lewis Lewes, rector of Sutton (Sussex), and Jane Weston is accompanied by the note of a certificate having been 'exhibited by them under the hand of Richard Lewkenor and William Bartlett, according to the statute of Queen Elizabeth'.⁶⁹ In London in 1592, Edmund Roberts, rector of Leaden Roding (Essex), sought to marry Mercy Reymonde of Little Dunmow (Essex), spinster and daughter of Francis Reymonde, gentleman, and 'her laudable & honest life and conversation ... [were] attested under the hands of Francis Barrington & Richard Francke, Esquire, JPs for said county of Essex'.⁷⁰ Also in Essex, the 1601 licence for marriage between Samuel Purchas, curate of Purleigh, and Jane Lease, spinster and twenty-six year old daughter of Vincent Lease, yeoman, recorded that both her parents and Mr D. Freake, parson of Purleigh and Jane's employer, gave their consent.⁷¹ In Exeter too, three such notes exist against entries for marriage licences issued in 1596. Thomas Salter, rector of St Mellion, and Alice Tozer, William Cogan, rector of Chawleigh and Grace Medford of Barum, and Robert Claye, rector of Sowton and Marie Lowman of Honiton, all obtained licences predicated on the testimony of two justices. However, justices William Kirkham and William Poole seem to have been a little confused about their duties, for they vouched for the character

⁶⁷ D. Newton, 'The Clergy, Identity and Lay Society in the Diocese of Durham, 1561-1635', *History*, 44 (2007), pp. 39-40.

⁶⁸ A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy in Elizabethan and Stuart Times, 1558-1660* (London, 1958), p. 34.

⁶⁹ *Calendar of Sussex Marriage Licences in the Archdeaconry of Chichester June 1575-December 1730*, ed. E. H. W. Dunkin, *Sussex Record Society*, 9 (1909), p. 9.

⁷⁰ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London, 1520 to 1610, vol. 1*, eds J. L. Chester and G. J. Armytage (London, 1889), p. 196.

⁷¹ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London*, p. 265.

of Claye himself rather than that of his proposed wife, stating that he was ‘a man leading an honest and steady life’.⁷² The Injunction, therefore, continued to be observed throughout the reign and across the country. The assertion made by Henry Bromley, parson of Stubton (Lincolnshire), when seeking the bishop’s consent to marry Mary Holte possibly reveals why this was the case. Bromley had entreated the justices to provide a certificate of Mary’s good character as he was ‘lothe to incurre the daunger which might befall him if he should proceed in the said marriage contrarie to the order prescribed in the said Iniunctiones’.⁷³

Bromley was not being overcautious. In 1574 Thomas Houghton, curate of St Sepulchre’s, Northampton, was accused of having contracted a clandestine marriage with his wife, Mary Greene, and clerics were indeed presented in the church courts for having solemnized the marriages of their fellows without banns or licence from their Ordinary.⁷⁴ In 1577, Ralph Crenold, vicar of Culworth (Northamptonshire), was brought before the court for having solemnized marriage between John Gill, parson of West Favell, and one Atkins ‘which dwelt with the tailor in Northampton’.⁷⁵ In 1578, Robert Cawdraye, rector of South Luffenham (Rutland), was accused of solemnizing matrimony between one ‘ffosbrooke, parson of Cranford and his nowe wedded wife ... withowte licence and withowte the consent of my Lord which according to the Iniunction ought to have ben (upon the sufficient commendacion of the woman) requested’.⁷⁶ If justices and clerics such as Bromley as late as 1602 felt under such an obligation, then the explanation for the dearth of letters testimonial cannot safely be attributed to widespread disregard for the Injunction.

⁷² *The Marriage Licences of the Diocese of Exeter from the Bishops Registers*, ed. J. L. Vivian (Exeter, 1889), pp. 11-12.

⁷³ LA, DIOC/CER W/16.

⁷⁴ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/8, f. 114v; Northamptonshire Parish Register Transcripts, St Sepulchre’s, Northampton, 241P/1.

⁷⁵ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X608/15, f.13r.

⁷⁶ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, f. 95r.

Could it be that these certificates of good character are so well hidden within the archive that even those with an active interest in clerical marriage or in post-Reformation clergy have failed to locate them? D. M. Barratt based her research into the parish clergy between the Reformation and 1660 on the dioceses of Worcester, Oxford and Gloucester. She cites a missing certificate for Anne Norris which will be considered later, but she described it as ‘only an incidental reference to this procedure [which] shows that the injunction was still being observed in the latter half of Elizabeth’s reign’.⁷⁷ She was clearly unaware of the existence of any actual letters testimonial within her chosen localities, yet at least one survives. In 1579, Edward Noryce, vicar of Tetbury (Gloucestershire), was issued with a certificate declaring that the woman that Noryce ‘hathe chosen by gods assistance to take to wife’ is deemed to be of good character and ‘good [and] meete for a man of his calling’. Although the justices do not feel it necessary to give her a name, in his will of 1583 Noryce named ‘Pilaster my wife’ as his executrix.⁷⁸ Online catalogues and internet searches have made the hunt for such documents more likely to yield results than in Barratt’s time, but much still depends on accurate labelling within the archive. The content of the Noryce document could not be more clearly indicated for it is archived as *Edw. Noryce vicar: Certificate of character of proposed wife (1579)*. The well-known Lincoln set of letters testimonial are individually catalogued as *Certificate for Minister’s Wife* or in a couple of instances, *Assent to a Marriage*, and are housed in a folder the contents of which are unequivocal.⁷⁹ It can hardly be a coincidence that this particular group of certificates has come to the attention of historians and suspicions are aroused that others may remain hidden for lack of awareness of their true nature.

⁷⁷ Barratt, ‘The Condition of the Parish Clergy’, p. 348.

⁷⁸ GA, GDR/B4/1/2426 Edw. Noryce vicar: Certificate of character of proposed wife (1579); *Will of Edward Norris* at http://www.rpi.edu/~holmes/Hobbies/Genealogy/ps12/ps12_498.htm, accessed 21 March 2011.

⁷⁹ LA, DIOC/CER W/1-10, 12, 13-18, 22-3, 26-7, 30-50.

The Calendar of Worcester Wills and Administrations also Marriage Licences and Sequestrations 1451-1600 in the diocese of Worcester makes no mention of character references for clergy wives. It does, however, list marriage bonds for fifty clergymen between 1562 and 1600 which are stored alongside other documents in the Probate Registry.⁸⁰ A licence enabled a marriage to take place more quickly as the need for the banns was waived, although in Worcester they were still to be called once. It also permitted the couple to marry in a parish other than their own. The implication of both wealth and status conveyed by the cost of licences made marriage by this arrangement increasingly popular as the reign progressed. The greater incidence of licences and the better survival of documents from later in the sixteenth century explain the larger number of and references to marriage licences from 1580 onwards. A clarification of the process involved in obtaining a marriage licence also explains why a variety of documents relating to marriage remain among the diocesan papers. When a licence was sought, the bridegroom or third party swore that there was no just cause or impediment to prevent the couple from marrying - the marriage allegation or obligation. A degree of affinity between the intended couple, a pre-contract of marriage or an existing quarrel or law suit would all constitute just impediment. In Worcester obligations, the bridegroom was merely required to elicit the approval of the woman's parents before proceeding to solemnization, but the Lincoln archive contains letters of consent from parents which may indicate a divergence in procedure between the two dioceses. Once the obligation was signed, a surety or bond was lodged with the ecclesiastical authorities and the licence granted.⁸¹

⁸⁰ *Calendar of Worcester Wills and Administrations also Marriage Licences and Sequestrations 1451-1600*, British Record Society, 31 (1904).

⁸¹ V. Brodsky-Elliott, 'Marriage Licences and the Local Historian', *The Local Historian*, 10 (1973), pp. 282-3.

When clergy sought permission to marry, the letter testimonial indicating the good character of the intended clergy wife would also have to be exhibited. The licence itself was then issued to be presented to the minister of the church where the marriage was to take place but the supporting documents would remain with the diocesan authorities. This explains why, among the marriage bonds issued to clergy at Worcester, are deposited ten hitherto unnoticed letters testimonial. The initial discovery demonstrates the misleading nomenclature applied to these documents. The 1584 entry 'Rawlingson, John, Clerk, Churchill' initially suggests a will, but Rawlingson did not die until 1611. Retrieval of the document revealed that it was actually a certificate of good character for his third wife, Katherine Staunton.⁸² Further research uncovered an additional nine letters testimonial, the calendaring of which bears no indication of their true content. It is entirely possible that additional certificates may be stored in similar obscurity in archives across the country and await detection.

The certificates at Worcester exist only for the period between 1583 and 1589, but significantly this places them a decade earlier than those in Lincoln. According to the *Calendar*, between these dates twenty eight licences were issued at Worcester suggesting the loss or absence of eighteen certificates. As the letters coincide loosely with the episcopate of Edmund Freake, it is tempting to suggest that their existence derives from his personal insistence on a stricter enforcement of the Injunction. However, four of the certificates actually precede his installation, are marked 'sede vacante' and are signed by Edward Archpole, deputy to the Dean. Perhaps Archpole himself imposed tighter control or just a more efficient system of filing. However, Freake personally endorsed the remaining six letters on the reverse in his own hand, a practice which does not appear to have been followed at Lincoln.

⁸² WRO, Probate Registry (PR), 1584, John Rawlingson, 27a; *The Registers of Churchill in Oswaldslow*, ed. R. A. Wilson, *Worcester Parish Register Society* (1914), p. 22; WRO, PR, 1611, John Rawlingson, 117.

All the letters testimonial at Lincoln and Worcester are associated with marriage by licence where the allegation, bond and apparently some certificates were retained by the bishop with the licence acting as proof to the minister solemnizing the marriage that the necessary conditions had been met. The extent to which a licence was the preferred or only means of indicating episcopal approval of a clerical marriage remains unclear. The Injunction itself stated that once in receipt of the certificate, the clergyman intending to marry ‘before he shall be contracted in any place he shall make a good and certain proof thereof to the minister, or to the congregation assembled for that purpose’.⁸³ In their letter testimonial for Ursula Weaver, Worcestershire justices Edmund Coller and John Washeburne are the only officials that rehearse the requirement for the certificate to be presented publicly, stating that ‘the said minister is to mak a proof therof to the Preist & Congregacon assembled, where he shall be married’.⁸⁴ This observation is of significance and could explain the absence of letters testimonial from the historical record. Once the proof of good character had been shown to the minister and congregation the destination of the certificate becomes ambiguous. If the certificate were handed back to the couple after the solemnization of their marriage or if it were retained by the minister to be added to the parish records, it would not enter the diocesan archive.

A jactitation of marriage case from Worcester in 1586 provides further evidence that the absence of such letters from the archive does not mean that they had not been sought or written.⁸⁵ William Osburne, vicar of Chaddesley Corbett (Worcestershire), sought to free himself from the persistence of Anne Norris in her appeals that he should honour his obligations and marry her. He argued that she had previously been contracted

⁸³ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, p. 125.

⁸⁴ WRO, PR, 1587, Richard Bidle & Ursula Weaver, 121o.

⁸⁵ In English Law, jactitation of marriage is the untruthful assertion by one party that he or she is married to another. A successful private suit established the plaintiff's right to marry someone else whereas an unsuccessful suit established that plaintiff and defendant had entered into a valid marriage, <http://definitions.uslegal.com/j/jactitation-of-marriage>, accessed 16 May 2013; M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage*, p. 191.

to marry another and that no contract of marriage existed between them. Anne and several witnesses, however, maintained that Osburne had indeed promised to marry her and that sexual relations had followed at his insistence. Weighing his words carefully, Osburne claimed that he had only said that 'if ever he married with any he wold marry with her', and that, besides, the promise had been made five or six years before and that 'beinge soe longe a goe, hyt wold not hurte him'. Local opinion, however, begged to differ. Alice Newall, declared that 'a promisse was a promisse thoughe it was made xx^{ti} or xl^{ti} yeres agoe'. Having failed to end the matter with an inducement of forty shillings, Osburne had apparently agreed to marry Anne if she 'could procure such a certificate', possibly hoping or assuming that Anne would not be able to do so or at least that further delay and difficulty would ensue. William Perkes, a nailer from Chaddesley attested that he and diverse others did 'travaile unto S^r John Littleton Knight & M^r Francis Clare, being iustices of the peace ... upon the report of him & his neighbours the iustices did subscribe unto the certificate'.⁸⁶ Ultimately Osburne lost or abandoned the case, as the parish register of Chaddesley Corbett records that William Osburne and Anne Norris were married on 6 October 1586.⁸⁷ There is no evidence of the survival of this certificate, but a letter testimonial had clearly been sought and provided.

The surviving certificates deserve closer scrutiny than they have hitherto received, for they reveal much about the procedure involved in the implementation of the Injunction and the extent to which justices were aware of their duties and responsibilities. In general, those who wrote these certificates clearly understood their origin, purpose and content. Four of the Worcester letters testimonial make reference to the 'lawes of the Realme' and three specifically allude to the 'Quenes Maiesties Iniunctions' before rehearsing the provisions of the Injunction itself. Four of the Elizabethan letters from

⁸⁶ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/3, ff. 282-3v, 286-7v, 296r, 298, 299r, 308r, 454v-5v.

⁸⁷ *Parish Register of Chaddesley Corbett*.

Lincoln recite the provisions of the Injunction while the rest either mention it specifically or demonstrate an implicit awareness; a situation which continued well into the subsequent reign. Robert Crosbey and William Pouller, bailiffs of the city of Worcester, did this with clarity and accuracy in the 1584 certificate for Katherine Staunton. They explained that ‘for the credite of the Ministerie’ all ministers who

‘are willing to joyne them selves in godly matrimony should in this respecte have such a regard and care to their calling as to adioyne them selves to weomen of godly and honest conversation and the same to be approved by the estimacon and testimony of twoe of her Majestie’s Justices of the peace next to the place of thabode of any such wooman so to be married’.⁸⁸

Only one certificate from Worcester shows some degree of confusion for the justices Edmund Coller and John Washeburne appear to attribute the tenets of the Injunction to the ‘Parlyament holden at Westminster in the sixt yeare of the Raigne of Kinge Edward the sixt’ in which the statute actually reaffirmed the legality of clerical marriage and legitimized the resulting offspring without making any provision for vetting the character of would-be clergy wives.⁸⁹ Although guilty of an inaccurate attribution, nonetheless these particular justices fully comprehended their role in the implementation of the Injunction. The premise which lay behind the Injunction outlived Elizabeth for as late as 1608, a marriage between Thomas Wilshire, clerk, and Frances Manistie, both of Welwyn (Hertfordshire), was considered to offer no scandal ‘to the church or ministry’ while the 1612 the marriage of Ann Cave to William Linge, parson of Edmundthorpe (Leicestershire), was not deemed likely to be ‘a cause of scandall or offence’ to the

⁸⁸ WRO, PR, 1584, John Rawlingson, 27a.

⁸⁹ *The Statutes of the Realm: printed by command of His Majesty King George the Third*, vol. 4, part 1, (Buffalo, 1993), pp. 146-7.

church.⁹⁰ Recognition of the need to fulfil the requirements of Injunction 29 had not been diluted by the passage of time.

Even justices who did not feel the need to summarize the Injunction demonstrated by the form of their letter that they knew what traits of character should be included and from whom the information should be obtained. Epithets such as good, sober, honest and virtuous abound in the descriptions of the lives of prospective clergy wives. In Worcester in 1583, for example, Elizabeth Fido did 'lead her lief honestlie and according to the lawes of god', while in 1587, Agnes Wilson was known to be 'of good honest & discreete lyffe and conversacon'.⁹¹ The Lincoln letters testimonial use similar wording. In 1601, Elizabeth Chamberlaine the intended wife of Noah Bowier was said to be 'of good honest and sober demeanor', and in 1602, Susan Borne of Ufford (now Cambridgeshire) was believed to be 'a virtuouse and descent woman of honest and good fame'.⁹² This terminology replicates the vocabulary employed by the original injunction. It also reflects the conventional sixteenth-century phraseology of character assessment so frequently employed to establish the credit of individuals in cases brought before the church courts. There is sufficient variation and idiosyncrasy of style within the certificates to conclude that the justices wrote freely and in their own words but with an eye to the original wording and meaning of Injunction 29.

Some justices knew the woman concerned personally but others had to rely on the word of employers and neighbours. Gloucestershire justices Rowland Leigh and Edmond Bray could attest that 'wee knowe the sayd Annis Wilson to be of good honest & discreete lyffe & conversacon' while Robert Steyner and Raphe Bagnall, bailiffs of the city of Worcester, declared on their 'owne certaine knowledge' that Margaret Greene,

⁹⁰ LA, DIOC/CER W/39, 45.

⁹¹ WRO, PR, 1583, Roberte Wilcockson & Elizabeth Fido, 65d; WRO, PR, 1587, Anthony Spurrett & Agnes Wilson, 51a.

⁹² LA, DIOC/CER W/ 9, 17.

‘being borne of honest parentes’, had ‘behaved her selfe honstlye, modestlye in the ffeare of god & with suche discretion as hathe bene bothe to her owne iust commendation & the good lykinge of her governors & other honest neyghboures which have the knowledge therof’.⁹³ Officials who did not know the woman themselves stated as much and relied on the testimony of her neighbours. In the Lincoln examples, in an undated letter which must have originated between 1580 and 1584, John Notte gathered the signatures of eleven of the ‘cheffeste in Tylbrok’ as well as that of the current incumbent to verify the ‘good fame and name’ of his daughter Alice.⁹⁴ In Worcester, the justices responsible for certificates on behalf of Elizabeth Fido of Bredicot and Anne Smith of Claines stated that they were ‘credeable enformed’ of their good character.⁹⁵ The opinions expressed in these certificates were not mere formalities; the justices took their duties seriously not only out of ‘christian charitie’ but also to avoid falling foul of the law even when the process was not straightforward and crossed diocesan and county boundaries.

In 1589, a certificate was provided for Anne Aston, daughter of Richard Aston, the late vicar of Eldersfield (Worcestershire), who sought permission to marry Floris Child, the present incumbent and her father’s successor. The justices on this occasion merely added their recommendation based on ‘the report of verye honest and substanciall persons’ below the testimony of those very persons. The author(s) demonstrated a clear understanding of the injunction and in an explanation of its content included the words with the ‘consente, & good will likewise of her parentes, (yf she have anye) & yf she have none, then with thadvice, consent, & good will, of her master where she serveth’ to reflect

⁹³ WRO, PR, 1587, Anthony Spurrett & Agnes Wilson, 51a; WRO, PR, 1587, Thomas Seller & Margaret Greene, 59f.

⁹⁴ LA, DIOC/CER W/1, the date can be placed between 1580 and 1584 as Gyll became vicar of East Claydon, Buckinghamshire in 1580 and Thomas Cooper, to whom the letter was addressed, had become Bishop of Winchester by 1584.

⁹⁵ WRO, PR, 1583, Roberte Wilcockson & Elizabeth Fido, 65d; WRO, PR, 1587, Thomas Franke & Anne Smith, 131c.

Anne's particular situation. The letter was drawn up on behalf of and signed by Edward Pearte of Tewkesbury and Richard Wakeman of Beckford (Worcestershire), who had employed Anne during the previous three or four years and confirmed that she had behaved 'very vertuously, honestly & godlily'. The vicar of Beckford also added his signature for good measure.⁹⁶

What at first sight appears an unwieldy and burdensome procedure could in the diocese of Worcester at least prove remarkably swift. Edmund Hazewell and Giles Reed, for example, signed and sealed the certificate for the marriage of Richard Stone and Ellen Pirton of Redmarley D'Abitot on 1 May 1587 and on the following day, the bishop gave his approval at his house in Hartlebury. The marriage bond bears no date but the couple were married in Redmarley D'Abitot on Sunday 6 May 1587. The entry in the parish register, more detailed than those which surround it, states that the marriage was 'lawfully and suffyciently lycensed'. The whole process had taken only a week.⁹⁷ When Thomas Lennartes married Joan Rawlingson, the certificate was issued on 22 November 1586 and Churchill Parish Register records their marriage on 28 November 1586.⁹⁸ During the episcopal vacancy the administrative functions continued and the granting of the licence took only slightly longer. The justices signed the letter testimonial for Katherine Staunton on 23 April 1584, permission was granted on 2 May, and the couple were married in the parish church of Churchill on 10 May.⁹⁹ The extensive distances within the large diocese of Lincoln do not appear to have caused the marriage arrangements of Richard Field to become particularly protracted. A certificate for the 'modeste maide' Elizabeth Harris of

⁹⁶ WRO, PR, 1589, Floriti Child & Anne Aston, 81b. The authorship of the main body of the letter remains unknown; WRO, PR, 1577, John Noks & Margaret Aston, 58a. Margaret (Anne's sister) had also married a clergyman, John Noks, clerk of Eckington.

⁹⁷ WRO, PR, 1587, Richard Stone & Ellen Pirton, 18b; *Ridmarley D'Abitot Parish Register*. When Stone married again on 28 April 1594, the entry in the parish register recording his marriage to Elizabeth Moreton of Newland in the parish of Great Malvern also noted that they were 'lawfully lycenced accordyng to her maties Iniunctions'.

⁹⁸ WRO, PR, 1586, Thomas Leanarte and Joane Rawlinson, 70a; *The Registers of Churchill*, p. 6.

⁹⁹ WRO, PR, 1584, John Rawlingson, 27a; *The Registers of Churchill*, p. 6.

Hardwick (Buckinghamshire) was signed on 18 March 1594, approval was granted in Lincoln on 5 April and her marriage to Richard Field, Bachelor of Divinity, Winchester, took place in Hardwick four days later.¹⁰⁰ The process was probably not as ‘cumbersome’ as Carlson envisaged.¹⁰¹

Not only did Carlson describe the need for a minister’s wife to obtain a letter testimonial as ‘cumbersome’, he also represented it as ‘humiliating’ while Lea considered it ‘degrading’ and Anne Barstow talked of ‘humiliating restrictions’.¹⁰² Yet against a background where women who had traditionally associated with priests were of dubious social standing and reputation, a written confirmation of a woman’s good character and upbringing was surely a valuable commodity. Moreover, given the blurred interface between the public and private in sixteenth-century society, assessments such as those by Carlson and Lea appear somewhat anachronistic. It was normal practice for the making of any marriage to involve consultation with the parents, friends and neighbours so the requirement for a certificate of good character need not have seemed unduly demeaning.¹⁰³ A 1590 case from Worcester reveals the workings of this informal vetting procedure. In this instance, the intended partner of Joan Bradley was the subject of neighbourhood enquiries which convinced her friends and family that he could not maintain her ‘in any good sort’. The object of Joan’s affection was one Thomas Overton but her friends and uncle became suspicious of his reputation and financial worth and even of his clerical status, the common fame being that having stolen his brother’s orders he was only ‘a seeming minister’. When they prudently checked his credentials with Mr

¹⁰⁰ LA, DIOC/CER W/3; ODNB, Richard Field (1561-1616): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/9393, accessed 19 August 2015.

¹⁰¹ Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage’, p. 13.

¹⁰² Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage’, p. 13; Lea, *Sacerdotal Celibacy*, p. 140; A. Barstow, ‘The First Generation of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?’, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 52 (1983), p. 11.

¹⁰³ S. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 108; E. A. Foyster *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London and New York, 1999), p. 65; D. O’Hara, *Courtship and Constraint*, p. 31.

Archpole, deputy to the Dean, Overton's deceit was confirmed. The Bradley family concluded that Overton was the 'arrantest raskall' in the country and broke off marriage negotiations with Joan returning all his tokens.¹⁰⁴ When set against the background of contemporary marriage formulation, the need to procure a certificate of good character would not have appeared particularly remarkable.

There was a widespread awareness that a man's authority, credit and standing within the community required the maintenance of an orderly household and this was even more crucial when a minister's spiritual and pastoral authority was at stake.¹⁰⁵ These women were marrying ministers and, as Laura Gowing has indicated, although marriage conferred status on women, 'their dishonourable characters or pasts could undermine it', so perhaps it was seen as only prudent to require their acceptability to be publicly acclaimed.¹⁰⁶ Acknowledgement that to become the wife of a minister required admirable qualities which placed a woman in a select group would be more likely to convey esteem than humiliation. In any case, as Bernard Capp has observed, women were accustomed to the close scrutiny of their neighbours as part of an informal female network which helped maintain collective moral probity.¹⁰⁷ There were other occasions on which certificates of good conduct were provided. For example, when Hugh Tunckes, parson of Penton Mewsey (Hampshire), had initially employed Lucy Deane as a household servant, he had required her to 'fetch a testimonial of her good report and honesty' and Lucy duly 'brought such a certificate'.¹⁰⁸ As well as endorsing her professional expertise, a midwife's testimonial was required to affirm that she was of 'sober life and

¹⁰⁴ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/4, ff. 95r-96v, 97v; D. O'Hara, 'The Language of Tokens and the Making of Marriage', *Rural History*, 3 (1991), passim.

¹⁰⁵ Foyster, *Manhood*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁶ L. Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5 (1995), p. 230.

¹⁰⁷ B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 277.

¹⁰⁸ *Winchester Consistory Court Depositions 1561-1602*, ed. A. J. Willis (Hambleden, Lyminge, Folkestone, 1960), p. 4.

conversation'.¹⁰⁹ A statement of good character was a precious commodity in the sixteenth century. Women were prepared to go to court to defend their reputations against even outwardly trivial slights because they thought these could threaten their standing within the community. In such a context, a letter testimonial could be viewed as a mark of distinction, recognizing in writing a woman's credit and worth at a time when one's good name was a particularly fragile commodity.

In most cases, the minister probably instigated the request for a certificate. Hugh Tunckes had to explain that it was not sufficient for his intended's brother and father to attest to Lucy's good behaviour and that they 'must get a testimonial under the hands of the parishioners where she was bred of her good and honest bringing up and conversation, viz. of half a dozen'.¹¹⁰ However, the letters testimonial from Worcester indicate that this was not always the case. It is perhaps unsurprising that John Rawlingson as parson of Churchill should understand the procedure required to marry his daughter to Thomas Lennartes, vicar of St John's Bedwardine. In the letter which they wrote on her behalf, justices Hazewell and Tolye explained that 'the parentes of Jone Rawlynson have requested us to certifie unto your Lord, the behaviour and conversacon of the said Jone'.¹¹¹ However, the prospective bride was not necessarily a passive observer of the procedure but could actually initiate the process. Anne Norris, whose story has been narrated above and whose certificate does not survive, sent neighbours on the errand to procure a certificate on her behalf as her reluctant husband was unwilling to do so himself.¹¹² In 1587, Robert Steyner and Raphe Bagnall noted that they were 'requested by this berer Margreate Greene' to provide the certificate.¹¹³ Carlson's evidence suggested

¹⁰⁹ A. Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2013), p. 160.

¹¹⁰ *Winchester Consistory Court Depositions*, p. 9.

¹¹¹ WRO, PR, 1586, Thomas Leanarte & Joane Rawlinson 70a; *Churchill Parish Register*.

¹¹² WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/3, f. 455v.

¹¹³ WRO, PR, 1587, Thomas Seller and Margaret Greene, 59f.

that testimonials were gathered ‘clearly at the initiative of the clergyman himself’, something the Lincoln certificates appear to support, but in Worcester, the agency of at least two prospective clergy wives is clearly demonstrated.¹¹⁴

Traditional Marriage Practice

Evidence, from across the country and throughout the reign, demonstrates that letters testimonial for prospective clergy wives were actively required and produced and their absence from the historical record does not lie in a widespread disregard for the Injunction. Yet, from examples cited above and from cases which came before the church courts, it is evident that some clergy failed to follow the stipulations of Injunction 29. The reasons for this apparent contempt could derive from personal circumstance, fear that a certificate of suitability would not be forthcoming, lack of parental consent or from attachment to traditional marriage practice. What follows, in seeking to investigate non-compliance and to enquire into the response of the ecclesiastical authorities, relies heavily on depositions made before the church courts in various dioceses. The discussion is, therefore, unavoidably and unashamedly anecdotal as motivation and attitude can only be extracted by a close reading of specific cases.

If a couple were determined to marry but knew or feared that the necessary permissions would not be forthcoming, by making a contract between themselves or by undertaking a clandestine marriage, they might hope to present the authorities with a *fait accompli*. Divorce in this period was granted only in exceptional circumstances so that provided no fault could be found in the contract, the worst that was likely to happen would be an admonition or, more likely, the imposition of some form of penance.¹¹⁵ A pre-emptive strike seems to have been the ploy exercised when the matrimonial intentions of Thomas Nicholls, vicar of Taynton (Oxfordshire), and the widow Christian Wysdom

¹¹⁴ Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage’, p. 14.

¹¹⁵ Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage’, p. 16; For discussion of divorce see Houlbrooke, *Church Courts*, pp. 68-71.

of Burford were threatened. Nicholls had ‘divers tymes moved her to be his wyffe’ and had reassured Christian that he would pay her children’s legacies. Witnesses agreed that the pair had plighted their troths. Unfortunately other witnesses deposed that Christian had subsequently plighted her troth to one Thomas Beare after which Nicholls had arrived and, making reference to a letter, claimed Christian as his wife. In a somewhat confusing tale, Christian’s motivation for the second contract is unclear. Perhaps she simply changed her mind, or the granting of the house to Beare altered her economic circumstances. Conceivably her brother objected to the first match and pushed for the second. Christian’s feelings, it appears, were originally inclined towards Nicholls for she had declared in private to Fulke Jones that she and Nicholls were ‘man & wyffe before God’ and had agreed to a certain Mr Harman that they were contracted together. Indeed Harman deposed that, in the town of Burford, the couple were reputed to be married as ‘they resorte so muche together’. Before the outcome of the suit was finalized, Nicholls acted decisively to resolve the matter and their marriage was solemnized in Taynton church. Perhaps Nicholls had put pressure on Christian, alluding to the ‘inconvenience that might ensue yf she should cast him of’ but in marrying, they had disobeyed an order from the Bishop that neither of them should marry during the course of suit.¹¹⁶ The authorities were obviously aware that marriage could be undertaken to forestall an unfavourable decision.

An irregular marriage would also have been an option should the parental support required by the Injunction not be forthcoming. Parental consent might be ‘a deeply desirable commodity’ for all marriages but for the clergy it was an explicit stipulation of the Injunction.¹¹⁷ Thomas Foster clearly had not given his consent when, in 1587, he, with

¹¹⁶ OHC, Oxford Archdeaconry and Diocesan Papers, c. 21 ff. 347v-9v, 365v-67v, 371r, 373-4v, 445(B). The ‘letter’ brandished by Nicholls could well have been a letter testimonial for Christian but there is no way of telling.

¹¹⁷ Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, p. 134.

two parsons and four churchwardens in support, dragged his daughter Isabel before the Dean of Doncaster on discovering that she had contracted a clandestine marriage with Christopher Priorman, curate of Hatfield (Yorkshire). Foster had grounds for not wishing his daughter to marry Priorman whose unwelcome and predatory sexual advances were documented by several female witnesses. His wife Mawde's attitude appears more ambivalent. Witnesses claimed that Mawde had stated that she wished that her daughter 'were good enoughe' for Priorman and that 'she mighte lyve to see her so well matched'. On hearing of the death of Priorman's first wife, Mawde's sister had sent word that Mawde 'myghte come to her purpose which was to marry her daughter' to Priorman. Whatever Mawde's earlier role, she now joined her husband in formally objecting to the match. Priorman sued Isabel for breach of contract and significantly she employed the Injunction in her defence. Priorman stood accused of having failed to obtain consent for the marriage from Isabel's parents and from the Archbishop, contravening Injunction 29 on both counts.¹¹⁸ The contract, if properly framed, would have remained valid but lacking creditable witnesses Priorman had to withdraw his suit.¹¹⁹

The Injunction's emphasis on the bride's character did nothing, as Carlson has observed, to prevent the scandal of a cleric leaving his wife and establishing a new family elsewhere.¹²⁰ Some early cases of apparent clerical bigamy can be attributed to the Marian deprivations and the confusion which followed but others were deliberate attempts to deceive. A 1573 case involved William Pullan and Margaret who twelve or thirteen years previously were 'solemye and openlye maryed together in the face of the parishe church of Chirland' in the diocese of Chester. The marriage was consummated and they lived together as man and wife for two or three years. Then 'without anye iust or resonable cause' Pullan had 'put [her] from his companye ... to the great greif of the said Margarete'.

¹¹⁸ BI, CP.G.2277, CP.G.2329, CP.G.2334.

¹¹⁹ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 16.

¹²⁰ Ibid., pp. 17-18.

Subsequently in Nottinghamshire, Pullan had acquired a second wife, Anne Pullan alias Barham, with whom he had had five children. Both women desperately pleaded with the court to take pity on them and their circumstances but Margaret could not provide sufficient evidence of a contract of marriage although William had apparently confessed to a ‘pretended’ solemnization of matrimony between them.¹²¹

The extent to which spouses abandoned their husbands or wives and took advantage of the anonymity afforded by poor communication and distance is the subject of debate.¹²² For one clergyman neither distance nor the inconspicuousness offered by London could protect him from discovery. Thomas Corker, rector of Handsworth and vicar of Rotherham (Yorkshire), husband of Elizabeth, and father of seven children, contracted a doubly bigamous marriage with Anne Morgan, wife of a London baker. In court in 1574, she explained that they had married in Buckinghamshire after the calling of the banns but Corker claimed that the banns had been called without his knowledge and that in church ‘some words were mumbled over them that were not of matrimony’, a feeble explanation which impressed no-one.¹²³ The lack of a letter testimonial for a clergyman and his bride should have proved an impediment although Corker may not have acknowledged his clerical status. For those trying to hide a bigamous marriage or to avoid ‘social oversight’, there were plenty of clergy willing to make financial gain by ignoring the requirements of the law.¹²⁴

When the clergyman was the bigamist, the women were the victims and not the cause of embarrassment and damage to the perception of clerical marriage. Women were not, however, always the innocent party. In stipulating that certificates be provided where

¹²¹ BI, HC.CP.1573/2.

¹²² Stone, *Family, Sex and Marriage*, pp. 33, 324, 383; Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 179.

¹²³ BI, CP.G.1681; CCEd, ID:23179, Thomas Corker; *The Parish Register of St Mary, Handsworth, Yorkshire, vol.1B, 1558-1658*, transcribed by H. Ferraby. Corker died in 1577 but his wife continued to live in the parish of Handsworth and was buried 13 May 1601.

¹²⁴ Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, pp. xvii, xxi, 56; Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 149; Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 134.

the ‘woman hath made her most abode’ and by giving employers the ability to offer consent, the Injunction allowed a woman, through freedom of movement, to avoid any incriminating evidence from her native or subsequent parish. Whether a certificate was sought for Isabel Smithson is unknown but her marriage to the clerk Thomas Eire of Wollaton (Nottinghamshire) had woeful consequences. She married Eire and had two children although her husband, William, who had abandoned her and had subsequently married another woman, was still alive. After Eire uncovered the truth about Isabel’s past, he had ‘utterly abhorred and forborn ... [her] companie’. When the case came to court in 1592, it was decreed that the couple should be divorced. In the meantime, Isabel was to do public penance in Nottingham market place and then twice in Wollaton Church. Eire was also required to do penance on two occasions in Wollaton church but the judge ‘to make clear the scandal, expressly interdicted and inhibited the said Eire from having any consort with the said Isabel or from exercising the office of clerk’.¹²⁵ In cases of bigamy, the authorities could act swiftly and severely.

A similar case occurred in London in 1594. It is not clear what caused William Dixon, clerk, to suspect his wife Anne of bigamy but after contacting the curate of Holy Trinity, Ely, his fears were confirmed. The parish book revealed that one Anne Hopkins had married John Tailer twenty two years earlier and subsequent enquiries proved that Tailer was still alive. Anne had left both her husband and Ely, returned to her family home in Hertford and married Dixon with whom she had lived for three years.¹²⁶ Whether certificates had been duly provided for Isabel and Anne is unknown but justices and the local community could only testify within the parameters of their knowledge. The evasion of scrutiny resulting from geographical mobility did indeed present an ‘insurmountable

¹²⁵ NA, *Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeacon of Nottingham 1565-1675*, ed. R. F. B. Hodgkinson, pp. 91-2.

¹²⁶ LMA, DL/C/214, ff. 623-7, 630-2, 637-40.

problem' to both secular and ecclesiastical authorities when attempting to implement the law.¹²⁷

The most obvious reason for clergy failing to comply with the requirements of the Injunction can be attributed to bridal pregnancy. As Carlson observed there was little point in a letter testimonial if the intended clerical spouse was already pregnant. In his assessment, pregnant clergy brides were the 'embarrassing clergy wives' that the Injunction was designed to prevent.¹²⁸ However, bridal pregnancy is closely allied to traditional marriage practice which accorded little shame to prenuptial pregnancy. Keith Wrightson talks of the flexibility of society's attitudes when sexual intercourse followed a betrothal, a course of action characterized by Carlson himself as 'generally acceptable'.¹²⁹ The consequence of anticipatory sexual relations is considered by Richard Adair to have been 'generally accepted and tolerated, certainly at a popular level'.¹³⁰ Despite the disapproval of moralists, Ingram too sums up attitudes to ante nuptial pregnancy as 'ambivalent but, especially before the end of Elizabeth's reign, tending towards tolerance', noting also that such behaviour extended across social boundaries.¹³¹

According to Hair, who made a detailed study of bridal pregnancy from parish registers, between 10 and 30 per cent of brides were pregnant at the time of their marriage, rates differing between parishes. He concluded that the high proportion of brides who were pregnant at the time of their marriage indicates that any associated shame was not 'widespread, or indeed markedly existent' and that pre-nuptial fornication was 'too common to be regarded as scandalous'.¹³² Indeed for many, pregnancy may well have

¹²⁷ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 18.

¹²⁸ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 17-19.

¹²⁹ Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 93; Carlson, *Marriage*, pp. 128, 131.

¹³⁰ R. Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, p. 92.

¹³¹ Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 226, 230.

¹³² P. E. H. Hair, 'Bridal Pregnancy in Rural England in Earlier Centuries', *Population Studies*, 20 (1966), p. 239; P. E. H. Hair, 'Bridal Pregnancy in Earlier Rural England further examined', *Population Studies*, 24 (1970), pp. 67, 69; Wrightson, *English Society*, p. 93; Estimates vary: Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 219, 'at least a fifth'; E. A. Wrigley and R. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London, 1981), p. 234, 'nearly a third'; Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 43, 'above 25 per cent'.

determined the point of solemnization. The low incidence of defamation cases arising from accusations of pregnancy at the time of marriage is widely agreed to bear out such interpretations.¹³³ The only dissenting voice in this discussion is that of Houlbrooke who maintains that there is little evidence that sexual relations followed matrimonial contracts or that such ante nuptial consummation was tolerated.¹³⁴ While cases of fornication and bastardy provoked comment, censure and public penance, sexual activity in anticipation of solemnization was viewed differently. For this reason John Aldred, vicar of Granby (Nottinghamshire), emphasized that carnal knowledge between himself and Mary Howarde was 'following and not proseedng' their contract. There is no indication from Aldred that he had behaved in any way unusually, even for a clergyman, rather that his matrimonial path was conventional. Yet, as a spousal on its own created a binding contract which the church could not undo, to comply with the Injunction a certificate needed to be sought before this took place. As will be seen, this does not always seem to have happened suggesting that traditional marriage custom, where followed, was difficult to reconcile with the demands of the Injunction.

Aldred was far from unique as the clergy themselves do not appear to have experienced particular shame in bringing pregnant brides to the church for solemnization. The cases of Beard and Sykes discussed above suggest that bridal pregnancy was just an addition to a list of failings levelled at a clergyman during a multi-faceted and acrimonious dispute rather than a significant shortcoming in its own right. A case involving bridal pregnancy came to court in Yorkshire in 1583 not because of the pregnancy per se, but rather because the paternity of the child was in question. Mary Black had been six months pregnant at the time of her marriage to the clerk Thomas Dickson who had stood before the congregation in the parish churches of Brandsburton, Lockington and Bugborough

¹³³ Ingram, *Church Courts*, p. 230; Adair, *Courtship, Illegitimacy and Marriage*, p. 92.

¹³⁴ Houlbrooke, 'The Making of Marriage', p. 345.

(Yorkshire) and announced that he ‘had carnall knowledge of the bodie’ of Mary and ‘had done to hir as ever anie man had done to his wife and did begett the childe that she was then withall’.¹³⁵ Dickson’s clerical status does not appear to have been compromised by the clear association between his actions and traditional marriage practice although his wife’s behaviour certainly occasioned embarrassment. The presentments of churchwardens highlight similar examples of pregnancy among clerical brides. In 1577, William Hause, clerk, of Harringworth (Northamptonshire), was accused of having got his wife with child before he married her.¹³⁶ In 1585, the wife of Robert Jones, curate of Brightling (Sussex), bore a child ‘begotten by the said Robert before marriage’.¹³⁷ Two years later, John Taylor, rector of Sheepy (Leicestershire), confessed that he had had carnal knowledge of Dorothy now his wife before the solemnization of marriage.¹³⁸ The Leicestershire curate, Mr Perkin, in 1602, also confessed that he had got his wife pregnant before the solemnization of matrimony.¹³⁹ The later cases probably reflect the stronger line taken towards the end of the reign against prenuptial fornication in general.¹⁴⁰

Although at the forefront of marriage-making in the parish church, some of the clergy seemed remarkably impervious to this change of emphasis when it came to their own marriages; they displayed the same ‘obstinate attachment’ to traditional practice as did many of the laity.¹⁴¹ Houlbrooke concludes that ‘unwitnessed private agreements may well have been commoner than formal, enforceable contracts, especially in the lower reaches of society’.¹⁴² This judgement is accepted by other scholars. David Cressy agrees there is ‘nothing to suspect that these rituals were abnormal’ while O’Hara observes that

¹³⁵ BI, DC.CP.1583/2.

¹³⁶ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, f.57r.

¹³⁷ J. Goring, ‘The Reformation of the Ministry in Elizabethan Essex’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34 (1983), p. 351.

¹³⁸ LRO, Archdeacons Court, Act Books, Office Causes, 1D41/13/12/43r.

¹³⁹ LRO, 1D41/13/26/6r.

¹⁴⁰ Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 221-2, 230; Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 155.

¹⁴¹ Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. 38.

¹⁴² Houlbrooke, ‘The Making of Marriage’, p. 344.

those involved in such cases ‘give no indication that their behaviour was in anyway unusual’.¹⁴³ Outhwaite maintains that ‘many couples obstinately refused’ to abandon traditional practice ‘coupling themselves in private in irregular ways’ although in their estimation such contracts were far from ‘irregular’.¹⁴⁴ There may well have been a ‘growing acceptance’ that solemnization in church was ‘the only satisfactory mode of entry into marriage’ as Ingram maintains, but not all had come round to this way of thinking and the church had to accept the validity of unions created by acts of consent in which it had played no part.¹⁴⁵ Loreen Giese after outlining the various forms of marriage creation states that ‘solemnization was more a matter of publicity than a requirement for a valid marriage’.¹⁴⁶ Rebecca Probert, however, challenges the ‘myth’ that an exchange of vows was a full legal alternative to regular marriage and that it was regarded by contemporaries in the same way as one celebrated before a minister. She maintains that ‘the vows exchanged formed contracts but these were not the equivalent of a solemnized marriage, merely giving each party the right to insist on the marriage to be celebrated in church’. Her research, however, focusses primarily on the eighteenth century and although she does concede that ‘the work of historians of the 1600s provides a very different perspective on marriage rites’, she remains unconvinced. She argues that for traditional marriage practice to be ‘a “functional alternative” would entail co-residence, a sexual relationship, and some recognition by the parties themselves, and by the wider community, that their relationship was equivalent to a formal marriage’. The examples given in my research meet these requirements, but even if we were to accept that the

¹⁴³ O’Hara, ““Ruled by my friends””, p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ R. B. Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts, 1500-1860* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 48.

¹⁴⁵ Outhwaite, *Clandestine Marriage*, p. xiii; Outhwaite, *The Rise and Fall of the English Ecclesiastical Courts*, p. 51; O’Hara, ““Ruled by my friends””, p. 13; Ingram, *Church Courts*, pp. 193, 205, 219.

¹⁴⁶ Giese, *Courtships*, pp. 2, 13-15; R. Probert, *Marriage Law and Practice in the Long Eighteenth Century: A Reassessment* (Cambridge, 2009), pp. 21, 35, 68, 343.

premise that an exchange of vows constituted only a contract to marry, the timing and their legally binding nature would still conflict with the letter testimonial.

That a clergy bride was pregnant at the time of solemnization does not mean, therefore, that the woman in question was necessarily of dubious character rather than the couple were merely treading the same path as those around them. If a minister intended to seek a certificate of good behaviour for his bride prior to solemnization but adopted common practice with regard to commencement of sexual relations, a resulting pregnancy would render the Injunction irrelevant.

When clergy were willing to enter into irregular marriages and their colleagues were prepared to collude by conducting clandestine marriages, the church authorities could only deal with the aftermath. To the three examples from the 1570s quoted earlier can be added that of Thomas Hancocke, clerk of West Retford (Nottinghamshire), presented for marrying Robert Southworth, clerk, without banns.¹⁴⁷ Hancocke admitted the offence but his punishment is unknown. There is a reference to unspecified proceedings relating to the clandestine marriage of John Palmer, Archdeacon of Ely, and Katherine Knevit, daughter of William Knevit, conducted by Thomas Braine, clerk, in the Chapel of Sir Thomas Howard in Essex, in 1593.¹⁴⁸ However, for some instances it is possible to see how the authorities reacted. In 1599, the clerk, George Meriton confessed that 'he had procured matrimony to be celebrated in the face of the church between himself and Mary Randes, daughter of the said master Thomas Randes ... without having observed all things prescribed in the twenty-ninth injunction of the year 1559'. Randes, a prebendary and Commissary General of the bishop of Lincoln, was responsible for disciplining his own son-in-law. After deliberation, he concluded that 'a case of confession should be dealt with more leniently than a case of conviction, simply absolved

¹⁴⁷ NA, *Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeacon of Nottingham*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁸ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London*, p. 206.

master George and dismissed him finally with an admonition'. This was not a matter of family favouritism for Randes acted with similar leniency towards Thomas Bancks, vicar of South Elkington, after his marriage to Katherine Racke of Louth, widow.¹⁴⁹

In the case of John Aldred, whose marriage to Mary Howarde was introduced earlier, pragmatism again seems to have triumphed. His marriage contract had finally been solemnized by Edward Alred, clerk (possibly a relative) but the banns had been read 'once instead of three times as required by law, no licence however having been previously obtained in accordance with the Queen's Injunctions'. Aldred was required to do penance but failed to carry it out and was twice excommunicated. Yet, the judge knowing his reputation and that his marriage had been publicly solemnized, decreed him to be free from all further proceedings and absolved him.¹⁵⁰ Also in the Archdeaconry of Nottingham but in 1594, John Thorpe, vicar of Hucknall Torkard, admitted that he and Anne Fetherston had mutually contracted a marriage between themselves, that he had known Anne carnally and that there had been no public solemnization. Subsequently they had obtained a licence from the ordinary and married in the face of the church. Thorpe pleaded that case had not been referred to the court at the instigation of others which is significant in itself. He also offered to pay twenty shillings towards some pious cause. On this occasion the pair escaped correction as the marriage had been solemnized and because Thorpe was a clergyman.¹⁵¹ It seems that where possible, the authorities were reluctant to make too public a spectacle of the clergy. As Carlson observed, there was little to be gained by pursuing such cases and the authorities usually accepted the *fait accompli*. The aim of the Injunction, the avoidance of scandal, was best served by not

¹⁴⁹ C. W. Foster, 'The State of the Church in the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I as illustrated by Documents relating to the Diocese of Lincoln', *Lincoln Record Society*, 23, (Lincoln, 1926), pp. xxi-ii; D. Marcombe, 'Spital Hospital: A Saga of the Reformation in John Foxe's Lincolnshire', in D. M. Loades (ed.) *John Foxe at Home and Abroad* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 13. Randes was also the son of the former Bishop of Lincoln, Henry Holbeach alias Randes.

¹⁵⁰ NA, *Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeacon of Nottingham*, p. 110.

¹⁵¹ NA, *Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeacon of Nottingham*, p. 144.

drawing unwelcome attention to a marriage that had actually taken place, even if not in the way the Injunction envisaged.

However, when solemnization could not be obtained and the minister was openly defiant eventually action had to be taken. John Nasshe, vicar of East Tuddenham (Norfolk), seems to have been a serial offender. He insisted that he and ‘one Margaret who kept a howse with hym’ were ‘man and wief before god’. He had failed to fulfil the formalities necessary for a minister’s marriage, had not undergone a solemnization in church and continued to resist pressure to regularize his relationship. Ten years earlier, in 1572, Bishop Parkhurst had tried to reform Nasshe’s ‘troublesom and disordred behaiour’ and reprimanded his scandalous behaviour in ‘refusing lawfull matrimonie.’ His threats seem to have been idle but it appears that his successor’s patience was finally exhausted as Nasshe was excommunicated and ceased to be vicar in 1582.¹⁵² For Nasshe, a formally recognized marriage appears to have been an unwelcome intrusion into his normal lifestyle. The authorities resorted to heavy-handedness only when other measures failed. In general, the action taken seems to have relied heavily on pragmatism and damage limitation with a preference for persuasion and limited sanctions.

Conclusion

All early modern marriages, including those of the clergy, required individuals to weigh a variety of personal and economic considerations. Only occasionally is it possible to glimpse the intimate thoughts and feelings of those embarking on marriage but it appears that the clerical suitors recognized the need for both mutual affection and spiritual parity tempered by financial prudence. The desire for spiritual companionship encouraged clerical endogamy as did the tendency of the clergy to socialize among themselves aided by their somewhat anomalous position within local society.

¹⁵² NRO, DN/DEP19/20, 1581-2, ff. 87r-90r; *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, compiled during the years 1571-5*, ed. R. A. Houlbrooke, *Norfolk Record Society*, 43 (1975), pp. 165-6.

The making of all marriages was a multi-dimensional process radiating out from the couple themselves to family and friends and the wider community but the need to observe the formalities of Injunction 29 assigned an additional dimension to clerical marriages. The relative obscurity of the ten certificates for minister's wives in the Worcester diocesan archive suggests that others may yet be discovered affording greater visibility to early ministers' wives while restoring some of their lost historical agency. Considerations of the institution of clerical marriage have failed to engage fully with the letter testimonial as an important historical source but as a result of comparative study and detailed examination, this chapter has shed further light on the procedures involved in implementing the Injunction. It is evident that the requirements and purpose of the measure were clearly understood by the secular authorities, that women themselves actively procured certificates and that the process as a whole was less arduous or degrading than has previously been suggested.

Although the Injunction was enforced throughout the reign and across the country, some individuals failed to comply thereby revealing the inherent practical shortcomings of the measure. This contempt could arise from personal circumstance but was also associated with continued adherence to the traditional marriage practices which did not sit easily alongside the requirements of the Injunction. Some clergy brides were, therefore, never subject to the vetting procedure and even those who were could negate the process by their mobility. The Injunction, therefore, could only function within the constraints of custom and the competence of authority. In this, it provided a continuity with the general tenor of contemporary marriage-making, as much as it represented a departure from it.

3. 'As Common as the Cartway?': The Social Status of Clergy Wives

The marriage of Beatrix Richmond, widow, and servant of the vicar of Horsham (Sussex), to John Spratt, vicar of Sevenoaks (Kent), in 1584, appears to confirm the received perception of the social status of early clergy wives.¹ The traditional view postulates that uncertainty as to the permanency of clerical marriage as an institution combined with the opprobrium associated with 'priests' whores' made respectable women unwilling even to contemplate marriage to a minister. As a result only the desperate would feel that they had anything to gain from such a match so servants, widows and women of low social standing are presumed to predominate among the earliest clergy wives. The elusiveness of Elizabethan clergy wives has contributed to such assumptions and would appear to suggest that any attempt to determine the social status of ministers' spouses would be doomed to failure, a fear reinforced by Roger Manning's pronouncement that 'very little evidence survives concerning the social origins of the clergy'.² Although there is no single repository of evidence to furnish a definitive analysis, this chapter seeks to prove that through the examination of a variety of sources, there is scope for a meaningful discussion of the social backgrounds of the first generations of clergy wives.

The denigration of clergy wives was present in the writings of contemporaries. Although much of what was written at the time hardly amounts to indifferent observation, it has coloured the judgements of subsequent scholars. As Beth Plummer observed for Germany, opponents of reform 'criticized many aspects of clerical household (sic), including the wives' social status ... to underscore these marriages as immoral and dishonourable and undercut the spiritual authority of the clergy'.³ In 1554,

¹ *The Parish Registers of Horsham in the County of Sussex 1541-1635*, ed. R. G. Rice, *Sussex Record Society*, 21 (1915), p. 27.

² R. Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex* (Leicester, 1969), p. 171.

³ M. E. Plummer, *From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife: Clerical Marriage and the Process of Reformation in the Early German Reformation* (Farnham, 2012), p. 215.

the English polemicist, Thomas Martin had employed similar tactics when he claimed that married priests ‘were so blindfolded with the desires of the flesh, that they saw not whom they married, but for haste took at all adventures, some of them common strumpets, some of them widows expressly against the word of God’.⁴ In a similar vein, Miles Huggarde referred to married priests as ‘dissolute’ and said they ‘cared not what women they married, common or other, so they might get them wives’. As a result, he declared, ‘the women of these married priests were such for the most part that either they were kept of other before, or else as common as the cartway’.⁵ Such views continued to pervade Catholic polemic throughout the reign. Nicholas Sander’s, *De Origine ac Progressu Schismatis Anglicani Liber*, edited by Edward Rishton and first published in 1585, claimed that ‘almost all [priests] ... married women of tainted reputation’. Protestants ‘would not give them their daughters in marriage; so they regarded it as something disgraceful to be, or to be said to be, the wife of a priest’. As a result ‘hardly any honest woman could be found who would become the wife of even the highest dignitaries, who were therefore forced to marry whom they could get’.⁶ The axiom that Elizabethan clerics were unable to secure respectable women as partners in marriage has become deeply entrenched in the narrative of clerical marriage.

Later scholarship has been little kinder. One of the most scathing views of early clergy wives comes from the mid-nineteenth century in which Haweis refers to the ‘unequal unions’ into which the upper echelons of the clergy were driven ‘by a combination of circumstances over which individually they had small control’. He went on to declare that ‘mere country clergyman’ fared no better having been ‘consigned for

⁴ Thomas Martin, *A treatise declaring and plainly proving, that the pretended marriage of priests is ... no marriage* (London, 1554), sig. D1v.

⁵ H. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation: Precedent, Policy and Practice*, (Aldershot, 2000), pp. 183-4; Miles Huggarde, *The Displaying of Protestants* (London, 1556), STC (2nd edn) 13558, sigs 6r-v, 11v-2r.

⁶ Nicholas Sander, *Rise and Growth of the Anglican Schism*, ed. D. Lewis (London, 1877), pp. 279-80.

life to the companionship of such a female as would be likely, by accepting his hand, to console her widowhood or repair a blemished name!'. As a result, he declared the Elizabethan clergy were 'demoralized ... to an extent at present happily unknown'.⁷ Although such extreme views lack credibility, the belief persists that clergy found it difficult to obtain suitable partners in the years subsequent to the introduction of clerical marriage. The social status of clerical wives was according to Roger Manning 'not merely low; it was anomalous' so that the clergyman 'was lucky, indeed' if he could make an advantageous marriage.⁸ Others are more cautious. Anthony Bax rather equivocally concluded that 'generally speaking, the parsonage wife came from a poor and unimportant family, although there are plenty of exceptions to show that wellborn women cared more for love than what the world thought of them'.⁹ Muriel Porter, however, confidently asserts that there is 'no evidence that the first generation of clerical wives were not respectable women'.¹⁰ Anne Barstow has also challenged the accepted view and concludes that 'English women of all classes were, in fact, willing partners in the new and far from accepted experiment of clerical marriage'.¹¹ Beyond unspecified entries in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, however, this claim, and those which precede it, lack convincing evidential support and must, therefore, be subjected to further scrutiny.

The dearth of readily available source material on which to base a more grounded analysis has served to prolong reliance on generalization and assumption. In her study of clerical marriage in early Reformation Germany, Beth Plummer has mounted an investigation into the motivation and social status of some of the women who became

⁷ J. O. W. Haweis, *Sketches of the Reformation and Elizabethan Age taken from the Contemporary Pulpit* (London, 1844), pp. 76-7, 79.

⁸ Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex*, p. 173.

⁹ B. A. Bax, *The English Parsonage* (London, 1964), p. 62.

¹⁰ M. Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church* (Melbourne, 1996), p. 73.

¹¹ A. L. Barstow, 'The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?', *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 52 (1983), p. 6.

the first pastors' wives. Although she recognizes that there are 'hundreds of women for whom not even their name, family background, or social origin can be reconstructed', early German clergy wives appear to have left a broader and more substantial imprint on the archive than their English counterparts. Plummer has been able to correlate the increasing acceptability of clerical marriage with a changing social demographic among ministers' wives. Initially pastors drew their wives from among marginalised women including concubines, nuns and widows which reinforced the assumption that all pastors' wives were of dubious background. Once 'poor' but middle class women seized the opportunity to marry, perhaps because they lacked the opportunity to marry elsewhere, marriage to a pastor became acceptable to the middle class as a whole. Significantly, the pastors themselves preferred women of a higher social standing as a marital partner than those whom they had been willing to accept as unofficial wives.¹²

The backgrounds of the women who married Elizabethan clergy can only be reconstructed from incidental references scattered through a wide variety of sources which are particularly meagre for the initial years of the reign. Evidence drawn from parish registers, wills and marriage licences forms the basis for the discussion within this chapter. Parish registers record the marriages of ministers and sometimes when a particularly effusive clergyman has taken charge of the parish book, the name, status and occupation of a woman's father is included. Matthew Allen, vicar of Horsham (Sussex), was one such minister. He seemed exceptionally proud of his family's connections which he rehearsed in the entries for the baptisms of his daughter Mary and grandson Matthew and for his wife's own burial in 1596. The burial record reads:

The 24 day, Isabell the wife of Mr Matth. Alleyn, Vicar of this church, daughter
& heire of Tho. Burnam, of Lambith, in the county of Surrey, & she left alive,

¹² M. E. Plummer, *From Priest's Whore to Pastor's Wife*, p. 243; M. E. Plummer, "'Partner in his Calamities': Pastors' Wives, Married Nuns and the Experience of Clerical Marriage in the Early German Reformation", *Gender and History*, 20, 2 (2008), pp. 211-17.

which she had by the said Math., John Alleyn, nowe Parson of Hitchingfild, & Mary, nowe the wife of Ravenscroft Bennett, of Horsham, mercer, & was of the age of lix yeares & upwards when she died.¹³

While his eagerness to include such information may originally have stemmed from a degree of defensiveness about Isabell's acceptability, a sense of social complacency, if not conceit, pervades the entries. Whatever his motivation, Allen has bequeathed to posterity a valuable insight into the composition of his family. The minister George Drywood, in 1595, entered the death of his wife, Elizabeth, into the parish register of South Ockendon (Essex) with the additional information that she was the daughter of Robert Samson, esquire.¹⁴ The social advancement of the family of John Chapman, parson of Donnington (Shropshire), can be charted across three generations from the parish register. At their marriage in 1574, John and Joan were recorded as the progeny of local husbandmen Rychard Chapman and Thomas Pytt respectively. Their daughter, Joan married Wyllyam, son of Hugh Southall of Beamish Hall, yeoman, and another daughter, Anne married Francis Cartwright of Coventry, yeoman.¹⁵ Such detailed entries are unfortunately far from common particularly for the first decade of the reign. All too often the record is no more than a list of names, for example, Gwen, a member of the family of John Lloyd, a farmer in Myddle (Shropshire), married Richard Dod, clerk, in 1565.¹⁶ Even when parents are named as in the case of Alice Locke who in 1567 married John Styll, clerk, in Crewkerne (Somerset), additional information can be limited. Although the entry notes that her parents were 'Robert & Johan Locke of the cytye of Sar[um]', we know nothing

¹³ *The Parish Registers of Horsham*, *Sussex Record Society*, 21, pp. 139, 186-7, 356.

¹⁴ SEAX, Register of South Ockendon, D/P 159/1/1.

¹⁵ *The Parish Register of Donnington*, *Shropshire Parish Registers, Diocese of Lichfield*, vol. 7 (1909), pp. 236, 242-3, 249.

¹⁶ *Myddle Parish Registers*, *Shropshire Parish Registers, Diocese of Lichfield*, 19 (1931), p. 20.

more about them.¹⁷ The full significance of such entries can only be unlocked with in-depth local knowledge and research.

The marriage records for Thomas Cattell, minister, and Elizabeth Yeardley in 1561 and William Inman, clerk, and Margaret Pavot in 1569 record no additional material, but it is clear from the surrounding entries that the Yeardleys and Pavot/Pavets were local Essex families.¹⁸ Such women did not seem to fear that the community would reverse its opinion of them on marriage to a local minister. Cattell married Agnes Phillipe five months after the death of his first wife.¹⁹ Although little may be known about the women themselves clergymen such as Cattell and Richard Dixon, rector of Horstead (Norfolk), who married Anna in 1559 and Cecilia four years later, did not seem to find it difficult to obtain a wife even during the first decade of clerical marriage.²⁰

Occasionally, a testator provides an insight into his wife's parentage, as in the case of Michael Calwarde, vicar of Barrington (Cambridgeshire), who, in his 1594 will, described his wife Margery as the eldest daughter of Edward Wallis, late Alderman of Cambridge.²¹ Again such detail is unusual as only occasionally is the name of a wife's father recorded and almost never his status.²² If beneficiaries, witnesses and overseers are named and kinship established, such deficiencies can sometimes be overcome but often such evidence is at best tentative.

¹⁷ *Somerset Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 5, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and D. M. Ross (London, 1904), p. 4.

¹⁸ SEAX, The Parish Registers of Great Leighs and Great Canfield.

¹⁹ SEAX, The Parish Register of Little Canfield.

²⁰ *Norfolk Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 3, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and F. Johnson (London, 1907), pp. 54-5.

²¹ TNA, PROB 11/84, Mighell Calwardine, 1594; C. Cross, 'Religion in Doncaster from the Reformation to the Civil War', in P. Collinson and J. Craig (eds), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 58. Cross notes that Arthur Kay, vicar of Doncaster (Yorkshire) from 1579, married twice and on both occasions into the aldermanic elite.

²² TNA, PROB, 11/58, George Johnson, 1576, the vicar of Walthamstow (Essex), was married to Margery, daughter of John Fawkenor of Orsett (Essex); TNA, PROB 11/79, Thomas Cole, 1592, the vicar of West Hendred (Oxfordshire), was married to Hester, the daughter of Simon Bird of Brightwells; TNA, PROB 11/82, Thomas Warter, 1593, clerk of Bewdley (Worcestershire), his wife was Luce, daughter of William Hammons.

The most frequent references to family background and paternal occupation are to be found among marriage licences, which are readily accessible for a number of dioceses. However, they lack homogeneity as some record supplementary information, others simply note whether the bride was a widow or spinster and many exist for only part of the reign. Occasionally, the bonds of obligation required before the issuing of the licence do, as in a few Worcester examples, refer to parental status. One Thomas Broke, farmer, for example, stood surety in the bond issued for the marriage of Peter Holder, clerk of Madresfield (Worcestershire), to Alice Broke of St Andrew's, Worcester.²³ The bond issued for the 1577 marriage between Anthony Spurrell, clerk of Icomb (Gloucestershire), and Margaret Onyon of St John's Bedwardine (Worcestershire), stated that Margaret was the daughter of Roger Onyon, yeoman. Ten years later, Spurrell married again and the letter testimonial for Agnes Wilson described her as the 'daughter of John Wilson of Mangersbury in the county of Gloucestr yeoman'.²⁴ The daughters of yeomen also appear in the marriage licences of the diocese of London. In 1583, licences were granted for Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas Pace of Flamstead (Hertfordshire), yeoman, to marry Edward Spenlowe, vicar, and for Sarah Rayner, a farmer's daughter, to marry the clerk, Thomas Bushopp. Two years later Margaret, daughter of Thomas Springe, yeoman of Chilton (Buckinghamshire), married Lawrence Dyos, clerk.²⁵ In 1598, Nicholas Hovenden of Canterbury, yeoman, stood surety, for the marriage of Susanna Hovenden and Lawrence Dakyne, vicar.²⁶ Even with their limitations, marriage licences afford an opportunity to question whether widows were unduly represented among early clergy wives and to investigate more closely the social backgrounds of at least some

²³ WRO, PR, 1571, Peter Holder and Alice Broke, 113a.

²⁴ WRO, PR, 1577, Anthony Spurret and Margaret Onyon, 83e; WRO, PR, 1587, Anthony Spurrett and Agnes Wilson, 51a. Anthony appears variously as Spurret, Spurrett and Spurrell.

²⁵ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London, 1520 to 1610, vol. 1*, eds J. L. Chester and G. J. Armytage (London, 1889), pp. 117, 118, 141.

²⁶ *Canterbury Marriage Licences, First Series 1568-1618*, ed. J. M. Cowper (Canterbury, 1892), p. 119.

clerical spouses. The instances quoted above cast doubt over the alleged low social status of Elizabethan clergy wives and suggest that sufficient evidence does survive to permit an exploration of their social backgrounds.

Domestic Servants

In her survey of clerical marriage within the early post-Reformation church, Anne Barstow observes that ‘scholars have postulated that the clergy, once they were permitted to marry, chose or could choose wives only from the servant class’.²⁷ The origin of this statement seems to lie in various discussions of Injunction 29 of the Royal Injunctions of 1559. The Injunction required that before a woman could become a minister’s wife she must obtain a letter testimonial or certificate of good character signed by two justices of the peace and presented to the bishop of the diocese. This letter testimonial required evidence of ‘the good will of the parents of the said woman if she have any living, or two of the next of her kinfolds, or for lack of knowledge of such, of her master or mistress where she serveth’.²⁸ In his discussion of the adverse influences on early clerical marriages, Lea reflected on the Queen’s unfavourable attitude to clerical marriage and on Injunction 29 which he considered ‘degrading’ to a parson and unhelpful ‘when it was assumed that his bride must be a woman at service’.²⁹ Similarly, Christopher Hill, when quoting the Injunction, commented that this was ‘significant of the expected social status of clerical wives’, thereby conflating the wording of the Injunction with the underlying assumption that ministers would have difficulty in persuading women of status to become their wives.³⁰ Both Muriel Porter and Dorothy Barratt considered the issue from the standpoint of the Injunction. Porter noted that the Injunction ‘seemed to assume that only women

²⁷ Barstow, ‘The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives’, p. 4.

²⁸ *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. 2, The Later Tudors, 1553-1587*, eds. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (New Haven and London, 1969), p. 125.

²⁹ H. C. Lea, *History of Sacerdotal Celibacy in the Christian Church*, 3rd edn (New York, 1907), p. 145.

³⁰ C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1968), p. 201.

from the servant class would marry priests' but herself believed this not to be the case.³¹ In acknowledging that Mary Holt was described as a domestic servant in her 1602 certificate, Barratt added, 'as the injunction of 1559 leads us to suppose some of the clergy's wives would be'.³² A more thorough investigation of the extent to which the clergy married domestic servants, will be followed by further consideration of the connotations of Injunction 29.

Evidence that servants became the spouses of clergymen is plentiful and can be gleaned from entries in parish registers. In 1565, at St Olave's, London, the minister Henry Trevergo married Magdalen Freinde 'his maide servant'.³³ That such marriages occurred should come as no surprise given the evidence of relationships that developed between clergy and their own household servants as described in the first chapter. However, many marriages to women described as maidservants originated from outside the immediate domestic setting. St Olave's seems to have been a popular choice for clerical marriages. Thomas Hale and Barbara Alleine, maidservant, were married there in 1583 as were Thomas Browne and Frances Shuter, maidservant to Lady Walsingham, in 1590.³⁴ Outside London, Dorothy Birch, maidservant of Thomas Wilton, rector of Myddle (Shropshire), in 1571, became the wife of William Roberts, minister of the word of god at Ryton.³⁵ In the city of York in 1581, John Phillips, minister, made Ellen Richardes, servant to Mr Yonge, his wife, and two years later, Richard Hawcocke, clerk of Ponteland in the diocese of Durham married Isabelle Lawe, servant to Mr Dethecke.³⁶ To this evidence can be added a 1595 case from the Consistory Court at Worcester, in

³¹ Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church*, p. 68.

³² D. M. Barratt, 'The Condition of the Parish Clergy between the Reformation and 1660, with Special Reference to the Dioceses of Oxford, Worcester, and Gloucester' (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1949), p. 347.

³³ *The Registers of St Olave, Hart Street, London, 1563-1700*, London, ed. W. B. Bannerman, *Publications of the Harleian Society*, 46 (London, 1916), p. 218.

³⁴ *The Registers of St Olave's*, pp. 252, 254.

³⁵ *Myddle Parish Registers*, p. 25.

³⁶ *Registers of St Michael le Belfry, York*, *Yorkshire Parish Register Society*, 6, 1899, pp. 33, 44.

which according to William Bullocke, one Gurney, a curate, 'had a bastard by one Jone Case then dwelling with the said Gurney's father in Queenhill And further ... married this last winter a maid of Mr Childs of Poole courte'.³⁷

The surviving letters testimonial also provide evidence that women who had spent time in domestic service became ministers' wives. Eric Carlson quotes the certificate sent by John Cowper on behalf of a prospective minister's wife in which Cowper records that she has the goodwill of both her mother, 'her master ... and of her friends'.³⁸ In 1589, in the diocese of Worcester, a certificate was provided for Anne Aston to enable her to marry Floris Child, vicar of Eldersfield. It was recorded that Anne was of 'honest conversacon, & good behavior' and that she had 'for the space of those three or foure yeres last passed ... served with' Edward Pearte of Tewkesbury and with Richard Wakeman of Beckford. Anne was in fact the daughter of Richard Aston, the late vicar of Eldersfield, and as the prospective bride of his successor was deemed 'a woman fitte & meete for that calling'.³⁹ That in this instance we know something of Anne's background and character calls into question assumptions that the frequent occurrence of domestic servants among the spouses of the clergy was a reflection of attitudes towards clerical marriage.

Yet the nature of domestic service in the sixteenth century was such that to ascribe a low social status to women designated as servants is to misunderstand its role in the lives of the young. By late adolescence, as Ralph Houlbrooke observed, 'a substantial proportion of young people, perhaps most of them, had left home finally or for a long

³⁷ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/4, f. 400v.

³⁸ Letter from John Cowper to Sir John More, *The Loseley Manuscripts*, ed. Alfred Kempe (London, 1836), pp. 254-5, quoted in E. J. Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation', *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), p. 14.

³⁹ WRO, PR, 1589, Floriti Child & Anne Aston, 81b; CCed, ID:79856, Child is listed as Florinus. Elsewhere he is referred to variously as Florinus/Floriti/Florice/Flories.

period'.⁴⁰ Keith Wrightson defined service as 'an elegant means of transferring the labour of the young between households'.⁴¹ Young women in particular would find employment as domestic servants within the households of others, a scenario recognized by Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford as 'the archetypal "growing-up" experience'. Significantly, they also observed that 'no-one was too poor to be a servant or apprentice, and few were too wealthy' because service was 'the common experience of young women from a broad spectrum of society'. The actual work involved took many forms but its principal function was to prepare for entry into and advancement in the adult world, an important aspect of which, for women of all backgrounds, was learning the skills essential for married life.⁴² Domestic service was not necessarily, therefore, a mark of low social standing and could in fact be seen as the ideal training for the future responsibilities of a clergy wife.

Relatives from the extended family were often employed as servants and it is evident from testamentary bequests that the clergy themselves employed their own relatives as servants. Such instances can be identified by a shared surname or an explicit reference to kinship. Hugh Waull, parson of Hasfield (Gloucestershire), for example, bequeathed twenty pounds to Elynor Waull, his 'servant and cosen' and John Stephen, clerk, of Dallington (Sussex), left ten shillings to Alice Stephen his 'late servant'.⁴³ Rose Habergham, sometime servant to Lawrence Habergham, clerk of Walton (Suffolk), received ten shillings and several items of his wife's clothing.⁴⁴ In 1569, Robert Willis, clerk of Cropthorne (Worcestershire), differentiated between the servants to whom he

⁴⁰ R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1540-1700* (Harlow, 1984), pp. 171-2; R. C. Richardson, *Household Servants in Early Modern England* (Manchester, 2010), p. 63. Richardson states that 'sixty to seventy per cent of the fifteen to twenty-four age group worked as live in servants'.

⁴¹ K. Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities, Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain, 1470-1750* (London, 2002), p. 58.

⁴² S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 92-4; see also M. K. McIntosh, *Working Women in English Society 1300-1620* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 46-7; S. E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603; Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 123, 131.

⁴³ TNA, PROB 11/52, Hugh Waull, 1570; TNA, PROB, 11/78, John Stephen, 1591.

⁴⁴ TNA, PROB 11/91, Lawrence Habergham, 1598.

was related and the three who were ‘not of his kindred’ to each of whom he bequeathed a sheep.⁴⁵ Clergymen also employed servants from outside their immediate kinship group and on occasions their parentage can be traced. When Samuel Purchas, curate of Purleigh (Essex), sought leave to marry Jane Lease both were described as household servants of the parson of Purleigh, and Jane had lived at the parsonage for three years. Her parents had given consent for her marriage and her father, Vincent Lease of Westhall (Suffolk), was of yeoman status.⁴⁶ Likewise, the 1600 letter testimonial for Philippa Cranwell, declares that she was the servant of Henry Cholmeley of Burton (Lincolnshire) but also that she was the daughter of John Cranwell, a yeoman from Colne (Huntingdonshire).⁴⁷ The mistaken inference that the term ‘servant’ applied exclusively to women of low social standing has had serious repercussions for the reputation of early clergy wives.

Those employing servants had a responsibility towards them which in the absence of their parents would extend to involvement in the selection and approval of marriage partners. This obligation accounts for the wording of Injunction 29, for, as Peter Rushton noted, it was ‘not surprising to find masters and mistresses intervening in the marriages of their servants’.⁴⁸ When Bishop Parkhurst of Norwich used persuasion and finally threats to bring about the marriage between the clerk Anthony Willmott and his own maidservant, Dorothy Crabbe, his interest and responsibility derived not only from his role as Willmott’s ordinary but also as Dorothy’s employer. Eventually Willmott admitted that he had ‘made a wrong match, and hath caught a shroude ele by the taile, which makes

⁴⁵ WRO, PR, 1569, Robert Willis, 56; TNA, PROB 11/78, Robert Bankes, 1591. Bankes, clerk of Moreton (Essex), made bequests to his servant Margaret Bankes who was also his niece.

⁴⁶ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ LA, Dioc/Cer W/5.

⁴⁸ P. Rushton, ‘Property, Power and Family Networks: The Problem of Disputed Marriage in Early Modern England’, *Journal of Family History*, 11 (1986), p. 213.

me to repent what I haue done'.⁴⁹ Willmott's reluctance to marry the pregnant Dorothy, arose not from her status as a servant but from personal disinclination.

Injunction 29, therefore, acknowledged accepted practice and recognized that within a patriarchal system parents would exercise authority over their daughter but that in their absence such authority would naturally fall to her employers.⁵⁰ That 'maidservants' were evident among the wives of the Elizabethan clergy should hardly be a surprise given the nature of domestic service in the sixteenth century. It should not be interpreted as an indication of their uniformly low social status or form the basis of assertions that only a woman from the lowest levels of society would deign to marry a clergyman. The wording of Injunction 29 rather than denigrating the potential spouses of ministers was recognizing the circumstance from which many, if not most, of these young women would be drawn.

Widows

Widows constitute the second group of women who are traditionally held to number heavily among those willing or sufficiently desperate to contemplate marriage to members of the Elizabethan clergy. According to Vivien Brodsky a 'possible third of all married male testators' through lack of resources 'consigned their wives to a future life of economic hardship and doubtful prospects of remarriage' and even more prosperous widows could experience difficulties in supporting themselves, especially if they had dependent children.⁵¹ In such circumstances, widows understandably could have been prepared to risk ridicule and contempt in return for the financial security that marriage to a minister might provide. Yet a discussion based on more than supposition seems long

⁴⁹ *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, compiled during the years 1571-5*, ed. R. A. Houlbrooke, *Norfolk Record Society*, 43 (1975), pp. 89, 91, fn 132. Willmott married Dorothy and was presented to the benefice of Thurne (Norfolk).

⁵⁰ E. J. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 119.

⁵¹ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds), *The World We have Gained* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 147-8.

overdue and this section considers the prevalence of widows among sixteenth-century clergy wives.

In Elizabethan clergy wills, it is possible to identify that some wives had been married before when a previous husband is specified. Griffith Williams, canon of Hereford cathedral, for example, in his 1574 will, refers to 'Agnes Williams my wieff, late the wife of one Thomas Warren citizen and goldsmith of London'.⁵² A previous marriage is also indicated by references to a wife's children. Thomas Walles, clerk of Barking (Essex), in 1565, bequeathed a bullock to Alice 'my wives daughter' and Robert Walmysley, parson of Playden (Sussex), in 1567 made generous provision for Alice Cooke, 'daughter of my saide wife'.⁵³ Avice Helme, wife of Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall (Dorset), had from her previous marriage three children, Robert, Avys and Margaret with whom Helme appears to have had a difficult relationship.⁵⁴ In 1591, John Stephen, clerk of Dallington (Sussex), left a total of thirty shillings between Joan, Judith, Mary and Elizabeth Barworthe 'my wives daughters'.⁵⁵ There are also instances where the clergyman himself had been married before and charged his future widow with the upbringing of his children from his first marriage. The Essex minister Thomas Morse and the Dorset parson Robert Rickman both entrusted their second wives, Margaret and Susanna respectively, with the upbringing of their four children by their first wives.⁵⁶

The transitory nature of life and the untimeliness of death made widowhood an unwelcome but accepted feature of sixteenth-century life. According to the calculations of Wrigley and Schofield, 30 per cent of those marrying in the sixteenth century had been married at least once before so it is unsurprising that widows figure among the wives of

⁵² TNA, PROB 11/56, Griffith Williams, 1574.

⁵³ TNA, PROB 11/48, Thomas Walles, 1565; TNA, PROB 11/49, Robert Walmysley, 1567.

⁵⁴ TNA, PROB 11/64, Henry Helme, 1582.

⁵⁵ TNA, PROB 11/78, John Stephen, 1591.

⁵⁶ TNA, PROB 11/89, Thomas Morse, 1597; TNA, PROB 11/90, Robert Rickman, 1597.

the Elizabethan clergy.⁵⁷ There was a large pool of both men and women who found themselves once again potential marriage partners which in itself is reason to doubt that widows would have had to settle for clergymen as husbands merely for want of suitable alternatives.

Despite portrayals in contemporary literature, there was no such thing as the typical widow, for age, financial circumstance, the presence of dependent children, social background, geographical location, a deceased partner's occupation and testamentary arrangements all influenced a woman's future options.⁵⁸ Freed from male control legally, personally and financially, a widow enjoyed an anomalous position within the patriarchal society but to exercise this independence she needed both the desire and means to survive alone. As Brodsky cautions, accentuating an aspiration for 'independence' among Elizabethan widows can rely too heavily on an anachronistic view of gender emphases.⁵⁹ This interpretation is challenged by Todd on the grounds that the freedom from male control afforded by widowhood was an accepted theme in early modern writing.⁶⁰ Both can agree, however, that any decision to remarry required the pondering of 'many intangibles'. In balancing emotion and a sense of duty to the deceased spouse against more practical social and economic considerations, only the widow herself could weigh the relative importance of 'opportunity, necessity and preference'.⁶¹ With so many competing factors to be evaluated by so many individuals, it would seem unwise to make a direct correlation between widowhood, desperation and the opportunity to marry into a new and unestablished social group.

⁵⁷ E. A. Wrigley and R. Schofield, *The Population History of England, 1541-1871* (London, 1981), pp. 258-9.

⁵⁸ Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', pp. 126, 128.

⁵⁹ Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', p. 143; B. J. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: a stereotype reconsidered' in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), p. 55.

⁶⁰ B. J. Todd, 'Demographic Determinism and Female Agency: the Remarrying Widow reconsidered ... again', *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), pp. 422, 329.

⁶¹ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 56; Todd, 'Demographic Determinism', p. 422.

The surviving Lincoln letters testimonial indicate that one quarter of the clergy brides were widows while three widows are listed among the ten certificates which survive in the diocese of Worcester.⁶² It is difficult to ascertain the personal circumstances or motivation of such women. However, the 1586 will of yeoman Thomas Pirton of Redmarley D'Abitot (Worcestershire) makes it clear that financial necessity did not force his widow Ellen into a hasty marriage the following year. Thomas bequeathed to Ellen all his houses, buildings, lands, tenements, messuages, lands and rents as well as the residue of his goods which according to the inventory totalled in excess of £53. One of the two supervisors of the will was Richard Stone, parson of the Redmarley D'Abitot, and six months later he received the bishop's consent for his marriage to the 'honeste, discrete, and sober' Ellen Pirton.⁶³ Susan Dotshon was widowed in 1591 but her husband, Richard, rector of Winterbourne (Wiltshire), left her and their five children well-provided for. They received lands, leases and substantial sums of money suggesting that it was not financial motives which drove Susan into the arms of John Wood, clerk, in London five years later.⁶⁴

Any attempt at a statistical analysis of the number of widows among Elizabethan clergy wives relies heavily on the vagaries of the surviving evidence. Marriage licences provide the most readily quantifiable data and are accessible for a considerable period of the reign in the dioceses of Norwich, London, Canterbury, Ely, Exeter, and Chichester.⁶⁵

⁶² LA, DIOC/CER W. Not all fifty three documents in this folder actually relate to ministers' wives, the above percentage is based on those which do; WRO, the letters testimonial are to be found within the wills, inventories and marriage bonds of the Probate Registry.

⁶³ WRO, PR, 1586, Thomas Pirton, 81; WRO, PR, 1587, Richard Stone and Ellen Pirton, 18b.

⁶⁴ TNA, PROB 11/78, Richard Dotshon, 1591; *London Marriage Licences*, 1596, John Wood and Susan Dodshon, p. 231. A significant number of clergy widows chose clergymen as their second husbands, a phenomenon which will be discussed in Chapter 5 in the context of the lack of provision for clerical widows.

⁶⁵ NRO, *A Calendar of Marriage Licences issued by the Consistory Court of Norwich to the end of the year 1588*, transcribed by L. G. Bolingbroke; *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London, 1520 to 1610*, vol. 1, eds J. L. Chester and G. J. Armytage (London, 1889); *Canterbury Marriage Licences, First Series 1568-1618*, ed. J. M. Cowper (Canterbury, 1892); Ely Diocesan Records, Marriage Licences, G2/18. I am most grateful to Eric Carlson for a copy of his findings; *The Marriage Licences of the Diocese of Exeter from the Bishops Registers*, ed. J. L. Vivian (Exeter, 1889); *Calendar of Worcestershire Wills and Administrations in the Consistory Court of the Bishop of Worcester, 1451-1600*, ed. E. A. Fry, *British Record Society* (London, 1904);

Their value and the accuracy of the analysis depend on the assiduousness with which marital status was recorded. The marriage licences which exist for the diocese of Worcester, for example, make no mention of the woman's marital status. In addition, marriage licences cost money to obtain and as the reign progressed became increasingly popular as an indication of wealth and status thereby skewing the results in favour of the more affluent, the very women least likely to be forced into marriages of necessity. However, Brodsky maintains that widows and widowers were more likely to choose to marry by licence as it afforded greater privacy.⁶⁶ Yet in the absence of other data, these records, even with their limitations, offer the best prospect of an objective assessment of the incidence of widows among clergy wives.

In the dioceses under review (Table 4), analysis does not indicate that an unduly significant number of widows feature as clerical spouses. Significantly the figures for London, 33 per cent, mirror the findings of Brodsky who, using the same material, calculated that 35 per cent of all women marrying by licence were widows.⁶⁷ The highest percentage of widows occurs in Sussex within the diocese of Chichester and surprisingly for the final quarter of the century when clerical marriage was more established and when the role of the clergy wife was more well-defined. However, when the figures for all the dioceses are broken down by decade (Table 5) this result is no longer inconsistent as the

Calendar of Sussex Marriage Licences recorded in the Consistory Court of the Bishop of Chichester for the Archdeaconry of Leves, August 1586 to March 1642-3, ed. E. H. W. Dunkin, *Sussex Record Society*, 1 (1902); *Calendar of Sussex Marriage Licences in the Archdeaconry of Chichester, June 1575-December 1730*, ed. E. H. W. Dunkin, *Sussex Record Society*, 9 (1909); *Calendar of Sussex Marriage Licences in the Peculiar Court of the Dean of Chichester and of the Archbishop of Canterbury*, ed. E. H. W. Dunkin, *Sussex Record Society*, 12 (1911); *Paver's Marriage Licences, Yorkshire Archaeological and Topographical Journals (1567-1600)*, <http://www.genuki.org.uk/big/eng/YKS/Misc/Transcriptions/YKS>, accessed 16 January 2014. Only a handful of licences are recorded before 1590.

⁶⁶ Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', p. 128; V. Brodsky-Elliott, 'Marriage Licences and the Local Historian', *The Local Historian*, 10 (1973), pp. 286-7. Other reasons for marrying by licence include fashion, bridal pregnancy, avoiding seasonal and time restrictions, and evading the expenses associated with a local public wedding celebration.

⁶⁷ Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', p. 128.

Table 4. **Percentage of Widows among Women who married Clerics by Licence**

Diocese	Date Range	Number of Licences Issued to Clergy	Number of Widows	Widows as a % of all women marrying clerics
Norwich	1558 - 1588	116	21	18%
London	1565 - 1600	135	45	33%
Canterbury	1568 - 1600	77	29	37%
Ely	1568 - 1599	36	8	22%
Exeter	1568 - 1597	25	5	20%
Chichester	1575 - 1600	41	17	41%
York	1593 - 1600	58	17	29%

Table 5. **Breakdown by Decade of the Percentage of Widows among Women who married Clerics by Licence**

Diocese	1568 - 1577	1578 - 1587	1588 - 1597
London	28%	23%	34%
Canterbury	25%	32%	50%
Ely	20%	7%	43%
Exeter	0%	21%	29%
Chichester	-	27%	40%
Norwich	14%	19%	-

Table 6. **The Number of Widows among Women who married Clerics as noted in Parish Registers**

Date	Number of Marriages	Widows
1560 - 9	52	5 (9.6%)
1570 - 9	95	9 (9.5%)
1580 - 9	122	11 (9.0%)
1590 - 9	102	17 (16.7%)

The figures in Table 6 are based on a survey of over 1000 parish registers

percentages were higher in every region towards the end of the reign. Regrettably it is not possible to produce a statistically viable analysis for the initial decade of the reign. However, it is worth noting that as clergy from across a wide age range sought partners, older clergy would tend to marry women closer to their own age whose eligibility, in most cases, would be predicated upon widowhood. The percentages for the decade between 1568 and 1577 fall short of the third of widows one might expect to find among clergy brides given the data for subsequent years. Again this throws into doubt the assumption that widows constituted a disproportionate number of clergy brides.

In excess of 1000 parish registers and transcripts have been examined in the course of my research. The majority do not record either the social or marital status of those solemnizing marriages. Often it is not even obvious that the husband is actually a cleric so that although the evidence available supports the above findings (Table 6), it would be unwise to base conclusions on this evidence alone.⁶⁸ Between 1560 and 1589, around one tenth of the clerical marriages recorded in parish registers identify the bride as a widow and there is no obvious preponderance of widows in the initial decade of the reign. Once again in the final decade of the century the number of widows rose significantly which may be a reflection of demographic trends occasioned by the excessive rates of mortality associated with epidemics.⁶⁹ Parish registers, therefore, support the overall view that the prevalence of widows among clergy wives has been exaggerated.

Clerical Endogamy

In a letter of August 1581 from Robert Persons to Alfonso Agazzari, the Jesuit Rector of the English College, there is a somewhat gleeful reference to the adultery of Bishop Aylmer's son-in-law, a 'preaching minister', with the observation 'for they usually all

⁶⁸ The data has been collected from in excess of a thousand parish registers from across England either in their original form or as transcripts.

⁶⁹ Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London', p. 129.

marry for the most part within their own tribe of ministers'.⁷⁰ Historians, echoing this sentiment, have remarked on the tendency of ministers' daughters to marry within their fathers' profession. Porter writes of a 'priestly tribalism' occasioned by the intermarriage of clerical families, while Michelle Wolfe observed that clerical endogamy reinforced the collective identity of the profession.⁷¹ Patrick Collinson also viewed clerical endogamy as 'a kind of priestly tribalism' and calculated that in early seventeenth-century Kent one-third of ministers' wives were daughters of clergymen.⁷² The trend towards clerical endogamy quickly became established in the sixteenth century once daughters of ministers came of marriageable age. This section seeks to consider whether, in the case of daughters, clerical endogamy arose from choice or necessity. The personal factors influencing the choice of partner by both minister and his potential spouse have been explored earlier but the sociological factors which encouraged clerical endogamy also need to be examined.⁷³

This tradition of clerical endogamy was established early among the senior clergy, as evidenced in the register of St Olave's church, London, where the marriage of Winifred Turnor, daughter of Doctor Turnor, Dean of Wells, to John Parker, archdeacon of Ely, is recorded as early as 1568.⁷⁴ In 1577, Thomasine Louth, daughter of John Louth, archdeacon of Nottingham, married Zachary Babington her father's official.⁷⁵ Yet endogamy was present among the wider clerical family. Two of the daughters of Arthur Kaye, vicar of Doncaster (Yorkshire) from 1579, married ministers and similar evidence

⁷⁰ *English Historical Documents*, vol. v(a), ed. I. Archer and F. D. Price (London, 2011), no. 311 (ii).

⁷¹ M. Porter, *Sex, Marriage and the Church*, pp. 74-5; M. Wolfe, 'The Tribe Of Levi: Gender, Family And Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2004), p. 28.

⁷² P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 115-116, fn. 98.

⁷³ See Chapter 2.

⁷⁴ *The Registers of St Olave*, p. 248.

⁷⁵ *Nottingham Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 4, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and J. Ward (London, 1902), p. 6.

occurs regularly in parish registers.⁷⁶ For example, Anne, daughter of John Okeley, vicar of Great Burstead (Essex), married Stephen Bereyman, minister in 1576.⁷⁷ Susan, daughter of the rector John Barker, in 1582 became the wife of William Gurrie, minister at Everdon (Northamptonshire) and Avis Rumsey, step-daughter of Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall (Dorset) married William Hodder, minister in 1586.⁷⁸ John Rawlingson, parson of Churchill (Worcestershire) married three of his daughters to local clergymen; Joan Rawlingson married Thomas Lennartes, vicar of St John's Bedwardine, in 1586, Frances became the wife of Simon Picke, vicar of Upton Snodsbury in 1594 and four years later Elizabeth married Richard Forde, parson of Spetchley.⁷⁹

Calendars of marriage licences provide further examples. Both daughters of Richard Aston, vicar of Eldersfield (Worcestershire) married ministers. Margaret obtained a licence to marry John Noks, clerk, in 1577, while Anne procured a letter testimonial in 1589 to facilitate her marriage to Floris Child. The marriage seems to have taken place as soon as Child was appointed to her father's living.⁸⁰ Marriage to one's father's successor in this way was far from unique. Robert Buddle became vicar of Maxey (Northamptonshire) on the resignation of Richard Lively and married his daughter, Alice Lively, in February 1585.⁸¹ At Humberstone (Leicestershire) the vicar Thomas Wilson was buried in 1610 and was succeeded by Thomas Warriner who immediately married one Alice Wilson and, as Blagg observes, it was very probable that Wilson's daughter was swiftly married to the new incumbent.⁸² John Boyse married Miss Holt, daughter of the

⁷⁶ C. Cross, 'Religion in Doncaster', p. 58. Susan married Richard Winter, parson of Sprotborough and Elizabeth married Henry Postlethwaite, parson of Armthorpe.

⁷⁷ SEAX, Parish Register of Great Burstead.

⁷⁸ *Northamptonshire Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 2, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and H. I. Longden, p. 126; *The Registers of Sturminster Marshall, Dorset, 1563-1812*, ed. E. Hobday, (1901), p. 84.

⁷⁹ *The Parish Register of Churchill in Osawaldston*, ed. R. A. Wilson, *Worcester Parish Register Society* (1914), pp. 6, 10, 14; WRO, PR, 1586 Thomas Leonarte and Joane Rawlinson, 70a.

⁸⁰ WRO, PR, 1577, John Noks and Margaret Aston, 58a; WRO, PR, 1589, Floriti Child and Anne Aston, 81b; *CCEd*, ID:65068, Richard Aston died in 1585 and Florinus Child was appointed in 1589.

⁸¹ *The Register Book of the Parish Church of Maxey, Co. Northamptonshire 1538-1713*, ed. W. D. Saunders (London, 1892), p. 19.

⁸² *Leicester Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 9, ed. T. M. Blagg (London, 1913), pp. 123, 126.

previous incumbent, Francis Holt, ‘soon after’ he took up his position as rector of Boxworth (Cambridgeshire) in 1596.⁸³ While personal inclination and the suitability of a minister’s daughter to fulfil the role of clergy wife cannot be discounted, marriages of this nature suggest that an arrangement of some kind had been negotiated.⁸⁴

The presence of women from all social backgrounds as clergy wives renders it unlikely, therefore, that clerical endogamy resulted from a dearth of willing partners beyond the clerical community. The daughters of clergymen were certainly able to find husbands outside their fathers’ profession. Between 1583 and 1603, the daughters of ministers married across the social spectrum, as demonstrated by the marriage licences issued in the diocese of London with gentlemen, a yeoman, a clothworker, an embroiderer, a bricklayer, a waterman, a hosier and a vintner appearing among the occupations listed for their prospective husbands.⁸⁵ Bequests in wills also reveal daughters married to members of the local community. In her will of 1581, Elizabeth Bower, widow of Walter Bower, canon of Wells (Somerset), made bequests to her sons-in-law, John Elliott and Mr Charleton, neither of whom were described as clerks.⁸⁶ Sara, daughter of Richard Strong, parson of Slindon (Sussex), had married John Philpe who was a witness to her father’s 1598 will to which he was able only to make his mark.⁸⁷ Rachel, daughter of Christopher Metcalfe, vicar of Great Missenden (Buckinghamshire), had married Owen Brincklowe, a man of substantial means who had lent his father-in-law the sum of thirty pounds.⁸⁸ Neither clergymen nor the daughters of clergymen were restricted to finding marriage partners from within the clerical profession, that they so often did inter-marry suggests that other factors were at work.

⁸³ *West Stow Parish Register, 1558 to 1850, Wordwell Parish Registers, 1580 to 1850. With sundry notes*, ed. S. H. A. Hervey (Woodbridge, 1903), p. 124.

⁸⁴ The marriage of daughters and widows to subsequent incumbents is further examined in Chapter 5.

⁸⁵ *Allegations for Marriage Licences issued by the Bishop of London*, pp. 117-274.

⁸⁶ TNA, PROB 11/63, Elizabeth Bower als Hawthorne als Hawthorne, 1581; TNA, PROB 11/62, Walter Bower, 1580.

⁸⁷ TNA, PROB 11/91, Richard Strong, 1598.

⁸⁸ TNA, PROB 11/91, Christopher Metcalfe, 1598.

The tendency of various social groups towards endogamy is well-established. Vivienne Brodsky-Elliott in her analysis of marital connections between trades in London and the south east discovered 'clusters' of trades which were statistically more likely to form marriage alliances.⁸⁹ Keith Wrightson observed that the 'principal social groups were essentially endogamous' and that their reluctance to sacrifice social and economic parity created 'clusters of intermarrying social groups'.⁹⁰ The tendency towards endogamy is also emphasized by Martin Ingram who concluded that marriage 'served to reinforce and perpetuate the distinctions of the social order'.⁹¹ This was not a chance outcome for, as Houlbrooke explains, contemporary writers considered that parity of rank was of overriding importance in the choice of a spouse as incongruity could disrupt the relationship and destabilize the marriage.⁹² The clergy differed widely in educational background and economic and social status, but, in the words of Rosemary O'Day, 'all were drawn together by professional interests and duties to make them one social group'. As the profession came to include more graduates, their possession and study of books distinguished them more markedly from their parishioners ultimately rendering them 'caste-like'.⁹³ Collinson identified that an important aspect of clerical professionalization was 'the intensification of internal connections among the clergy as a social group, a matter of collective self-consciousness'.⁹⁴ In his study of the seventeenth-century clergy in Lincolnshire, Clive Holmes recognized that the parson was caught in an inter-hierarchical

⁸⁹ V. Brodsky-Elliott, 'Mobility and Marriage in Pre-industrial England: a Demographic and Social Structural Analysis of Geographic and Social Mobility and Aspects of Marriage, 1570-1690, with Particular Reference to London and General Reference to Middlesex, Kent, Essex and Hertfordshire' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 1979), cited in H. R. French, 'In Search of the "Middle Sort of People" in England, 1600-1800', *Historical Journal*, 43 (2000), pp. 283-4.

⁹⁰ K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (Abingdon, 2003), p. 95.

⁹¹ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 141.

⁹² Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, p. 75.

⁹³ R. O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979), p. 189; R. O' Day, 'The Reformation of the Ministry', in R. O' Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church in England 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), pp. 74-5.

⁹⁴ Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, p. 114.

position, educated above his flock but not quite one of the gentry.⁹⁵ The overall effect was to encourage the clergy to turn to those of their own vocation for social interaction and to select spouses from within their social circle. Clerical endogamy was, therefore, a variant of the status endogamy characteristic of all social groups rather than an expedient remedy for a dearth of willing marriage partners.

The extent of the contact between clerical families evident in contemporary wills and exemplified by numerous bequests to fellow ministers and in the appointment of local clergy as guardians and overseers has already been explored.⁹⁶ Clergy wives, and presumably their daughters too, were active participants in these relationships. A court case from 1582 in the diocese of Winchester allows us a rare glimpse into this world of Elizabethan clerical conviviality. John Towers, vicar of Sherborne St John's and his wife were entertaining Mr Thompson, vicar of Arundel, William Todd, clerk of Upton Grey, and Joan Todd, his wife, in their 'vicaredge hall'. Although the gathering developed into a rather ill-tempered affair with arguments between Towers and his wife and Towers and Todd, the social occasion, as an embodiment of clerical social interaction, was in itself unremarkable.⁹⁷ That marriages ensued when socially and spiritually compatible members of a group met together on a regular basis should not occasion surprise. Clerical endogamy threw up complex webs of friends and colleagues who were connected by marriage so that, as O'Day expressed so succinctly, 'marital relationships were in a sense both the cause and the effect of the closeness of the clerical community'.⁹⁸

Parity of Social Status

In challenging the accepted premise, Barstow concluded that the evidence did 'not bear out historians' assumptions' that only women of low social standing would consider

⁹⁵ C. Holmes, *Seventeenth-Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1980), pp. 52-61.

⁹⁶ See Chapter 2.

⁹⁷ HRO, Deposition Book 1578-82, 21M65/C3/8.

⁹⁸ O'Day, *The English Clergy*, p. 165.

becoming the wife of a clergyman, a view substantiated by the documentary evidence analysed above. Instead she maintained that the 'clergy who at the time of the Reformation were themselves drawn from all classes, married women from their own class', specifying that 'men from the peasant class married servant women' while 'sons of the lower middle class, who made up the bulk of the parish clergy, married daughters of small shopowners and of craftsmen'. This analysis was, she claimed, based on a 'careful study of the sources'. However, the only source acknowledged is the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* which itself hardly encompasses the full social range of clergy.⁹⁹ As the clergy did not form one homogenous body and changed in composition as the reign developed, Barstow's conclusions represent a plausible hypothesis but they need to be substantiated.

Historians of the clerical profession freely acknowledge the diversity of social background, education and income encompassed by this group.¹⁰⁰ Manning concluded that the educated clergy were most typically from 'yeoman stock' while 'the bulk of the uneducated clergy, not so clever at disguising their origins, came from the humblest classes'. He lists incumbents described as merchants and curates who were tailors, drapers, clothiers, mercers, glaziers, weavers, husbandmen and shoemakers.¹⁰¹ Such clerics were not merely the remnants of the unreformed church but also the products of the mass ordinations initially undertaken by the bishops of the Elizabethan church who, desperate to fill empty cures, adopted the philosophy that 'an ignorant pastor was better than no pastor'.¹⁰²

William Overton, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, created seventy ministers in one day in 1585 and the tailors, shoemakers, and other craftsmen whom he ordained may

⁹⁹ Barstow, 'The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives', p. 6.

¹⁰⁰ M. Zell, 'The Personnel of the Clergy in Kent, in the Reformation Period', *English Historical Review*, 89 (1974), *passim*.

¹⁰¹ Manning, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan Sussex*, pp. 172, 180.

¹⁰² O'Day, 'The Reformation of the Ministry', p. 58.

well have continued to exercise their trades.¹⁰³ The Puritan surveys of 1585 were at pains to demonstrate that the clergy still included men of dubious learning but the list of occupations in which some of them were engaged gives a clear indication of their social status. The clergy of Essex included nineteen men who had been engaged in a variety of trades among whom were Mr Glascock, vicar of Hockley, 'sometime a wheelwright'; Mr Pokins, parson of South Hanningfield, 'sometime a fishmonger'; Mr Archer, curate of Little Easton, 'sometime a pedler' and Mr Stere, vicar of Little Baddow, 'sometimes a tailour'.¹⁰⁴ The authenticity of such claims is supported by the parish book of East Horndon (Essex) which contains the inscription that it was 'written by me Robert Hunter parson of Great Horndon' who describes himself as 'once a baker than a rector'.¹⁰⁵ This was not a situation confined to Essex for one 'Barre of Hunnley' (Honiley, Warwickshire) was described as 'a woolwinder and girthmaker by his usuall occupation' while Mathew Hammonde was 'late an apprentice to a mercer'.¹⁰⁶ Such men were likely to attract wives from comparable social backgrounds.

Clerical wills indicate that the majority of clergy were involved in the rural economy to such an extent that Hill noted that in Lincolnshire at the end of the sixteenth century 'practically every parson was a farmer' as, according to Hoskins, was his Leicestershire colleague.¹⁰⁷ This preoccupation with farming, particularly among the beneficed clergy, was, claims Tyler, 'the greatest single factor determining the status of the Elizabethan country clergy'.¹⁰⁸ Richard Tandy, the married parson of Shrawley (Worcestershire), demonstrated his close involvement in the farming economy as almost

¹⁰³ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, pp. 216-17.

¹⁰⁴ *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol. 2, ed. A. Peel (1915), pp. 156-60, 169.

¹⁰⁵ SEAX, Parish Register of East Horndon.

¹⁰⁶ *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, p. 169; examples from Yorkshire are quoted in P. Tyler, 'The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy', *Studies in Church History*, 4 (1967), p. 86; further examples are given in A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy 1558-1660* (London, 1958), pp. 24-6.

¹⁰⁷ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, p. 216; W. G. Hoskins, 'The Leicestershire Country Parson', *Transactions of the Leicester Archaeological Society*, 21 (1940-1), pp. 89-114.

¹⁰⁸ Tyler, 'The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy', p. 89.

all the many bequests in his will of 1562 took the form of produce and livestock.¹⁰⁹ Robert Hollande, clerk of the coastal village of Skinningrove (Yorkshire), supplemented his income from the local fishing trade. In his 1575 will, he made ten individual bequests of one penny each (his only monetary bequests) alongside gifts of fish and pecks of salt.¹¹⁰ Economic circumstance very much determined whether a parson's life revolved around the plough or the pulpit. Houlbrooke differentiates between the 'well-remunerated clergy' who were able to 'devote themselves to prayer, preaching and pastoral work while their wives looked after the household' and the many who were 'part-time farmers whose wives helped them work their glebe' and whose lifestyle would have been barely distinguishable from that of their parishioners.¹¹¹ In 1585, Whitgift claimed that half the benefices in the country were worth less than £10 although research has shown that such clergy were able to supplement their incomes in a variety of ways.¹¹² However, those surviving on barely sufficient or inadequate incomes could have experienced difficulty both in attracting and supporting a wife as the experience of William Sanderson demonstrates.¹¹³ Sanderson felt compelled to give up his curacy in Berwick (Northumberland) as it did not allow him to provide for his wife and child. As he explained, 'I have made the most of itt thatt I can. Putt away my servaunt I have nott so muche as a boye to carye my bookes & yett itt wyll nott suffice to fynde my wyfe & me & my chyld meat & drynke & house rent wyth other necessities'.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ WRO, PR, 1562, Richard Tandy, 76; WRO, The Parish Register of Shrawley. Tandy had married Margery Arden on 25 May 1552.

¹¹⁰ BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, vol. 19, f. 806, Robert Hollande, 1575.

¹¹¹ Houlbrooke, *The English Family*, pp. 109-10; T. Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 155-6.

¹¹² Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, pp. 202, 206-9; O'Day, 'The Reformation of the Ministry', pp. 56-61; M. L. Zell, 'Economic Problems of the Parochial Clergy in the Sixteenth Century', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 20, 36, 40; D. Loades, 'Anticlericalism in the Church of England before 1558: "An Eating Canker"?', in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), p. 4; I. Green, 'Career Prospects and Clerical Conformity in the Early Stuart Church', *Past and Present*, 90 (1981), pp. 83-7.

¹¹³ Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, pp. 202, 206-9; O'Day, 'The Reformation of the Ministry', pp. 56-61; Zell, 'Economic Problems of the Parochial Clergy', pp. 20, 36, 40; Loades, 'Anticlericalism in the Church', p. 4; I. Green, 'Career Prospects and Clerical Conformity', pp. 83-7.

¹¹⁴ State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, 1561-2, SP 59/5, f. 213.

The property, furnishings, clothing and jewellery listed in some clergy wills contrast sharply with the meagre bequests made by others. Similarly, monetary bequests demonstrate the economic diversity present within the clergy. In 1568, the widowed vicar choral of Salisbury, Richard Poore, left £156 in monetary bequests while those of Thomas Smyth, the married vicar of Sidmouth (Devon) amounted to £3 16s 8d.¹¹⁵ A decade later, Walter Bower, canon of Wells (Somerset) and husband of Elizabeth, left a total of £275 in monetary bequests while John Arnolde, clerk of Saltfleetby St Peter's (Lincolnshire) and husband of Joan, bequeathed a mere 6s 8d.¹¹⁶

As the reign progressed, the drive to create a university-trained preaching ministry began to bear fruit but exacerbated the gulf between the unlicensed, barely literate curate in remote rural parishes and the highly educated minister who commanded a higher social position.¹¹⁷ While historians freely acknowledge the enormous gap between, the beneficed and unbeneficed, the learned and unlearned, the tendency is to discuss 'clergy wives' as an entity without differentiation. Yet men of such varied circumstance and prospects were likely to attract wives from equally diverse social backgrounds, women suited to the varied individuals and lifestyles accommodated within the clerical community. The progression towards a graduate profession, the increased gentrification of the clergy and the progressively defined and accepted role of the clergy wife within parochial life would draw women of a different 'sort' into clerical marriages over the course of the reign; a process encouraged by the improved economic position of the clergy and the increase in their material wealth in relation to that of the laity.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁵ TNA, PROB 11/50, Richard Poore, 1568; TNA, PROB 11/52, Thomas Smyth, 1570.

¹¹⁶ TNA, PROB 11/62, Walter Bower, 1580; TNA, PROB 11/62, John Arnolde, 1580.

¹¹⁷ Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants*, pp. 94-7; C. Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and Clericalism, 1580-1640', in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), p. 28; Tyler, 'The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy', pp. 91-2; M. Hawkins, 'Ambiguity and Contradiction in "the rise of professionalism": The English Clergy, 1570-1730', in A. L. Beier, D. Cannadine and J. M. Rosenheim (eds), *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 256.

¹¹⁸ Tyler, 'The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy', pp. 90-3; F. W. Brooks, 'The Social Position of the Parson in the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 3rd series, 10 (1945-7), pp. 35-7.

From 1570 onwards, the social status of more clergy brides can be determined with a degree of certainty and unsurprisingly many were drawn from farming backgrounds. Numerous examples of women from the yeomanry who married ministers have been cited earlier but there were also clergy brides who came from gentle stock.¹¹⁹ Probably the most poignant example appears in the nuncupative will of John Bell, Dean of Ely. Bell left his house and lands to his wife and hoped that she would be contented with her legacy, adding that ‘I fownde her a gentlewoman and I meane to leave her somewhat like not diminishynge any thinge that I have from her’.¹²⁰

Although, as Ian Archer explains, gentility ‘lacked legal definition’, being a member of the gentry was very much about being accepted as such.¹²¹ In 1574, a year after the death of his first wife, William Saunders, minister of Chesham (Buckinghamshire), married Margaret Bacon of Weston Turville, daughter of Mr Nicholas and Agnes Bacon.¹²² Anna Maynard, widow, who married Robert Serle, minister at Lexden (Essex) in 1587 was the daughter of Mr William Lorange of Burstall (Suffolk).¹²³ The use of this title conveyed a degree of respectability and status for as William Harrison explained it was given ‘to esquires and gentlemen, and [one] reputed for a gentleman’.¹²⁴ The gentle status of some clergy brides was explicitly stated for they are described as ‘generosa’ or ‘gentlewoman’. In 1580 in Lapford, Exeter, Hugh Dowrishe, rector, obtained a licence to marry Anna Edgecombe, gentlewoman, and in 1596, in Lamport (Northamptonshire), William Greenhill, vicar of Brixworth, married Margaret Fulnetbie,

¹¹⁹ To the earlier examples can be added Elizabeth Barradale who in 1573 married William Chamberlaine, rector of Sileby (Leicestershire), and who was the daughter of yeoman, Thomas Barradale. *Leicestershire Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 8, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and T. M. Blagg (London, 1912), p. 55.

¹²⁰ TNA, PROB 11/78, John Bell, 1591.

¹²¹ I. Archer, ‘Up and Down the Social Ladder in Elizabethan England’, in T. Cooper (ed.), *Elizabeth and her People* (London, 2013), p. 20.

¹²² *A Transcription of the First Volume, 1538-1636, of the Parish Register of Chesham*, ed. J. W. Garrett-Pegge (London, 1904), p. 184.

¹²³ SEAX, Parish Register of Lexden.

¹²⁴ W. Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. G. Edelen (Washington, 1968), pp. 113-14, quoted in I. Archer ‘Up and Down the Social Ladder’, p. 20.

gentlewoman.¹²⁵ Richard Forthe, clerk, marrying a year after the death of his first wife Anna, took Maria Barwicke, ‘generosa’, for his wife in Great Holland (Essex) in 1594.¹²⁶ John Rawlingson, parson of Churchill (Worcestershire) reminded everyone that his wife, Mawde, had been the daughter of William Acton, gentleman, when he penned the entry for her burial in 1583.¹²⁷ The ministers of Chesham, Lexden, Brixworth and Churchill were all in possessions of livings valued in excess of ten pounds in 1535. Given that, according to Zell, parochial benefices had at least doubled in value between 1535 and 1586, incumbents of such benefices, while not necessarily among the wealthiest, were sufficiently prosperous to attract wives of good social standing.¹²⁸

In London, licences were obtained in 1583 for the marriage of Isabell Myners of Hampton, to the curate Richard Harte, her deceased father being a gentleman from Barton (Staffordshire) and in 1585 for Martha Badcocke of Rayleigh (Essex) to marry the rector Ralph Kinge, her father being George Badcocke, an Essex gentleman. Mirabel Pooley of Boxted (Essex) who married William Boyse, rector of West Stow (Suffolk) in 1572, was a ‘gentlewoman’ but as one of thirteen children and whose father had died in 1548, perhaps she fits into the category of women who short of a dowry might have little to lose by entering into a clerical marriage.¹²⁹ However, to attribute bridal motivation and to speculate on family circumstance from such entries would amount to no more than unsubstantiated conjecture.

Sixteenth-century women from a range of professional and trade backgrounds were prepared to marry clergymen and seem not to have been concerned about any

¹²⁵ *The Marriage Licences of the Diocese of Exeter*, p. 6; *Northamptonshire Parish Registers (Marriages)*, vol. 2, eds W. P. W. Phillimore and H. I. Longden (London, 1909), p. 102.

¹²⁶ SEAX, Parish Register of Great Holland.

¹²⁷ *The Registers of Churchill*, p. 6.

¹²⁸ A further example is the minister George Harris who married Jane, daughter of Humfrey Pen, gentleman, in Clent (Staffordshire) in 1581, *Clent St Leonard Parish Registers* edited for *Staffordshire Parish Register Society*, (2004), p. 7; Zell, ‘Economic Problems of the Parochial Clergy’, p. 40; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, Chesham, £13 6s 8d, vol. 4, p.146; Lexden, £12, vol. 1, p. 443; Brixworth, £14 18s, vol. 4, p. 306; Churchill, £13 6s 8d, vol. 3, p. 264.

¹²⁹ *West Stow Parish Register*, pp. 123-4.

associated scorn or damage to their reputations. Mary Cole, daughter of John Cole, the ‘chief lord of Haverhill’, for instance, married Lawrence Fairclough, vicar of Haverhill (Suffolk) and Susan Cardinal, sister of wealthy lawyer and MP William Cardinal, married Edmund Chapman; apparently neither they nor their families were deterred by the prospect of marrying a minister.¹³⁰ John Still, rector of Hadleigh (Suffolk) had married Anna, daughter of the wealthy clothier, Thomas Alabaster.¹³¹ The Norwich marriage licences rarely refer to parental occupation but we are told that Anna Edwardes who was in 1586 to marry William Thurgood, rector of Grimston, was the daughter of John Warwick, a beer brewer.¹³² Humphrey Ratcliffe, a Northampton cooper, while making testamentary bequests to his daughter Bridget in 1611, recorded that she was the wife of Edmund Skinner who was curate of Pitsford (Northamptonshire).¹³³

In the Worcester marriage bonds, evidence of parental status or occupation is also rare but two instances are recorded. In 1571, one John Wilkes, ‘walker’ (a cloth worker) stood surety for Joan Wilkes of Kidderminster and her intended spouse, Richard Jones, clerk of Arley, while Richard Bach of Bromsgrove, shoemaker, is named in the obligation for Margaret Bache and Humphrey Roe, clerk of Bromsgrove.¹³⁴ The marriage licences for the diocese of London, however, are a particularly rich source of such information although only from 1583. As with other sources, for the crucial period immediately after the introduction of clerical marriage, this archive can offer no assistance. However, the

¹³⁰ ODNB, Samuel Fairclough (1594-1677): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/9072 accessed 12 June 2014; ODNB, Edmund Chapman (1537/8-1602): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/68273 accessed 6 June 2014.

¹³¹ P. M. Hembry, *The Bishops of Bath and Wells, 1540-1640* (London, 1967), p. 184; ODNB, John Still (c.1544-1608): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/26524 accessed 6 November 2014; *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, vol. 3 (2007), p. 454. The rectory of Hadleigh had been valued at £45 18s 8d in 1535; The wealth of clothiers is examined in P. Collinson, ‘Christian Socialism in Elizabethan Suffolk: Thomas Carew and his Caveat for Clothiers’, in C. Rawcliffe, R. Virgoe and R. Wilson (eds), *Counties and Communities: Essays on East Anglian History* (Norwich, 1996), p. 166.

¹³² NRO, *A Calendar of Marriage Licences*, p. 197.

¹³³ Edmund Skinner, <http://www.the-curates-line.com/the-curates-skinner-line.php>, accessed 5 June 2013.

¹³⁴ WRO, PR, 1571, Richard Jones and Joan Wilkes, 56a; OED, entry for ‘fuller’; WRO, PR, 1595 Humphrey Roe and Margaret Bache, 75f.

daughters of three cordwainers, three tailors, two goldsmiths, two grocers, an innkeeper, a draper, a poulterer, a fishmonger, a carpenter and a barber surgeon were among those granted licences to marry clergy. A similar spread of occupations is listed for the deceased husbands of women who subsequently married into the clerical profession. As Table 7 demonstrates, during the last twenty years of the reign the spouses of the London clergy were drawn from all levels of society.

Table 7. **Social Status of Women, as Widows or Daughters, marrying Clergy by Marriage Licence in London 1583 - 1603**

Artisan	Merchant/Professional	Husbandman	Yeoman	Gentry	Clergy
17 (19%)	13 (14%)	1 (1%)	29 (32%)	17 (19%)	14 (15%)

Even when allowance is made for distortion occasioned by the cost of obtaining a marriage licence, the ability of clergymen to obtain spouses from across the social spectrum undermines assertions that only women of low social standing would consider marriage to a sixteenth-century minister. It also reflects the diversity in composition of the clerical profession itself and that the clergy recognized and valued parity of social status in their marriages. The limitations of the sources preclude any definitive conclusions about the social origins of clergy wives in the first decade of the reign but thereafter there can be little doubt that women from all social backgrounds were willing to accept the role of minister's wife.

Conclusion

Ascertaining the social background of Elizabethan clergy wives requires the piecing together of fragments from a combination of incomplete and inconsistent sources. Sadly the evidence is at its most sparse for the period immediately after the introduction of clerical marriage but it is apparent that the traditional view of ministers marrying below their own social status for lack of respectable women willing to become their wives needs

to be revised. Women described as domestic servants were common among clergy brides but, as Injunction 29 recognized, this was the reality for young women in the sixteenth century and should not be used as a marker of social rank. Many clergy wives had been married before but widowhood was also a common feature of the early modern life-cycle. Widows do not appear to have been unduly prominent in marriage licences granted to clergy and it is not safe to assume that a decision to remarry necessarily stemmed from economic necessity. Social parity was as important a consideration for the clergy as for all suitors so that the evolving educational and social status of the ministry would be mirrored in their choice of bride. Ministers sought wives to match their own social standing but the wide diversity in social background and income among the ranks of the clergy, resulted in 'women of all classes' becoming clergy wives. As Barstow had suspected, the spouses of the Elizabethan clergy were drawn from across the social spectrum.¹³⁵ In general, clerical marriage, although legally distinctive, sociologically it resembled other patterns of Elizabethan marriage. When viewed in terms of the status endogamy characteristic of all social groups, even the phenomenon of clerical endogamy was not as remarkable or involuntary as has been portrayed. An appraisal of a wide variety of sources has demonstrated that the traditional view of Elizabethan clergy wives being drawn predominantly from the lower orders of society no longer withstands scrutiny.

¹³⁵ Barstow, 'The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives', p. 6.

4. 'A Mirror of Virtue and Integrity': Expectations of the Elizabethan Clergy Wife

The string of epithets used to describe Elizabeth Gouge at her funeral in 1625 encapsulates the qualities expected of the seventeenth-century clergy wife; she was a 'pious, prudent, provident, painful, careful, faithful, helpful, grave, modest, sober, tender, loving, wife, mother, mistress and neighbour'. Her pursuit of the virtues of sobriety, sedulity, charity and piety, made Elizabeth 'worthy of admiration and imitation' and enabled her to 'grace her husband's vocation'. Moreover, by ordering the affairs of the household 'he had the more leasure to attend his publike function'.¹

Elizabeth, the archetypal minister's wife of the seventeenth century, is portrayed as a paragon of piety. Dogged by the legacy of confessional polemic with its references to priests' whores, strumpets and harlots, and the notoriety of the individuals whose behaviour punctuates the records of the ecclesiastical courts, her sixteenth-century predecessor has fared less well. Existing scholarship often finds little complimentary to say about early clergy wives preferring to depict them as scandalous women who brought the ministry into disrepute. This rather dismissive approach has served to divert attention from pressing questions about the actual role of the minister's wife, its formation and evolution.

For the women who married clergymen at the beginning of Elizabeth's reign, there was no handbook setting out the duties and expectations associated with this innovative role. Reformers had aimed their rhetoric at the theoretical justification of clerical marriage but had failed to explore and anticipate its practical consequences. The priest's wife herself had remained peripheral to the debate and was perceived as a spouse

¹ N. Guy, *Pieties pillar: or, A sermon preached at the funerall of mistresse Elizabeth Gouge, late wife of Mr. William Gouge* (London, 1626), STC (2nd edn) 12543, p. 41; ODNB, William Gouge (1575-1653): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/11133, accessed 12 May 2014. Elizabeth Calton or Caulton had married William Gouge, minister of the London parish of Blackfriars, on 11 February 1604.

not a member of the clerical team; she was most definitely given ‘no position within the Church’.² Injunction 29 decreed solely that she be ‘honest and sober’ and the ecclesiastical hierarchy offered no advice as to her responsibilities, how she should behave or how she was to negotiate possible hostility generated by her novel presence. With no official guidance, the first clergy wives had to forge an identity for themselves, one which accorded with their husbands’ calling and emerging communal perceptions. Using unexplored and neglected sources, this chapter seeks to engage with the existing catalogue of discreditable women before considering how the persona of the clergy wife was constructed in both the domestic and public sphere, how it matched later expectations and how successfully Elizabethan ministers’ wives lived up to this ideal.

Discreditable Clergy Wives

It is not hard to find examples of scandalous and unsuitable women married to sixteenth-century clergymen; indeed, generations of historians have been quick to use them to vilify all early clergy wives. For example, the wife of the vicar of Goudhurst (Kent), Mrs Walter, whose mental stability was open to question, has gained particular notoriety. Estranged from her husband, by 1566, she had come to believe that the village tailor, whom she had been ‘moved inwardly to love’, was her husband before God.³ Carlson observed that the proceedings of the church courts made for ‘entertaining reading’ and illustrated the point with several examples including the wife of the vicar of Downham (Essex) who in 1577 was described as ‘an unquiet woman’ and Joan Gardener who had deserted her minister husband and moved to Leverington on the Isle of Ely where she was said to be ‘such an evil disposed woman that all the parish is weary of her’.⁴ Other unsuitable women include the wife of Francis Saunders, vicar of Ewell (Kent), whose behaviour was declared

² A. Clark, *The Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century*, 3rd edn (London, 1992), p. 239.

³ P. Collinson, *Godly People*, (London, 1983), p. 412.

⁴ E. J. Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), pp. 18-19.

scandalous by the churchwardens and Agnes Gibson, an East Riding minister's wife, who in 1590 was described as 'a scold and a slanderer of her neighbours'.⁵ To the list can be added the wife of Anthony Palmer, rector of Brampton Ash (Northamptonshire), who in 1577 confessed to adultery with Simon Norwich, a member of the local gentry, and one Mrs Tydie who had married a priest in Sussex after the execution of her scrivener husband for fraud in 1598.⁶ Although Mrs Tydie may well have been an unwilling participant in her husband's crime, by conveying money connected with the deception, she had somewhat compromised her honesty.⁷ The wives of those in the higher reaches of the ecclesiastical hierarchy were not immune to scandal. When Henry Ewbank, chaplain to Toby Matthew, Bishop of Durham, thanked Frances Matthew for his preferment, she replied that he should 'thank the hot arsd Quene his wife and not her for it'.⁸

One of the most detailed accounts of a disreputable Elizabethan clergy wife is provided in Peter Marshall's study of John Otes, vicar of Carnaby (Yorkshire). Otes had married Isabel in the early 1560s and she went on to behave with a complete lack of discretion, finding herself twice cited for defamation. In the first incident from 1580, she indulged in gossip and alleged that she had seen Ellen Stone's servant 'great with child' in York but the second suit was the more extraordinary. In an alehouse, Isabel met an old acquaintance, William Consett, and suggested that he was the father of her son George. John Otes hardly seemed perturbed by this suggestion and bet that it was actually true, adding that 'when he runs to man's estate he will have a black beard as Consett hath'. Whatever the circumstances behind this surprising and 'ill-considered' behaviour, gossip and derision would almost certainly have ensued. Isabel failed to perform what would

⁵ *Some East Kent Parish History*, transcribed P. de Sandwich, *The Home Counties Magazine*, 12 (1910), pp. 233-4; P. Marshall, 'Discord and Stability in an Elizabethan Parish: John Otes and Carnaby, 1563-1600', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 71 (1999), p. 196.

⁶ NthRO, PDR, Correction Books, X607/14, f.40r.

⁷ State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1598-1601, SP/267, f.88.

⁸ D. Newton, 'The Clergy, Identity and Lay Society in the Diocese of Durham, 1561-1635', *Northern History*, 44 (2007), p. 40. Ewbank's wife was Anne Sampson of Oxford with whom Matthew 'was supposed to have bin kind'.

have been a deeply humiliating public penance, did not seek the forgiveness of those she had offended and was subsequently excommunicated. Isabel's behaviour not only brought her own honour into question but implied that Otes did not exert effective patriarchal control, with implications for his ministry and standing in the parish. Although Isabel Otes was careless in committing two acts of poor judgement, one householder painted her in a very different light. In a scene of parochial harmony and normality, he described coming home to find Otes and his wife paying a social call and Isabel and his wife 'fallinge in talke' together.⁹ Isabel Otes probably was a 'divisive' figure in her husband's parish but in recognizing that she was neither 'typical' nor 'unique', Marshall acknowledges the diversity of character within this body of women. Others have been less accommodating; Tindal Hart dismissed Elizabethan clergy wives as 'dim pathetic ladies' while Haugaard claimed that 'priests' wives did not adorn the ministry'.¹⁰

The tendency to view Elizabethan clergy wives as a homogenous body fails to concede that the women themselves differed in social and economic status, piety, education and character. This is in marked contrast to the widespread acceptance that the clergy themselves were a disparate group, comprising, as Patrick Collinson remarked so succinctly, a 'professional minority' and an 'incompetent majority'.¹¹ While the number of graduate clergy rose during the course of the reign, professionalization was achieved only slowly and men such as William Russell, vicar of Preston (Kent), continued to serve parishes throughout the reign. Russell, described as a married man in the visitation of 1569, was, three years later, revealed to be 'a common fighter and quarreller' and a 'common cow-keep' who drove his beasts through Faversham 'in a jerkyn with a bill on his neck, not like a prelate but rather like a common rogue'. He refused to mend his ways

⁹ Marshall, 'Discord and Stability', pp. 196-7.

¹⁰ A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy in Elizabethan and Stuart Times, 1558-1660* (London, 1958), p. 34; W. P. Haugaard, *Elizabeth and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1968), pp. 200-1.

¹¹ P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1626* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 128-9.

and was also said to keep as a servant, a light-fingered, 'naughty pack'.¹² Brian Bywater, curate of Wetherby (Yorkshire), was described as being a 'disordered and distemperate person altogether indeede unfitt and unworthie of any ecclesiasticall function' who although married lived apart from his wife or 'att least dothe not cohabitt and dwell with her as a man ought to do with his wife'.¹³ The proceedings of the church courts are littered with the failings of inadequate clergymen such as Russell and Bywater. It is perhaps unsurprising that the wives of such individuals were not always fine examples of piety and upright behaviour; men of dubious integrity and standing and with little education, were likely to attract wives of a similar background. Some, like the drunken vicar of Gulval (Cornwall) who in 1586 married a 'common harlot', must have found the pool of potential marriage partners somewhat limited.¹⁴

Indeed, indictments suggest that it was not unusual for a clerical couple to be as bad as each other. William Lynche, rector of Beauchamp Roding (Essex) was presented in 1564 for being drunk and was made to do penance with a white sheet and a wand in the market place at Chelmsford. His wife was also given to drink and danced 'at the common alehouse' where she was kissed by her partners. On being examined, she confessed 'that she hath herd herself accused of yvill fame'.¹⁵ In 1566, in Twinstead (Essex), Richard Halywell and his wife, Anne, were indicted as 'common barretours, disturbers of the peace and sowers of quarrels among their neighbours'. Furthermore, they kept a 'bawdy house there at which divers men and women of ill condition and conversation frequent and keep divers whores there also'.¹⁶ Also in 1566, Robert Heron, vicar of Aveley (Essex), was indicted for bawdry with his maidservant and his wife was

¹² *Some East Kent Parish History*, 9 (1907), pp. 205-6.

¹³ BI, CP.G.2767.

¹⁴ *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol. 2, ed. A. Peel (1915), p. 103.

¹⁵ Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy*, p. 34.

¹⁶ SEAX, T/A 418/10/25, Chelmsford Assizes 26/7/1566.

accused of incontinence.¹⁷ In 1578, the vicar of Epsom (Surrey), Robert Cole, and his wife were indicted for repeated instances of barratry.¹⁸ In 1586, the vicar of Beverley (Yorkshire) was described as a ‘common drunkard’ and his wife as a ‘curtail’.¹⁹ Again, disreputable behaviour was not confined to those in the lower ranks of the clerical profession. The parish of Rettendon (Essex) witnessed particularly unseemly clerical goings on in 1589 when a quarrel over the incumbency got out of hand. An armed mob including Robert Buckberd, clerk, his wife Helen, and daughter Elizabeth, broke into the kitchen of the rectory and assaulted the rector William Bingham and his wife Katherine.²⁰ The two clergymen also engaged in an undignified scuffle in the parish church before finally, the ministers, their wives and children were all instructed to keep the peace.²¹

Some clergy wives do indeed deserve Tindal Hart’s depiction of ‘pathetic ladies’ but only in the sense that they were victims of their husbands’ abuse. For example, in 1569, the churchwardens of Herne (Kent), complained that the vicar ‘did send his wife away from him, being in her travail, and is given to filthy lykar’.²² Elizabeth Corker, wife of the rector of Handsworth and vicar of Rotherham (Yorkshire), was undoubtedly ignorant of her frequently-absent husband’s adultery and bigamous marriage prior to his indictment in 1574.²³ Several clergy wives in Essex suffered at the hands of their husbands. In 1586, Mr Vaux of High Ester was said to be ‘a verie negligent man and one that spendeth much time at the bowles, cards, and tables, and one verie careles for his

¹⁷ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life, vol. 2, Morals and the Church Courts* (Chelmsford, 1973), p. 220.

¹⁸ *Calendar of the Assize Court Records: Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (London, 1980), no. 958, p. 166; OED, barratry: the offence of habitually exciting quarrels, or moving or maintaining law-suits, vexatious persistence in, or incitement to, litigation; M. Ingram, “‘Scolding Women Cucked or Washed’: a Crisis in Gender Relations in Early Modern England?”, in J. Kermode and G. Walker (eds), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp. 51-2, ‘some barratry indictments related to disruptive behaviour not dissimilar to that imputed to female scolds’.

¹⁹ C. Haigh, ‘Anticlericalism and Clericalism, 1580-1640’, in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), p. 22; N. Bailey, *An Universal Etymological English Dictionary* (1790), ‘a nasty slut or drab’.

²⁰ SEAX, Q/SR 111/60.

²¹ SEAX, Q/SR 111/54, 55, 56; Q/SR 112/2-3; Q/SR 115/48; Q/SR 116/4-4A.; TNA, C 2/Eliz/B5/20. Robert Buckeberde v. William Bingham. Bingham was a Doctor of Law.

²² *Archbishop Parker’s Visitation*, transcribed A. Hussey, *Home Counties Magazine*, 5 (1903), p. 10.

²³ BI, CP.G.1681.

familie, for his wife and children want at home while he spendeth abroad'.²⁴ Two years later, the vicar John Harris, was accused of attempted sexual advances towards goodwife Pemberton and was prosecuted for 'abusing his wife and pinching her [when] with child'.²⁵ In 1593, in East Horndon, the rector Robert Hunter gave 'ill example of life by unquiet living, beating and chaining his wife to a post'.²⁶ In the north of England, Matthew More was presented for 'beating his wife ...being a clergyman', was deemed a lunatic and ultimately suspended from the ministry.²⁷ Grace Harper was granted a divorce in 1587 from her husband, the rector of St Mary's, Castlegate, York, on the grounds of his adultery with Anne Gilliot who he treated as his lawful wife in the village of Heslington.²⁸ Such stories are more indicative of the failings of the clerical husbands than the inadequacies of their wives.

While it is tempting for historians to seize on eye-catching examples, these can be misleading when taken out of context. Tensions within the parish could be exacerbated by the personality and demeanour of the local clergyman or his wife but could also highlight deeper divisions. The case of Melchior Smith, vicar of Hull, illustrates the danger of accepting accusations at face value. Smith was said to 'keep a woman in his house at Hull as his wife both at bed and at board' and it was rumoured that they were not married although he insisted that they had married in Leicester in 1560. He was accused of being a sower of discord in Hull and in his previous parishes and that he handled his wife 'very uncharitably'. During one of their very public disagreements his wife had been 'forced what with feare and sorrow to rone from him toward the great water of Hull and to lepe over the stayth there into the water to the great offence of all his neighbours'. There can be little doubt that Smith and his wife had not presented an example of model

²⁴ *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol. 2, ed. A. Peel, (1915), p. 157.

²⁵ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 221.

²⁶ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 225.

²⁷ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 18.

²⁸ BI, CP.G.2302.

behaviour to his parishioners and to his credit Smith accepted that he and his wife 'at their first coming to Hull did not as all times agree so perfectly as they ought to'.²⁹ However, Emma Watson has demonstrated that Smith was also the victim of the machinations of the local conservative faction and his marital relationship, to which they were almost certainly hostile, was an easy target for exploitation.³⁰ As Donald Spaeth observed, denunciations of scandalous behaviour were 'often part of a cluster of charges against a minister'.³¹ Accusers were often fully cognisant with the discourse of complaint and enumerating a string of clerical shortcomings, including denunciations of a wife's unseemly conduct, was a recognizable tactical ploy. Similarly, allegations of inappropriate behaviour were not an indication of guilt, as is demonstrated by the 1588 presentment of Katherine Whittingham for making unfounded accusations against Margaret Kay, wife of the vicar of Heighington (Durham).³² A degree of caution should, therefore, be exercised before accepting accounts as accurate portrayals of events and character.

That some clergy wives, like their husbands and various members of the clerical profession, behaved disreputably is beyond doubt. Examples of ministers married to women who were deemed in some way to be unsuitable occur across Elizabeth's reign. The number of presentments and complaints at the beginning of the reign, particularly the questioning of the validity of marriage, is proportionally higher, suggesting initial unease with the change. However, the incidence does not suggest that the first wives, traditionally painted as women of low esteem, were sufficiently scandalous to provoke extensive consternation. Later references must be viewed against a proliferation of clergy wives and the higher expectations placed upon them. Even without these considerations,

²⁹ *Tudor Parish Documents of the Diocese of York*, ed. J. S. Purvis (Cambridge, 1948), pp. 211, 215-16.

³⁰ E. Watson, 'Clergy, Laity and Ecclesiastical Discipline in Elizabethan Yorkshire Parishes', in N. Lewycky and A. Morton (eds), *Getting Along?: Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of Professor W. J. Sheils* (Farnham, 2012), pp. 110-11; D. Lamburn also refers to parochial divisions in 'Politics and Religion in Early Modern Beverley', in P. Collinson and J. Craig (eds), *The Reformation in English Towns 1500-1640* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 64.

³¹ D. Spaeth, *The Church in An Age of Danger*, (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 28-9, 123.

³² Newton, 'The Clergy, Identity and Lay Society', p. 41.

the picture conveyed is far from one of widespread infamy. The assertion that the failure of bishops' wives to make an impression in the archive was an indication that 'most wives were evidently suitable, sober and entirely uncontroversial', would seem an appropriate conclusion to extend to the majority of clergy wives.³³

Establishing a Role in Support of Her Husband's Ministry

The lives of ministers, according to Sir Walter Mildmay, 'ought to shine as purely in the Church as the bright stars do in the firmament for a spotte in one of their Cotes is more odious then in the garment of another'.³⁴ The 1593 memorial to Anna, wife of John Still, rector of Hadleigh (Suffolk), indicates that this responsibility for exemplary behaviour was extended to the minister's spouse who, by association, was also required 'to shine'. Anna was described as an 'example of goodness throughout her life, a mirror of virtue and integrity'.³⁵ Although the lack of sources, especially for the initial decade of the reign, makes it difficult to trace the precise chronology of this identification with the ministry, it was inherent from the outset in the requirements of Injunction 29. The 1559 vetting procedure instituted for all prospective clerical spouses was designed to avoid 'offense and ... slander to the church' by preventing marriage to women deemed lacking in honesty and sobriety.³⁶ Wolfe maintains that the early letters testimonial at Lincoln focussed entirely on the immediate concern of the Injunction, namely the avoidance of scandal, and considered only the moral virtue of the potential clergy wife. She contends that only after 1600 did 'both the form and content of these letters chart the developing

³³ B. Usher, 'Queen Elizabeth and Mrs Bishop', in S. Doran and T. S. Freeman (eds), *The Myth of Elizabeth* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 205.

³⁴ Quoted in M. Byford, 'The Price of Protestantism: Assessing the Impact of Religious Change on Elizabethan Essex; the Case of Heydon and Colchester, 1558-94' (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), p. 334.

³⁵ P. M. Hembry, *The Bishops of Bath and Wells, 1540-1640* (London, 1967), pp. 184-5. Anna had married John Still when he was rector of Hadleigh and died in 1593 only two months after he became Bishop of Bath and Wells.

³⁶ *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. 2, The Later Tudors, 1553-1587*, eds. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (New Haven and London, 1969), p. 125.

cultural identity of the “minister’s wife””.³⁷ Yet, by imposing a system of vetting which was predicated on the needs of the church, the Injunction had established a clear link between a minister’s wife and her husband’s calling. It had said nothing specific about the role but by promulgating this connection, the Injunction had added an extra dimension to the subsequent words and actions of clergy wives. Half the certificates from the final three years of Elizabeth’s reign did indeed indicate in some way that the woman concerned was ‘fytte to be a ministers wief’. The letter written in 1602 for Elizabeth Fitzjohn burdened her with particularly high expectations as by marriage to Robert Byrd, parson of Bramfield, (Hertfordshire) it was hoped that he:

may not only contynewe in that good manner he hath hitherto mainteined: but rather (by his & his wifes godly livinge) may encouragde his Parishioners & others to followe that doctrine which he out of godes worde doth preach, seing his life & his wifes answerable in some measure therunto.³⁸

Such references and concern for the woman’s education and good parentage presented a sharply defined role for the clergy wife and placed significant demands upon her.

Although distinguished and articulated with less precision, the evidence from Worcester demonstrates that, contrary to Wolfe’s intuition, the role of the clergy wife had acquired distinct characteristics considerably earlier than 1600. Several justices had expanded their appraisals beyond the demands of the Injunction and reported not only character, conduct and conversation but also the piety of prospective brides. In the 1584 certificate for Katherine Staunton, Robert Crosbey and William Pouller explained that ‘for the credite of the Ministerie’ all ministers who ‘are willing to joyne them selves in

³⁷ M. Wolfe, ‘The Tribe Of Levi: Gender, Family And Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2004), p. 41.

³⁸ LA, DIOC/CER W/15.

godly matrimony should in this respecte have such a regard and care to their calling as to adioyne them selves to weomen of godly and honest conversation'.³⁹

A certificate from 1587 is the first Worcester letter testimonial to articulate the belief that to become the wife of a minister required a particular disposition. In wording which explicitly identifies the clergy wife with her husband's profession, Ursula Weaver, whom the justices had known since infancy, was considered by her demeanour as 'one worthie of a man of that vocacon'.⁴⁰ Even earlier, in Gloucestershire in 1579, Pilaster, future wife of Edward Noryce, vicar of Tetbury, was deemed to be 'good [and] meete for a man of his calling'.⁴¹ This perception had extended into the wider community, for the 1587 certificate procured for Anne Aston indicates that her Gloucestershire employers, Edward Pearte and Richard Wakeman, considered her 'a woman fitte & meete for that callinge'.⁴² By the 1580s, therefore, association with her husband's profession required more of a clergy wife than honesty and sobriety.

The lack of letters testimonial for the beginning of the reign obliges us to rely on other sources to uncover earlier illustrations of this association. It is evident, for example in Matthew Parker's depiction of his own wife, Margaret. Parker credited Margaret with making a positive contribution to his ministry by taking charge of the running of the household and freeing him to devote himself to his duties and calling. In word and by practical example, Parker sought to demonstrate that a wife added to a minister's ability to fulfil his vocation, writing that an 'honest' wife, such as his own, 'that feareth God ... cannot but be an helper to perform a godly lyfe'. He also presented Margaret as the embodiment of a virtuous wife whose demeanour was beyond censure. He described her

³⁹ WRO, PR, 1584, John Rawlingson, 27a.

⁴⁰ WRO, PR, 1587, Richard Bidle & Ursula Weaver, 121o.

⁴¹ GA, GDR/B4/1/2426 Edw. Noryce vicar: Certificate of character of proposed wife (1579); *Will of Edward Norris* at http://www.rpi.edu/~holmes/Hobbies/Genealogy/ps12/ps12_498.htm, accessed 21 March 2011.

⁴² WRO, PR, 1589, Floriti Child & Anne Aston, 81b.

as his ‘most dearly beloved and virtuous wife’, as ‘a woman very chaste and well-mannered and that did greatly reverence her husband’; she was his ‘yoke-fellow’ with whom he could share his sorrows.⁴³ Margaret was depicted as the ‘mater familias’, a ‘perfect spouse, subordinating herself to her husband’s work and wishes’.⁴⁴ Parker’s endorsement of his wife was primarily a justification for clerical marriage but it also reflected and reinforced the bond between a clergy wife and her husband’s calling. As the epitome of uxorial propriety, the Elizabethan clergy wife could both counter any lingering doubts about her own inherent respectability and enhance her husband’s standing within the community.

The characteristics of the ‘perfect spouse’ were well-established in the literature and public consciousness of the period and were laid out, for example, by Thomas Becon in his *Boke of Matrimony*. A wife should look after the household ‘diligently’, supervise ‘the vertuous education and bringing up of her children’ and acquaint her maids with the ‘knowledge of God & of his holy word’ as well as spending her time in ‘frutetful and necessary occupations, profitable to her husband, to herselfe, to her family and to the common weale’. She also had a duty to be ‘chast, pure, and honest in dede, in word, in gesture, in apparell and in all her behaviour, that no poynte of lightnes appere in her, but all modestye, sobrietye, gravitye, chastitye, honestye, womanlynes’; in short, anyone beholding her was to ‘looke upon a perfect pearle of precious purity’.⁴⁵ As part of the rhetoric promoting clerical marriage, George Joye required in 1541 that the women who married ministers should mirror the qualities prescribed by Paul for the wives of Timothy and Titus and be ‘sober, learned, modest, shamefaced, simple, sad, chaste, godly maidens virtuously brought up in reading and understanding truly the Holy Scriptures’. It was also

⁴³ *Correspondence of Matthew Parker, D.D.*, ed. J. Bruce and T. Perowne (Cambridge, 1853), pp. x, 484; N. B. Bjorklund, “‘A Godly Wyfe is an Helper’: Matthew Parker and the Defence of Clerical Marriage”, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 32 (2003), pp. 356, 364.

⁴⁴ ‘Matthaeus’ in J. Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker* (London, 1711), Book IV, Appendix, p. 155; Bjorklund, “‘A Godly Wyfe’”, pp. 352, 361.

⁴⁵ Thomas Becon, ‘The Boke of Matrimony’, *The Worckes of Thomas Becon* (London, 1564), STC 913:01, f. Dclxxiii v.

expected that a minister's wife would devote herself to housewifely duties, 'nurse her own children with her own breasts'.⁴⁶ These attributes anticipate the qualities for which Elizabeth Gouge was to receive such adulation almost a century later, but as the characteristics of a good wife, they were in fact both constant and timeless.

Piety

Personal piety was perhaps foremost among the attributes which parishioners would expect from their minister's wife and family. Failure to attend the parish church or to receive communion was a visible and public denial of religious commitment or of being out of charity with neighbours, a lapse that parishioners were not inclined to overlook. In 1581, churchwardens presented the wife of the Leicestershire vicar, Roger Crosley, for failing to receive 'the holy sacrament for the entire time she has been in Thurnebie'.⁴⁷ The churchwardens of Ewell (Kent) recorded that although the vicar's wife had returned to live with her husband, 'Mistress Saunders ... hath not received the Communion'.⁴⁸ In 1597, the wife of the rector of Walton on the Wolds (Leicestershire) 'did not receive the communion till michaelmas last past, beinge put of[f] by the parson'.⁴⁹ Mr Jones, the vicar of Shilton, was presented before the Oxfordshire church courts in 1589 for keeping a woman in his house but her particular shortcoming was that she did not 'come unto the church to divine service'.⁵⁰

Doubts over the strength of a wife's religious convictions could undermine a minister's spiritual authority in less overt ways, as a case from 1582 reveals. During her husband's absence in London, the wife of Richard Harrison, parson of Beaumont (Essex), visited a neighbour, Annis Herd, to 'rate' and 'chid' in the belief that she had stolen her ducklings. Convinced that the 'wicked harlot Annis' had subsequently bewitched her, Mrs

⁴⁶ George Joye, *The Defence of the marriage of priestes* (Auryck, 1541), STC (2nd ed.) 21804, sig. C ii v-iii r.

⁴⁷ LRO, Archdeaconry Court, Act Books, Office Causes, 1D41/13/10/14r.

⁴⁸ *Some East Kent Parish History*, 12 (1910), p. 234.

⁴⁹ LRO, 1D41/13/22/30v.

⁵⁰ *Oxford Church Courts: Depositions 1589-1593*, ed. J. Howard-Drake, (Oxford, 1997), p. 5, no. 7.

Harrison eventually confided her fears to her husband. He tried to dissuade her from her suspicion and encouraged her to ‘put trust in God and put your trust in him onely, and he will defend you from her, and from the Diuell himselfe also’. While contemporaries believed that ardent religious belief was one method of countering witchcraft, Mrs Harrison was clearly among those found little consolation in the protection of faith.⁵¹ Within two months she was imploring Harrison to act ‘as euer there was loue betweene vs, (as I hope there hath been for I haue v. pretie children by you I thanke God)’ or she would to take the matter to her father. Once again Harrison urged her to pray to God. However, when he himself encountered Annis, he accused her of bewitching his wife and threatened to have her hanged should she trouble his wife anymore.⁵² Harrison’s wife died before Christmas, departing from the world ‘in a perfect faith’ but repeating the words, ‘Oh Annis Herd, Annis Herd she hath consumed me’.⁵³ Harrison’s wife’s conviction that she was bewitched and her ultimate demise were not only personally distressing for her husband but had wider ramifications for his household and pastoral authority. The case, as Martha Skeeters points out, was multifaceted and raised questions about the parson’s ability to protect his wife, the origin of her crisis, his control over his household and his pastoral responsibilities towards Herd.⁵⁴ Yet, primarily it threatened Harrison’s spiritual persuasiveness and authority for he had demonstrably been unable to convince his own wife of the efficacy of trust in God. Harrison was all too aware of these wider implications for he explicitly stated: ‘what will the people say, that I beeing a

⁵¹ A. Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London, 1970), pp. 105-6; K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), pp. 591-3.

⁵² Macfarlane, *Witchcraft*, p. 109. A threat made to a witch was believed to negate her power.

⁵³ *A true and iust recorde, of the information, examination and confession of all the witches, taken at S. Ofes in the countie of Essex* (London, 1582), STC 1014:07; M. Gibson, *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550-1750* (London, 2003), p. 45; <http://witching.org/brimstone/detail.php?mode=assertions&pid=2107> accessed 10 January 2013. Annis Herd was indicted on only one charge, of having bewitched a cow, ten sheep and ten lambs belonging to John Wade, she was not charged with bewitching Mrs Harrison. She pleaded not guilty and was acquitted.

⁵⁴ M. Skeeters, ‘Sacred Calling: Clerical Masculinity in an Elizabethan Witchcraft Case’, American Historical Association, Session 199 (2011), *North American Conference on British Studies*, 4, www.aha.confex.com/aha/2011/webprogram/Paper5478.html, accessed 10 January 2013.

Preacher shoulde haue my wife so weake in faith'. His failure to sustain his wife's trust in God was a personal tragedy but also a very public indictment of his spiritual authority. Moreover, Harrison was aware that his parishioners would expect better of his wife.

Such events were unusual, and ministers more usually credited their wives with a godly disposition. Richard Rogers, lecturer at Wethersfield (Essex), listed his wife's companionship in religion as one aspect of his marriage that he would miss should she die and elsewhere in his diary, he made reference to his wife joining him in prayer.⁵⁵ Through personal piety and the spiritual nurturing of children and household servants, the clergy wife could bridge the gap between expectations of private female devotion and the very essence of her husband's profession. Although a mark of every good wife, religious commitment acquired greater significance for a minister's wife because it offered proof of her own suitability to be the spouse of a clergyman and allowed her to 'adorn' her husband's ministry. Further recognition that godliness was a fundamental requirement for any woman intending to marry a minister, is to be found in the Worcester letters testimonial which demonstrate that justices gave consideration to the godliness of a prospective clergy wife. In the 1584 certificate for Katherine Staunton, justices Robert Crosbey and William Pouller wrote that they did indeed consider Katherine to be an 'honest and godly woman'.⁵⁶ The widow, Elizabeth Fidoe of Bredicot, was also said to 'lead her lief honestlie accordinge to the lawes of god' and was recommended for marriage with Roberte Wilcoxson, parson of Spetchley (Worcestershire), in 1583.⁵⁷ In 1586, Joan Rawlingson was said to have been 'very well brought up in the feare of god' - as one would hope for the daughter of a vicar.⁵⁸ In a certificate from the following year, Margaret

⁵⁵ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. M. M. Knappen (London, 1933), pp. 74, 81, 83, 96.

⁵⁶ WRO, PR, 1584, John Rawlingson, 27a.

⁵⁷ WRO, PR, 1583, Roberte Wilcockson & Elizabeth Fido, 65d.

⁵⁸ WRO, PR, 1586, Thomas Leanarte & Joane Rawlinson, 70a.

Greene was also adjudged to have ‘behaved her selfe honestlye, modestlye in the ffeare of god’.⁵⁹

The early religious education of children was a responsibility traditionally ascribed to women and ministers entrusted their wives with the spiritual guidance of their offspring. In their wills, clergymen sought to ensure that their children would be brought up in the fear of god.⁶⁰ William Atkinson, minister of St Antholin, London, seemed particularly preoccupied by the spiritual needs of his children, bequeathing each of them a religious book. He beseeched his wife to bring them up ‘in learninge and knowlege of god as she shalbe able to provide for them’.⁶¹ Austen Curtes, vicar of Eastbourne (Sussex), expected his wife Margaret to meet both the spiritual and physical needs of his daughter Alice by keeping her ‘in godlie exercise and honest apparell with meate and drinke untill her marriage’.⁶² Curtes died in 1559, and Atkinson in 1563, indicating that early clergy wives could well be godly women capable of fulfilling their religious and family obligations. Joan, wife of Thomas Southe, clerk of Great Coates (Lincolnshire), provides a later example. She was required to bring up her son ‘at the schooles and universitie for the knowledge of Christe his truth and good Litturature’ and her daughter ‘in the face and nurture of the lorde’.⁶³ In 1576, William Cocks, parson of Ashley (Northamptonshire), was assured of the ‘godly disposicon’ of his loving wife, Margaret.⁶⁴ The only later wife to be praised for her ‘upright and motherly care ... and christian disposicion’ was Joan, wife of John Field, London, minister of the Word of God, in 1588.⁶⁵ As the reign progressed, perhaps the clergy no longer felt the need to assert or

⁵⁹ WRO, PR, 1587, Thomas Seller & Margaret Greene, 59f.

⁶⁰ R. Houlbrooke, *The English Family, 1450-1700* (London, 1984), p. 112.

⁶¹ TNA, PROB 11/46, William Atkinson, 1563.

⁶² TNA, PROB 11/42B, Austen Curtes, 1559.

⁶³ TNA, PROB 11/81, Thomas Southe, 1593.

⁶⁴ TNA, PROB 11/58, William Cocks, 1576.

⁶⁵ TNA, PROB 11/72, John Fielde, 1588.

accentuate the good character and qualities of their wives, a possible intimation of the increasing convergence of their demeanour with the theoretical ideal.

Testamentary bequests of religious books to clergy wives acknowledged their desire for such works. The Bible was the most usual work bequeathed to wives. Thomas Gatacre, parson of Newington (Surrey), John Heardman, vicar of Hampstead Norreys (Berkshire), and Henry Moure, vicar of Rothwell (Yorkshire), all left English Bibles to their wives, but John Kempe, parson of Freshwater (Isle of Wight), allowed his wife, Agnes, to choose three other books as well.⁶⁶ Clergy frequently left their Latin and foreign language books to sons who were studying at university and whom they hoped were destined to follow them into the clerical profession. Their English books, however, would often be left to their wives. In 1581, Robert Avys, vicar of Bromsgrove (Worcestershire), left all his English books to his wife Anne and in 1586, Robert Tower, parson of Great Leighs (Essex), left his Book of Martyrs and other English books to his wife Mercimight.⁶⁷ John Rathbie, vicar of Exton (Rutland), was only betrothed to Anne Forest but bequeathed all his books to her.⁶⁸ James Twyste, vicar of Eltham (Essex), was a widower but bequeathed ‘some good Englishe booke’ to the wife of Mr Lightfoote, preacher of St Lawrence, London.⁶⁹ The fact that all these examples come from the second half of the period might suggest an increased degree of literacy among later clergy wives. However, when in 1597, Robert Rickman, parson of Bloxworth (Dorset), bequeathed to his wife Susanna, ‘Gualter uppon the Actes, Calvin uppon Job & Deeringe uppon the Hebrews’, he noted that the last two had belonged to her mother who had to agree to the bequest.⁷⁰ That they made similar bequests to their daughters indicates that the entire family was

⁶⁶ TNA, PROB 11/81, Thomas Gatacre, 1593; ODNB, Thomas Gatacre (1531/2-1593): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/10443, accessed 18 September 2015; TNA, PROB 11/83, John Heardman, 1594; BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Henry Moure, proved 1591; TNA, PROB 11/70, John Kempe, 1587.

⁶⁷ TNA, PROB 11/63, Robert Avys, 1581; TNA, PROB 11/69, Robert Tower, 1586.

⁶⁸ TNA, PROB 11/81, John Rathbie, 1593.

⁶⁹ TNA, PROB 11/91, James Twyste, 1598.

⁷⁰ TNA, PROB 11/90, Robert Rickman, 1597.

involved in reading devotional works. In 1569, Alexander Wymesherste, clerk, left to his wife, Alice, ‘fyve or six of my englisshe bookes even of that sorte which she thynketh best to serve her owen proper use’ and also gave ‘so many bokes to every one of my daughters such as ys metest for them’.⁷¹ Edward Heyden, prebendary of Winchester Cathedral, in 1581, left his English books to his daughters.⁷² Robert Rickman, parson of Bloxworth (Dorset), left his Book of Martyrs to his daughter Sara while Rebecca received the Hebrew bible in eight volumes, Perkins on the Creed and ‘a little book called the comforter’.⁷³ John Cole, parson of Hartlebury (Worcestershire), bequeathed ‘Marlorate on the Gospel’ to his daughter Cicely and ‘Erasmus on the Epistles’ to his daughter Mary in his 1599 will.⁷⁴ Many parsonages, on this evidence, were centres of true family devotion and spiritual learning in which wives and daughters engaged with demanding religious works.

In a public affirmation of their piety, some clergymen celebrated their wives’ godliness within the parish book which served a ‘vital commemorative function’ within the local community.⁷⁵ Julyan, wife of Edmund Scambler, Bishop of Peterborough, was described, in 1576, in the parish register of the church of St John the Baptist, as a ‘godly Matrone’.⁷⁶ Non-episcopal wives received similar accolades. In 1586, Robert Serle, minister of Lexden (Essex), entered the death of his wife Cassia Serle in the register and acclaimed her as ‘a good godly, & rare religious woman’; his second wife, Anna, was also ‘godly’ and ‘grave’.⁷⁷ William Saunders, vicar of Chesham (Buckinghamshire), recorded that his second wife, Margaret, was buried near to his first wife, Joan, ‘with the great

⁷¹ TNA, PROB, 11/51, Alexander Wymesherste, 1569.

⁷² TNA, PROB, 11/63, Edward Heyden, 1581.

⁷³ TNA, PROB, 11/90, Robert Rickman, 1597.

⁷⁴ WRO, PR, 1599, John Cole, 53.

⁷⁵ P. Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, (Oxford, 2002), pp. 292-3.

⁷⁶ NthRO, *Register of St John the Baptist, Peterborough, Northampton Parish Register Transcripts*, 261 P/46, p. 47.

⁷⁷ SEAX, Parish Register of Lexden, D/P 273/1/1. Serle’s wife, Cassia died 8 March, 1585/6. 13 June 1587, Serle married Anna Maynard, widow, and the daughter of Mr William Lorange of Burstall (Suffolk). Anna Serle died in 1597, and the following year, Serle married Anna Argent.

favour & liking of the good people of god'.⁷⁸ The 1598 entry for Judith Wylton in the parish register of Aldham (Essex), highlighted by means of a manicule, placed her devotion foremost among her qualities which significantly also included a commitment to the poor and her neighbours. The entry reads:

☞ Judythe Wylton the wief of John Wylton Clark parson of Aldham was buried the xvth of Maye whoe was devout towardses God, liberall to the poore, hatefull to none of good behavior amongst all her neighbors. Her life greatly desired, and her deathe much lamented.⁷⁹

The piety and good character of clergy wives is also evident in memorials within the parish church. No longer required to act as a reminder of the need for intercessory prayer, memorials became increasingly preoccupied with the identity of the deceased and celebrated their careers and achievements. Nigel Llewellyn insisted that monuments should be analysed in terms of their social meaning and Richard Rex argued that memorials should be placed in their 'social and historical context'; the portrayal of clergy wives on brasses and plaques, allows us to do both.⁸⁰ Through monuments within the parish church, the dead spoke to those they had left behind and their qualities epitomized the attributes of a virtuous life which others would do well to emulate. Despite the revival of brass-engraving in the reign of Elizabeth, the list of memorial brasses dedicated to the clergy is a 'comparatively short one' and that dedicated to their wives is even shorter. Some memorials such as the 1562 brass commemorating Agnes, wife of Robert Marsie, vicar of Naverstock (Essex), have simply vanished over time.⁸¹

⁷⁸ *A Transcript of the First Volume, 1538-1636, of the Parish Register of Chesham*, ed. J. W. Garrett-Pegge (London, 1904), pp. 225, 288.

⁷⁹ SEAX, Parish Register of Aldham, D/P 208/1/1.

⁸⁰ N. Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments in Post-Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 20; R. Rex, 'Monumental Brass and the Reformation', *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*, 14 (1990), p. 376.

⁸¹ H. W. Macklin, *The Brasses of England*, (London, 1913), p. 286; W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Essex, vol. 2* (London, 2003), p. 508; no examples of memorials to clergy wives were to be found in the volumes for Bedfordshire, Cornwall, Cheshire, Cambridgeshire, Derbyshire, Cumberland and Westmoreland by the same authors; In addition to the memorials considered in this chapter, other memorials include: Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *The Monumental*

Of those which do survive, the memorial tablet to Agatha Barlow, former nun and widow of William Barlow, Bishop of Chichester, is probably the best known. Erected in the church of Easton (Hampshire) after her death in 1595, it described Agatha as a 'godly' woman who had not only 'died in the Lord' but had displayed her piety daily. Moreover, she had been willing to accompany her husband into exile 'for the gospel sake'. The memorial, in enumerating her personal qualities - respectability, wisdom, maternal goodness, uxorial fidelity, concern for the poor - not only extolled her as a virtuous wife and mother worthy of emulation but, by emphasizing her clerical connections, both reflected and reinforced the image of the ideal clergy wife.

In 1599, John Freake, rector of Purleigh (Essex) and his siblings commemorated their mother, Cicely, and chose a Latin inscription for the brass. The use of Latin automatically conveyed recognizable 'social, educational, aesthetic and political values' which Cicely, as the widow of Edmund Freake, variously Bishop of Rochester, Norwich and Worcester, warranted.⁸² The biblical reference, 'mihi vita Christus, et mihi mors, lucrum', offered reassurance by implication that the soul of their mother was already with God. Yet, in describing Cicely merely as a 'good woman and pious widow', her children were displaying considerable circumspection in their choice of words given her reputation as a domineering personality.⁸³ As in later funeral sermons, credulity could only be stretched so far; somewhat reassuringly for historians, a posthumous encomium had to bear some resemblance to the reality of the life.⁸⁴

Brasses of Essex, vol. 2, p. 559, Margaret Rande, the wife of John Freake, rector of Purleigh (Essex) who is described as a 'dear wife' with the biblical reference, 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord', 1592; Griffin Lloyd, rector of St Botolph's Church, Chevening (Kent), and his unnamed wife. This imposing memorial comprises effigies of Lloyd and his wife, the date of his death (1596) and his coat of arms. His wife who survived until 1605 was not named but the implications of gentility, obedience and motherhood are evident.

⁸² Rex, 'Monumental Brass', pp. 388-9.

⁸³ See below, p. 177, fn. 128.

⁸⁴ A. Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination* (New Haven and London, 1995), p. 349.

The earliest surviving epitaph to a non-episcopal clergy wife is from 1581, and commemorates Constance Bownell, wife of Mordicai Bownell, vicar of Heston (Middlesex). The memorial is incomplete as the brass figure of Mordicai has disappeared leaving only the recumbent figure of his wife, her hands as in prayer and her swaddled child on the coverlet.⁸⁵ Her credentials as a godly woman and wife are epitomized by the four referenced biblical quotations, the figure of God above and the angel at her side. Together these would have left the onlooker in no doubt that the vicar of Heston and his wife were a godly couple who lived in fear of the Lord. The scripture at the top of the memorial (Come to me all ye that travayle and are heavye laden & I will refreshe you, Matth. xi) makes reference to Constance's death shortly after the birth of her daughter and, like that directly above her head (My helpe commeth of the Lorde which hath made both heaven & yearth Ps. cxxi), serves to proclaim her unshakeable faith. The inscription below her image states that she was daughter of Gabriell Pawlyn, gentleman, so not only was she a pious individual, she was also a respectable one. Her piety implied that her goodness was all-encompassing thus removing the need to enumerate her specific virtues.

A brass in the parish church of Ufton (Warwickshire) depicts another family grouping. The parson Richard Woddomes, his wife Margery and their seven children are shown kneeling in prayer, a fashionable convention but one particularly apt for a clerical family. Here Margery is noted only for her motherhood but this represented her fundamental role as a woman and her children signified her religious blessing.⁸⁶ The positioning of the figures with the male to the left traditionally epitomized patriarchal superiority so that by implication Margery was a dutiful wife as well as a good mother.⁸⁷ Patrick Fearne, rector of Sandon (Essex), and his wife were commemorated in a similar

⁸⁵ LMA, SC/GL/WAK/V/HES/LEO/k1255481. I am most grateful to Michelle Wolfe for drawing my attention to this image; A. Heales, 'Heston Church', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 2 (1864), pp. 210, 212.

⁸⁶ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 287.

⁸⁷ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 284.

pose although here both figures ‘speak’ to the living in banners issuing from their mouths. He announces ‘Godes wrath is pacified’ while his unnamed wife continues ‘through Jesus Christ crucified’. Again the image is of a godly man and wife united in prayer and belief.⁸⁸ As the memorialization of early clergy wives illustrates, the pious disposition of the wife within a godly family had emerged as a significant trope which in combination with the visual depiction of minister and wife, side by side, served to strengthen her association with her husband’s calling.

Restraint was not a feature of the memorial to Anna Still whose 1593 memorial brass, again inscribed in Latin, was designed to reflect her life as wife of the rector of Hadleigh and the verse translates as:

Here lies the best of mothers, the image of piety, an example of goodness
throughout her life, a mirror of virtue and integrity, who by her good deeds lives
a true Alabaster forever. Her unshakeable faith has given her a place in heaven
beyond the stars.⁸⁹

The inscription conveys the warmth of personal affection but again reflects the scriptural precepts in enumerating her virtues. Piety alongside goodness, integrity and generosity and the importance of being a good mother, was a virtue to which all women should aspire but which was particularly appropriate to the wife of a cleric. Peter Sherlock contends that through the use of ‘idealised words and images’ the living were presented with an argument about the ‘function, status and qualities appropriate to the clergy and their wives’ and that these monuments were ‘instrumental’ in transforming their image.⁹⁰ Yet, this is an interpretation which underestimates the synergy between memorials,

⁸⁸ Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory*, p. 121; M. Christy, W. W. Porteous and E. B. Smith, ‘Some Interesting Essex Brasses’, *Essex Archaeological Society*, 9 (1905), pp. 37-8.

⁸⁹ P. M. Hembry, *The Bishops of Bath and Wells*, pp. 184-5. The pun on her name makes reference to her family connection for her father, Thomas Alabaster, was a wealthy local clothier.

⁹⁰ P. Sherlock, ‘Monuments, Reputation and Clerical Marriage in Reformation England: Bishop Barlow’s Daughters’, *Gender and History*, 16 (2004), p. 60; Sherlock, *Monuments and Memory*, p. 12.

communal expectations and clergy wives themselves. Memorials reinforced the positive image of the clergy wife, but they also reflected the emerging popular perception of what constituted a good clergy wife, a persona which in turn relied heavily on the agency of the women themselves.⁹¹

Modesty

The existence of a definite association between a wife and her husband's calling extended beyond spiritual matters to more prosaic considerations and affected ideas of what constituted suitable attire for a minister's spouse. Sumptuary legislation attempted to define clothing appropriate to social status for dress was 'not only a reflection of social reality but also a determinant of it'.⁹² As Catherine Richardson reminds us, clothing was 'a vehicle for the representation of the self within society'.⁹³ She emphasizes the association between clothing and identity and contends that clothing had a 'clear role in regulation of the female body which linked it quite explicitly to appropriate feminine behaviour'.⁹⁴ Dress had important connotations for the clergy wife. Undue excess in self-adornment was associated with 'wanton, lewde, and unchaste behaviour' and the demeanour of the 'common strumpet'. This was vocabulary to which early clergy wives remained particularly sensitive but which also reflected the dependence of a woman's reputation on her sexual propriety.⁹⁵ The significance of modesty and restraint in one's choice of attire was expounded at length in the *Homily against Excess of Apparel*.⁹⁶ By exercising restraint in their attire, clergy wives could draw to themselves the positive inferences of the homily; namely, that women who dressed 'with shamefastnesse and

⁹¹ Memorials to the wives of the laity tended to focus more on pedigree with a few references to piety and dutifulness.

⁹² R. O'Day, *The English Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979), p. 190.

⁹³ C. Richardson (ed.), *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Aldershot, 2004), p. 8.

⁹⁴ Richardson, *Clothing Culture*, pp. 6, 17.

⁹⁵ L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 37, 109.

⁹⁶ John Jewel, *The seconde tome of homilies of such matters as were promised and intituled in the former part of Homylies, set out by the authoritie of the Queenes Maiestie. And to be read in euery paryshe churche agreablye*. (London, 1623), STC (2nd edn) 13675, pp. 102-9.

sobernesse ... [would] expresse godlinesse by their good outward workes' and 'live honestly in all things'.⁹⁷ Modesty in attire was, therefore, a manifestation of respectability and godliness.

The understanding and expectation at all levels that the wife of a clergyman should dress in a manner suited to her husband's calling was translated into visual imagery. Depictions of clergy wives on memorial brasses present them in restrained and simple clothing which encapsulated and reinforced the verbal references to their good character, integrity and piety. The style of dress favoured reflects the late sixteenth-century fashion for a long overcoat tied at the waist underneath which was worn a not unduly full gown. The similarities in style and the lack of patterning and ornamentation, appear to indicate an emerging stereotypical dress among clergy wives, one which was characterized by modesty and restraint. In marked contrast to the sartorial discretion practised by and expected of clergy wives, the clothing of lay contemporaries and social equivalents tends to be more elaborate and designed to emphasize affluence.⁹⁸ In providing parishioners with a visual reminder of the respectability of their ministers' wives, memorials subliminally reinforced the positive image of the clergy wife but also reflected a pattern of behaviour that was both expected and apparently fulfilled.

Parishioners who placed constraints on the manner of dress deemed appropriate for their parson's wife were signalling very clearly that they identified her with her husband's profession. In 1584, the churchwardens of East Mersea (Essex) declared that they had their Paraphrases from their curate, Thomas Tyrrell, 'but resiste to make him

⁹⁷ Jewel, *The seconde tome*, p. 107.

⁹⁸ I. Brooke, *English Costume in the Age of Elizabeth* (London, 1950), pp. 74, 80; D. Yarwood, *English Costume from the Second Century BC to 1960* (London, 1961), p. 130; See Arthur Page, gentleman, and his wife Sissely in St Michael's Church, Bray (Berkshire) 1598; *The Portfolio Plates of the Monumental Brass Society 1894-1984*, c. 1600, Elizabeth Leventhorp; Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Essex*, vol. 2, p. 127, Anne Pudsey; W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Devonshire* (London, 2000), Petrockstowe, Margaret Rolle, 1591, pp. 227, 229; idem, Haccombe, Maria Carewe, 1589, p. 152; idem, Ermington, Anne Strachleign, pp. 109-10; W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Cornwall* (London, 1997), Helston, wife of Thomas Bougins, pp. 56-7.

certificate thereof ... [until] his wife shall reforme her attyre so as shalbe decent for her calling'.⁹⁹ One of the complaints laid against Francis Saunders, the vicar of Ewell (Kent), in 1592, was that he 'doth suffer her to go in such attire as is not seemly for a minister's wife; whereby offence growth unto the minister not only in her unseemly attire and habit, but also thereby scandalous life'. Mrs Saunders was characterized as 'a common disturber of her neighbours, fending and proving [arguing] about the street without any good cause'.¹⁰⁰ Parishioners reacted to inappropriate apparel because it was indicative of shortcomings which threatened her credibility, her husband's authority and the integrity of the ministry.

While it was common for visitation articles to address ministers' behaviour and their attire, Bishop Aylmer of London appears to have been the first to extend this to include the apparel of their wives. In his visitation of 1577, he enquired 'whether their wyfe and children be proudly and vaynely decked in apparell not fit for the state and calling of the husband'.¹⁰¹ In 1586, Aylmer again asked whether ministers' 'wives, children and families, bee apparelled handsomely without vanity, and great charges for the calling of their husbandes'.¹⁰² The Bishops of Gloucester (1585 and 1594) and Chichester (1600) posed the same question.¹⁰³ Perhaps rather late in the day, the ecclesiastical hierarchy had begun to include the clergy wife in the regulatory process: recognition that she had become not just a social fixture but a key part of the pastoral team.

⁹⁹ LMA, DL/C/301, f.149.

¹⁰⁰ *Some East Kent Parish History*, 12 (1910), pp. 233-4; *OED*, to 'fend and prove': to argue or wrangle.

¹⁰¹ Articles to be enquired of within in the visitation of the dioces of London (London, 1577), STC, 2nd edn. 10251, Biiir, Article 29.

¹⁰² Articles to be inquired of within the dioces of London (London, 1586), STC (2nd edn) 10252, Biiir.

¹⁰³ Articles to bee enquired of within the Dioces of Glouces. and Bristoll, in the visitation of the Reuerend father in God, Iohn Bishop of Glouces. 1585, STC (2nd edn) 10208, Biiv; Articles to be enquired of within the Diocesse of Gloucester and Bristoll, in the visitation of the Reuerend father in God, Iohn Bishop of Gloucester (London, 1594), STC (2nd edn) 10209, B2v; Articles ministered by the reverend father in God Anthony, by the grace of God, Bishop of Chichester (1600), Article 56, STC (2nd edn) 10180.

Wifely Obedience

Unlike public displays of piety and modesty, wifely obedience was most noticeable when it was absent. The *Homily on the State of Matrimony* reminded a wife to be in subjection and obedience to her husband but accepted that few marriages were ‘without chidings’. It was not acceptable, however, for couples to permit domestic politics to spill out of the household and into the public sphere.¹⁰⁴ Domestic relations were, as Ingram observed, ‘on the borders of public and private morality’ but clerical couples found theirs were unequivocally under the public gaze.¹⁰⁵ In the context of seventeenth-century clergy wives, Jacqueline Eales argued that it was important for the minister’s wife to be ‘a paragon of wifely obedience’ for ministers were ‘offering their parishioners the model of their own clerical marriage as the ideal’.¹⁰⁶ Sixteenth-century parishioners had similar expectations and their reaction to any rupturing of the illusion demonstrates how quickly they had embraced the ideal of the clerical family. In 1567, for example, the husband of Elizabeth Butler told the clerk of Shoreditch that in his treatment of his wife, he ‘shulde be a lanterne and a spectacle to others to do good and well’.¹⁰⁷ Failure to uphold this semblance of the perfect family, was a threat to a minister’s standing in the locality, to the ministry in general and did little to dispel lingering doubts about clerical marriage per se. While parishioners may well have suspected that life behind the walls of the vicarage was not always exemplary, unedifying displays of discord involving a minister and his wife were to be avoided.

In 1575, John Sibthorpe, rector of Ashton (Northamptonshire), and his wife Marjorie, provided parishioners with a very public display of marital discord by ‘skoldinge

¹⁰⁴ Jewel, *The seconde tome*, pp. 240, 242.

¹⁰⁵ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 142; see also Wolfe, ‘The Tribe of Levi’, p. 236.

¹⁰⁶ J. Eales, ‘Gender Construction in Early Modern England and the Conduct Books of William Whateley (1583-1639)’, in R. N. Swanson (ed.), *Gender and Christian Religion, Studies in Church History*, 34 (Woodbridge, 1998), p. 17.

¹⁰⁷ LMA, Deposition Book, DL/C/210, ff. 60-1, 64v, 65r. See below, pp. 288-9.

and chidinge in the churche'. Marjorie had exhibited her disregard for patriarchal authority not only in public but in the very building in which her husband exercised his authority.¹⁰⁸ Another clerical couple drew attention to themselves in church not by squabbling but as a result of clerical shortcomings and female belligerence. The wife of Henry Daniell, vicar of Blockley (Worcestershire), was accused, in 1597, of giving out 'very bad speeches' to Mr Andrews, the churchwarden. An abusive debate between her husband, who was suspected of drunkenness, and the churchwarden over the fate of the remaining communion wine led Mrs Daniell to leap to her husband's defence. She claimed, somewhat enigmatically, that Andrews would have 'binn hanged all save his heade had hit not binne for hir husbände who sold his two yeres wooll to save his life'.¹⁰⁹ Although defending her husband, Mrs Daniell had, in the eyes of Andrews, exceeded her authority. By giving the impression that the vicar had to rely on the interventions of his wife, she had also threatened her husband's standing and masculinity before the assembled flock. Mistresses Sibthorpe and Daniell may have been careless in allowing their passions to overcome their self-restraint on one very public occasion or they may have been renowned for their argumentative natures but either way, their failure to uphold communal standards earned them an appearance before the church courts.

Unseemly behaviour was not necessarily confined to the environs of the church and could be a recurrent problem. The wife of John Pokins, the rector of South Hanningfield (Essex), was described by the justices as 'a very disquiet woman ... void of her perfect senses' but she had come to the attention of the authorities when she and her husband were presented in 1592 for 'very often brawling and scolding together and have

¹⁰⁸ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/8, f.122v; NthRO, Wills, 1590, John Sibthorpe. The contents and wording of the will give no hint of marital tension. On the contrary, Sibthorpe refers to Marjorie as 'my welbeloved wyfe', leaves her property for her natural life and wants her to bring up his son's illegitimate child until the age of three. In this respect too, the Sibthorpe's family failed to represent a model family for after fathering the child, his son had fled the district.

¹⁰⁹ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/4, f. 400v.

not lived quietly as man and wife ought to do'.¹¹⁰ In 1602, when the vicar of Waterbeach (Cambridgeshire) failed to control his wife's scolding, a charivari ensued replete with 'leaping, dancing and rejoicing in the defacing of the Ministry'.¹¹¹ On occasions the disreputable behaviour went beyond words. In 1597, at Little Wenham (Suffolk), it was alleged that the rector's wife, with whom he had not lived for nine years, 'keepeth her husband in prison upon an execution at her suit'.¹¹² When violence or public displays of 'unquietness' occurred, the denial of patriarchal authority had transcended the private sphere and exceeded the limits of parochial toleration. The behaviour of both spouses damaged the reputation of the ministry in a way that Injunction 29 had hoped to avoid although such incidents were probably inevitable in an institution that engaged with the complexities of human nature and relationships.

Although some clergy wives have gained notoriety for their unseemly behaviour, the dutiful demeanour of others remains more difficult to access. When drawing up their wills, some clerical testators made specific reference to the commendable behaviour of their spouses. Nicholas Wilson, clerk of Scrayingham (Yorkshire), for example, in 1586, described his wife Jane as 'a very good wyfe' to whom he made bequests in 'consyderatyon of her good and duetyfull behavyor towardes me'.¹¹³ In 1569, Thomas Wythers, parson of Toddington (Bedfordshire), also recognized his wife, Joan's 'honest demeanour and behaviour' towards him.¹¹⁴ Joan Harte had also been a 'good and dutifull a wife' to her husband, Robert Harte, clerk of Brinkley (Cambridgeshire), and was left all his goods and possessions in 1594.¹¹⁵ Alice Tuer depicted kneeling in prayer on her memorial brass was not only a pious woman but a dutiful wife. It was claimed that she had lived with her

¹¹⁰ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 229.

¹¹¹ Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi', p. 38; D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), p. 31, fn. 59.

¹¹² Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy*, p. 34.

¹¹³ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Nycholas Wilson, proved 1600.

¹¹⁴ TNA, PROB 11/51, Thomas Wythers, 1569.

¹¹⁵ TNA, PROB 11/83, Robert Harte, 1594.

second husband, John Tuer, vicar of Elsenham (Essex), for twenty-two years, four months and four days 'without any the least householde breach either in deede or worde betweene them'.¹¹⁶

These women may well have been meek, submissive individuals who followed their husbands' bidding but we are, of course, observing them solely from their husbands' perspective. The importance of projecting to the outside world, an image which reinforced their masculinity, their authority and the inherent virtue of the clerical family may have been considered more important than realizing a true representation of their marital relationship. The general consensus among scholars of early modern patriarchy is that the role conventionally assigned to women does not accurately reflect the lived experience. Bernard Capp has demonstrated that there was an awareness of 'the political dimension of family life, with its shifting mixture of authority and compromise' and perceived that 'few women ... equated subordination with submissiveness'. He also concluded that 'in a suspicious number of cases [of conjugal disagreement] ... we find a forceful wife prevailing'.¹¹⁷ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford have similarly argued that women could accept the divine precept but transcend it through their behaviour.¹¹⁸ Anthony Fletcher also acknowledged the 'huge untold story of the contestedness of English patriarchy within the early modern home'.¹¹⁹ That there were complexities inherent in the doctrine of subjection was recognized by contemporaries but they hoped to minimize its contradictions by stressing the complementary nature of the marital relationship in the form of 'yoke-fellows'.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Lack, Stuchfield and Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Essex*, vol. 2, p. 249.

¹¹⁷ B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), pp. 72-4.

¹¹⁸ S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), p. 134.

¹¹⁹ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 198; see also A. Wilson, *Ritual and Conflict: The Social Relations of Childbirth in Early Modern England* (Farnham, 2013), pp. 118-21.

¹²⁰ S. D. Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1988), p. 43.

In receipt of their husbands' testamentary instructions and bequests, wives acquire an enforced passivity, but we should be wary of equating their apparent submissiveness on paper with the reality of their lives.¹²¹ The anticipation of a lack of 'quietness' and fears of 'vexation' among some testators should dispel any such notion and demonstrates that some ministers' wives were willing to voice their opinions and pursue their own agenda. 'Quietness' was the word most commonly employed to describe conjugal harmony but, as Wrightson warns, it is simplistic to equate the term with 'uncontested patriarchal domination'. He describes a 'condition of dynamic equilibrium' in which women negotiated 'their own sense of personal esteem within the matrix of the existing system of constraints'.¹²² The will of Edward Blenhaiset, rector of Blunham (Bedfordshire), reveals his concern that Mary, his wife, would cause difficulties after his death and he left her the sum of ten pounds as long as 'she shall keepe her self quiet and not vexe and trouble in sute of lawe or otherwise' his son and executors. The will contains a further reference to 'trouble or vexacon' although Blenhaiset's concern seemed to extend beyond interference with legacies to comprehend a degree of anxiety about her general character and demeanour. The upbringing of his son was to be supervised by his brothers and sister, not his wife, and should his son die, then Mary was to receive a quarter of his money but only if she 'lyve also in good name and fame either maryed or widowe and withoute greate suspicon of slaunder even by the iudgement of her owne frends and kynne and of the godly people where she shall leade her life'.¹²³ Richard Strong, parson of Slindon (Sussex), also suspected that, despite generous provision, his wife Agnes would prove to be the source of disquiet. Anticipating tension, he proposed a deduction of ten pounds in her legacy 'yf my said wyfe at any time hereafter make tryble or clayme' to any

¹²¹ A. L. Erickson, 'An Introduction to Probate Records', in G. H. Martin and P. Spufford (eds), *The Records of the Nation* (Woodbridge, 1990), p. 276.

¹²² K. Wrightson, *English Society 1580-1680* (Oxford, 2003), p. 98.

¹²³ TNA, PROB 11/52, Edward Blenhaiset, 1569.

goods not bequeathed to her or ‘if shee dothe sue, vexe, molest or trouble’ his executor.¹²⁴ Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall (Dorset), had clearly found his marriage to a widow with children somewhat difficult and sounded weary of the ‘debtes, legacies, quarrelles and demaundes that hath risen growen or bene due’ between his wife’s children and himself ‘from the beginning of the worlde’. He also warned Avice not to ‘stirre anye quarrell doubte or question’ against his will, she was to ‘houlde herself quieted and contented’.¹²⁵ Strong and Helme tailored their wills in the light of their marital experience.¹²⁶ The numerous women who exerted authority over their husbands were, as James Sharpe observed, a potent image in popular consciousness.¹²⁷ Clergy wives who struggled with the precept of obedience were reflecting the huge gulf between the ideal and the reality of early modern domestic life and were present at all levels of the ecclesiastical hierarchy.¹²⁸

On occasions, we can hear the strength of character of a particular wife expressed in her own words. Henry Helme had hinted that his wife Avice was a woman determined to achieve her ends but further evidence comes at the conclusion of her own will. Having appointed executors and overseers, Avice still doubted that her wishes would be fully adhered to and in an attempt to ensure that they were, she turned to her beloved and

¹²⁴ TNA, PROB 11/91, Richard Slindon, 1598. The will does not indicate whether his wife was mother of his son or whether this was a second marriage.

¹²⁵ TNA, PROB 11/64, Henry Helme, 1582.

¹²⁶ In both cases, the competing claims associated with remarriage probably exacerbated tensions within the family.

¹²⁷ J. A. Sharpe, ‘Plebeian Marriage in Stuart England: Some Evidence from Popular Literature’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 35 (1985), pp. 80, 82, 84, 89.

¹²⁸ ODNB, Edmund Freake (c.1516-1591): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/10136, accessed 12 April 2015. The wife of Bishop Edmund Freake was notorious throughout late sixteenth-century Norfolk society and Freake himself had tearfully admitted that if he did not do whatever she wished, ‘she would make him weary of his life’; William Downham, Bishop of Chester, had a reputation for being ‘hen-pecked’ as evidenced by his wife’s intervention in the appointment to a vacant prebend in 1573. Both the bishop and his wife were surprised when Thomas Purvis, who had previously criticized Downham, entered the room in pursuit of the position. It was Mrs Downham, however, who reacted the more robustly and ‘start [sic] from her stoole, and said, if I were a man he shold not have it’. Her more acquiescent husband merely replied ‘why woman the writings be soe, it muste be soe’. Yet, Mrs Downham ultimately triumphed and thwarted the appointment, reportedly persuading the chancellor to find an irregularity in the ‘writings’. P. J. Cox, ‘Reformation Responses in Tudor Cheshire c. 1500-1577 (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2013), p. 301.

trusty friend William Lillington, parson of Lytchett Matravers. He was to be a 'helper' to her overseers in seeing that her will was 'truely and faithfullye executed' according to her meaning but, still unconvinced that her wishes would be met, she did not hesitate to remind Lillington and her overseers that they would 'answer for yt before god'. Avice also intended that her daughter should comply with her wishes, suggesting that the relationship between mother and daughter was not entirely harmonious. Her daughter, was to receive two of her mother's best cows, household items, a couple of silver spoons, a gold ring and her mother's wedding ring. However, these bequests came at a price. The daughter was required to 'conforme herself to me her mother duringe my lief, to marrie with one, that I shall well like of, or after my lief with one that my Overseers shall well like of. Otherwise I give her none of the aforesaide legacies'. The same stipulations were reiterated later in the will to emphasize the seriousness of her mother's intent. Although Avice Helme did not live to see the event, one assumes that she would at least have been content with her daughter's choice of spouse, for like so many ministers' daughters, in 1586, she married a clergyman.¹²⁹

The resolve of most clergy wives is rarely explicitly stated but the voice, and indeed indignation, of one clergy widow can be even more plainly heard in 1579. Gyles Buskyll, rector of Orsett (Essex), made generous provision in his will towards his wife Joan and granted her the profits of his lands for the education and upbringing of his son, Christopher, and his daughter, Christian. Perhaps with a particular individual or individuals in mind, he then inserted a clause which required that his wife 'do not marrie anie one who hath ben my servaunt nor any other syngle man'. He went on to threaten that 'if my said wyfe do fortune to marrye contrarye unto this my will' the profits of the

¹²⁹ TNA, PROB 11/68 Avice Helme, 1585; *The Registers of Sturminster Marshall, Dorset 1563-1812*, transcribed by E. Hobday (1901), p. 84, Avys Helme, the daughter, married William Hodder in 1586.

land and the care of the children would be lost. Below his will is the protest registered by his wife which deserves to be quoted at length:

I the sayed Johan do here belowe ... protest and declare by my procter that although I the said Jone or any other yn my name do exhibitt the sayed testament and last wyll of my saide husband afore yow and do take upon me the executyon thereof yet I do not mynde or intend by provyng of the sayd testament or by takyng upon me the executyon thereof to hynder or hurt my title or interest in any thing appertaynyng to me in myne owen ryghte in any respect But that I wyll have and enioye all the same to me myne executors and assignyes in myne owen righte. And I praye yow record this my protestation that it maye hereafter appeare how and yn what sorte I do prove the sayde testament and last wyll.¹³⁰

Joan Buskylly was prepared to contest the provisions of her late husband's will and publicly to announce her resistance to his attempts to control her future behaviour.

The reality probably lay somewhere between the argumentative Mrs Sibthorpe and the acquiescent Mrs Tuer. Within the archive are examples of couples who negotiated a *modus vivendi* in which the clerical wife was able and prepared to stand her ground as circumstances dictated. Sarah Ward, second wife of Richard Rogers, for example, successfully negotiated the cause of his nephew, John Rogers. While at Cambridge, John had twice sold his books and spent the money unwisely but on both occasions Sarah succeeded in persuading her husband to return the 'wild' young man to his studies with a new set of books.¹³¹ Most women, therefore, 'found ways to limit, evade or accommodate male domination' without overstepping the bounds of acceptability.¹³² Strength of personality enabled wives left in desperate circumstances by their husbands' principles and actions to demonstrate particular resilience and agency. When the imprisonment of

¹³⁰ TNA, PROB 11/61, Gyles Buskylly, 1579.

¹³¹ Giles Firmin, *The Real Christian* (Glasgow, 1744), p. 80.

¹³² Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 2.

John Field and Thomas Wilcox resulted not only in the ‘total impoverishment’ of themselves but also of their ‘poore wives and children’, those same wives took matters into their own hands. They were not prepared to rely solely on the pleas of others but presented their own petition to the Earl of Leicester. They begged him to implore the Queen to release their husbands from Newgate. They sought this not only on account of the penury to which the whole family was reduced but also on account of ‘the cold weather approching’ which could not but ‘greatlie hurt them’. Their supplication was made in ‘godes cause’ and the two wives assured the earl that they would ‘be bound to praise god and to pray’ for him.¹³³

Clerical marriages were as diverse and complex as those of the laity and clerical couples negotiated their own working marital relationships, some with greater success than others.¹³⁴ Forceful personalities could generate tensions but strong women were essential in developing the persona of the clergy wife.

Affection

Contemporaries expected that affection would form the basis of a good match.¹³⁵ Alongside a wife’s subjection to her husband, love and respect were considered ‘crucial to maintaining a godly, orderly household’.¹³⁶ However, the Elizabethan clergyman, if Haweis were to be believed, did not enjoy a happy marriage for ‘the glimpses caught of him now and then in his domestic circumstances do not seem to intimate that he found solace in his home’.¹³⁷ The tone and content of the will of George Whittingham, parson of Alphington (Devon), would appear to support this contention. His wife remained

¹³³ Dr Williams’s Library, Morrice MSS B, The Seconde Parte of a Register, ff. 178-9; *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol. 1, ed A. Peel (1915), p. 91.

¹³⁴ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 132; E. A. Foyster, *Manhood in Early Modern England: Honour, Sex and Marriage* (London and New York, 1999), p. 65; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp. 72-3.

¹³⁵ See Chapter 2.

¹³⁶ Amussen, *An Ordered Society*, p. 42.

¹³⁷ J. O. W. Haweis, *Sketches of the Reformation and Elizabethan Age taken from the Contemporary Pulpit* (London, 1844), p. 73.

unnamed and was permitted only to choose one item of his apparel 'yf she will'; there were no bequests or legacies made to her and she was not made executrix. Instead his will stated, 'I make her that should have bene my wief Grace Vilwayne my wholle Executrix'. Given that Peter Vilwayne, one of his overseers, was described as his 'father in law', it appears that Whittingham felt that he had married the wrong sister. Whittingham added further disparagement for having left Grace five pounds with which to discharge his funeral expenses, he curtly added, 'yf more be layd out let the widowe stand to yt her selfe'. There was clearly little love and much unhappiness to be found in the parsonage of Alphington.¹³⁸ It is unusual that a clergyman would choose to expose his marital unhappiness in a public document. However, parishioners were probably far from ignorant of the personal lives of their parsons. This may account for the note, in the returns for the diocese of London, that the rector, Mr Ryley, was 'infeliciter coniugatus'.¹³⁹

That some clerical couples failed to achieve marital harmony should hardly occasion surprise but the content and wording of clerical wills suggest that that most ministers enjoyed companionate marriages and that Haweis's sweeping statement is unfounded. Wrightson noted that 'the language of emotion was muted' in seventeenth-century Newcastle wills and that 'most people (or their scribes) tended to fall back on, or perhaps cling to the conventional formulae of their culture'. He speculated that people either lacked the words to articulate their feelings or that to venture beyond the stereotypical was 'deemed inappropriate'.¹⁴⁰ However, the standard phrase employed to express affection, 'my welbeloved wife', although ubiquitous was not devoid of meaning.¹⁴¹ In my comparison of lay and clerical wills, standardised expressions of

¹³⁸ TNA Probate, 11/72, George Whittingham, 1588.

¹³⁹ CCCC, Certificates and Returns of Livings of the Province of Canterbury, MS 122, pp. 88-9. Ryley was rector of St Andrew Undershaft with St Mary Axe.

¹⁴⁰ K. Wrightson, *Ralph Taylor's Summer: A Scrivener, his City and the Plague* (New Haven and London, 2011), pp. 90-1.

¹⁴¹ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds), *The World We have Gained* (Oxford, 1986), p. 146.

affection appeared in almost a third of the lay wills but in only half as many clergy wills.¹⁴² The *prima facie* explanation that clerical marriages were less companionate would, however, be a mistaken assumption for the clergy, writing their own wills or at least taking a closer personal involvement in their composition, were less likely than scribes to include such formulaic terms by default. Indeed, when the clergy did reveal their feelings, they frequently did so in their own turn of phrase. For example, John Morgan, curate of Ipsden (Oxfordshire), referred to his wife as ‘my dere and most singulerlie beloved wife Fraunces Morgan’ while Joan Watson was the ‘deare and faithfull wife’ of Christopher Watson.¹⁴³ Gregory Dodde, Dean of Exeter, in his will of 1570, refers repeatedly to ‘Elizabeth Dodde alias Swale my wyffe alias lover and companyon’ in a clear expression of the multi-dimensional nature of the marital relationship which he and his wife enjoyed.¹⁴⁴ Charles Daintith, minister of Kirk Ella, York, in his will of 1595, described Isabell as ‘my beloved ffrende and my true & lawfull wife’. Theirs was clearly a close relationship for he asked her, ‘as there was ever true love betwixt her and me’, to remember his brother and sister’s children at her own death if she had remained a widow and was, therefore, in a position to do so. He also beseeched his supervisors to ‘ayde and deffynde [his wife]...in all causes to further her as need requireth’.¹⁴⁵ These ministers felt no qualms about making loving references to their wives but some may have felt uncomfortable doing so when clerical marriage was still in its infancy and when the object of their true devotion should perhaps be seen to lie elsewhere. To equate their apparent reticence with emotional indifference would belie the general tone of clerical wills.

¹⁴² In a comparison of Elizabethan clerical and lay wills at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (in 17 per cent of clerical wills and in 30 per cent of lay wills).

¹⁴³ TNA, PROB 11/65, John Morgan, 1574; TNA, PROB 11/62, Christopher Watson, 1580.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, PROB 11/52, Gregory Dodde, 1570; Other examples include LRO, Wills 1585, f. 60, Katherine, ‘loving wyfe’ of John Willocke, rector of Loughborough; NthRO, Wills, 1602, Anne ‘lovinge wyfe’ of Thomas Deane, clerk of Lamport.

¹⁴⁵ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Charles Daintith, 1595.

Once again parish registers and funeral monuments supplement the evidence from wills. Emotional outpourings on bereavement demonstrate the enduring nature of the affection apparent at the making of clerical marriages. Although Llewellyn urges the observer to distinguish between ‘emotion felt and emotion displayed’, there seems little justification for doubting that ministers experienced genuine grief and a profound sense of loss on the death of a spouse.¹⁴⁶ The apogee of sentimentality must be Edward Gee’s memorial to his wife who was buried in 1613. In Latin, replete with classical allusions, Gee signalled his social and educational credentials but included an English translation so that local people too could appreciate Jane’s qualities and the extent of his loss. His ‘most deare’ Jane was ‘unequall’ in faithfulness, could not be surpassed in godliness and modesty and was happily enthroned in heaven. Edward depicts himself as bereft ‘as the tyrtle which hath lost his deere mate’.¹⁴⁷ This memorial represents a particularly intense and public outpouring of grief by a widowed cleric, but the sentiment was certainly far from unique for entries in parish registers record heartfelt emotion by ministers at the loss of a spouse and children. While George Drywood, minister of South Ockendon (Essex), in 1595, described his wife Elizabeth as ‘uxor fidelissima’.¹⁴⁸ Robert Serle, parson of Lexden (Essex), was more expansive in his register. In 1597 on the death of Anna, the second of his three wives, he ends the entry with the plea, ‘The lord have mercy on me her poore husband’.¹⁴⁹

The only memorial found to date which appears to have been created by the wife of a minister lies in the parish church of Bray (Berkshire) and is dated by Macklin to around 1600. The brass shows the couple kneeling in prayer and is placed in a marble

¹⁴⁶ Llewellyn, *Funeral Monuments*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁷ W. Lack, H. M. Stuchfield and P. Whittemore, *The Monumental Brasses of Devonshire* (London, 2000), p. 298; A. de Lamartine, *Lambeth and the Vatican: or Anecdotes of the Church of Rome, of the Reformed Churches and of Sects and Sectaries*, vol. 2 (London, 1825), p.38. By the time of his death in 1618, Edward Gee had found some solace for he left a widow, Mary.

¹⁴⁸ SEAX, Parish Register of South Ockendon, D/P 159/1/1.

¹⁴⁹ SEAX, Parish Register of Lexden, D/P 273/1/1.

frame where the heraldic devices would have served to identify those depicted. The verse reads:

When Oxford gave thee two degrees in art,
And love possest thee master of my heart,
Thy Colledge Fellowship thou lefst for mine,
And nought but deathe could seprate me fro[m] thine
Thirty Five yeare we livde in wedlocke bands
Conioyned in our hearts as well as handes
But deathe the bodies of best friendes devides
And in the earths close wombe their relyckes bides
Yet here they are not lost but sowed that they
May rise more glorious at the Iudgment Day

Deep and genuine love for her departed husband is poignantly expressed with references to affection, friendship and sacrifice before the final affirmation that as a couple they will be reunited on the Day of Judgement.¹⁵⁰

Expressions of tenderness and affection could be more tangible, as in a desire to be buried close to a late wife. For example, in 1568, Richard Poore, vicar choral of Salisbury cathedral, requested to be buried in the cathedral chapel of Saint Laurence ‘as nighe unto Dorathe my lawfull wyfe as maye be’. Poore had kept his wife’s wedding ring, best clothes and jewellery which he now bequeathed to one of her kinswomen.¹⁵¹ In 1572, John Persons, clerk of Longdon (Worcestershire), wished to be ‘buried as neare to Amie

¹⁵⁰ Macklin, *The Brasses of England*, p. 286; ‘Bray with the Borough of Maidenhead: Churches and Charities’, *A History of the County of Berkshire*, 3 (1923), pp. 107-116, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=43189>, accessed 7 September 2012.

¹⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/50, Richard Poore, 1568. The preamble to Poore’s will suggests a man of conservative religious beliefs for he bequeathed his soul ‘unto almyghty god my creator and redeamer Also I beseeche the blessed virgyn Marye the mother of oure Lorde Jhesus Christe and all the blessed companie of heaven to praye unto almyghtie god for me’. In addition, he made bequests ‘upon the poore for the welthe of my sowle my wyffes and all crysten sowles’. Religious conservatism did not necessarily preclude marriage among the clergy.

my late wief as it convenyentlie maye be' and in 1580, Clement Gregorie, minister of Peterborough (Cambridgeshire), declared that he wanted to 'be buried beside Katherine my wife latelie deceased', though he tactfully referred to his current wife as 'Johan my trustie and welbeloved wife'.¹⁵² Clergy widows made similar requests. In 1591, Agnes Stoyte, whose husband, John Stoyte parson of Uffington (Lincolnshire), had died four years earlier, asked to be buried in the chancel of the parish church 'so nere as may be where my husband lyeth buried'.¹⁵³ Marie Robinson, widow of the Archdeacon of Lincoln, survived her husband by twenty five years but in 1623 made a similar request and in 1630, Bridget Skinner asked to be buried by her husband, the clerk Edmund.¹⁵⁴ In the Prerogative Court of Canterbury wills studied, 22 per cent of widowed clergy and 17 per cent of widowed laity expressed such a wish, possibly because the clergy's greater professional engagement with the environs of the church made them more comfortable in expressing such burial preferences. Wrightson indicates that among the laity requests of this nature were 'not unknown in normal times, though comparatively rare' suggesting that the percentage in this survey may be unduly high.¹⁵⁵ Many clerical marriages, therefore, seem to have been companionate and while they may not always have offered parishioners a model of unremitting domestic bliss, they were far removed from the dysfunctional relationships sometimes portrayed.

¹⁵² TNA, PROB 11/54, John Persons, 1572; TNA, PROB 11/62, Clement Gregorie, 1580. Other examples include TNA, PROB 11/75, Robert Rodes, 1590; TNA, PROB 11/78, William Master, 1593; TNA, PROB 11/83, Thomas Curtesse, 1594; TNA, PROB 11/92, Richard Fox, 1598.

¹⁵³ TNA, PROB 11/71, John Stoyte, 1587; TNA, PROB 11/78, Agnes Stoyte, 1591.

¹⁵⁴ TNA, PROB 11/91, John Robinson, 1598; TNA, PROB 11/142, Marie Robinson, 1623; Bridget Skinner, <http://www.the-curates-line.com/the-curates-skinner-line.php> accessed 5 June 2013.

¹⁵⁵ K. Wrightson, *Ralph Tailor's Summer: A Scrivener, his City and the Plague* (New Haven and London, 2011), p. 96; perhaps the unusually high proportion of lay widowers who sought burial close to a deceased wife can be explained by the enhanced social standing of the majority of those whose wills were proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury given that burial within the parish church indicated that deceased was of significant social standing within the locality. See Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, p. 288.

Public Housekeeping

Beyond notional qualities, clergy wives were able to pursue more practical measures through which to aid their husbands' calling although probably few went as far as the wife of Richard Parker, vicar of Dedham (Essex), in pretending that her husband's surplice had accidentally been burnt before finally producing the garment.¹⁵⁶ Ministers' wives were able to take over the domestic tasks and duties formerly assigned to female housekeepers whose very presence had occasioned so much gossip and scandal. Yet, accusations that the distractions of family life would lead to ministerial dereliction of duty created a particular sensitivity towards domestic arrangements inside the parsonage. Clergymen such as Richard Rogers, who valued his wife's 'husewifry', credited their wives with relieving them of domestic responsibilities so that they could devote themselves to their vocation.¹⁵⁷ His wife successfully managed a large household which included theological students and others in search of her husband's spiritual guidance, his 'borders'.¹⁵⁸ The wife of Valentine Overton, minister of Bedworth (Warwickshire) between 1592 and 1639, was lauded because she 'took off the whole burden of family affairs, both within and without doors from her husband, that he might with more freedom attend his holy callings'.¹⁵⁹ Jacobine Goad, who in 1588 married Andrew Willet, rector of Barley (Hertfordshire), was described as a 'meet helper... [and] careful yoke-fellow' who took care of their thirteen surviving children so that he 'without any the least distraction, pursued his old course of study'.¹⁶⁰ These somewhat defensive statements, while betraying

¹⁵⁶ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 195.

¹⁵⁷ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁸ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries*, pp. 25-6. Rogers, acutely self-critical to his spiritual shortcomings, never fully reconciled the dichotomy between the support and distraction occasioned by his marriage, see pp. 57, 97, 101,

¹⁵⁹ Samuel Clarke, *A Looking-glass for Good Women to Dress themselves by*: (London, 1677), p. 4.

¹⁶⁰ P. Smith, 'The Life and Death of Andrew Willet, Doctor of Divinitie', in Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi* (London, 1634), STC 2070:08, sig., A3v; ODNB, Andrew Willet (1561/2-1621): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/29445, accessed 15 September 2015.

the legacy of arguments advanced against a married ministry and continuing personal anxieties, offer an insight into the practical support offered by wives within the parsonage.

Developing and expanding the role of the clergy wife beyond the domestic setting required women to proceed cautiously ever mindful of the dangers of crossing the divide between spiritual and pastoral concerns. Matthew Parker sought to demonstrate that a wife added to a minister's ability to fulfil his vocation.¹⁶¹ Margaret Parker, in word and practice, skilfully negotiated a very visible role for herself receiving letters from petitioners who required her husband's support and providing charitable assistance and money for sermons in her home town.¹⁶² Others were less adroit at avoiding controversy and two examples reveal wives who stepped beyond their remit and appropriated roles which encroached on their husbands' religious responsibilities. In 1582, the vicar of Alciston (Sussex) was cited as being too lazy to perform services on Sunday afternoons. If he could not avoid doing so by saying evensong immediately after matins, he would prevail upon his wife to take the second service for him; unsurprisingly this usurpation of her husband's spiritual role could not be tolerated.¹⁶³ The second case illustrates that on occasions the boundary could become blurred in the face of everyday practicalities. Brian Bywater, curate of Wetherby (Yorkshire), admitted that at the special request of Archdeacon Ramsden 'and sometymes of his wyffe in his absence', he had both christened children and buried corpses at Spofforth church despite his unlicensed state.¹⁶⁴

Although documentary evidence is rare, it was probably not uncommon for wives to act expediently or to influence their husbands' actions or decisions based on their knowledge of local circumstance. In Colchester in 1579, the minister, Thomas Upcher,

¹⁶¹ See above pp. 49, 158-9.

¹⁶² 'Matthaeus' in J. Strype, *The Life and Acts of Matthew Parker* (London, 1711), Book IV, Appendix, p. 155; Bjorklund, "'A Godly Wyfe'", pp. 352, 361.

¹⁶³ J. Goring, 'The Reformation of the Ministry in Elizabethan Sussex', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 34 (1983), p. 351.

¹⁶⁴ BI, CP.G.2767.

was deeply embroiled in the town's controversies and in response to Richard Littlewood's attempt to reconcile the minister and John Hunwick, Upchurch declared 'no I wyll confounde and overthrowe hym, or elles he shall confounde and overthrowe me'. Joan Upchurch reacted by asking 'O man whye saye you so', an intervention which shamed her husband into accepting that he was 'ffleshe and blood as other men be'. Joan had reprimanded her husband for his own unchristian behaviour and by implication, his handling of parochial affairs. Joan was probably far from unique among clergy wives in offering her opinions, that evidence of her interpolation survives is, however, unusual.¹⁶⁵

Establishing a role for herself in the affairs of the parish in support of her husband's ministry probably presented the parson's wife with fewer difficulties than might at first be supposed. The only counsel that Becon actually directed to the wives of 'spirytuall ministers' was that Paul required them to be 'honest, no evyl speakers: but sober, and faithful in all thinges' although significantly all wives were expected to devote themselves to activities 'profitable ... to the common weale'.¹⁶⁶ George Joye had looked beyond the home and anticipated that ministers' wives would exhibit a responsibility towards their neighbours and would 'visit the sick, sore, and poor'.¹⁶⁷ These obligations formed the essence of what Mendelson and Crawford have described as the ways in which women's domestic experience as housekeepers was extended into the public sphere. They have demonstrated that running a household involved more than domestic tasks and that outside the home, women were traditionally expected to socialize and to engage in providing health care and hospitality.¹⁶⁸ They categorized these aspects of social welfare under the umbrella term 'public housewifery' which was later amended to 'public

¹⁶⁵ M. Byford, 'The Price of Protestantism: Assessing the Impact of Religious Change on Elizabethan Essex; the Case of Heydon and Colchester, 1558-94' (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), pp. 260-1.

¹⁶⁶ 1 Timothy 2:9-10; Titus 2:3-5; 1 Peter 3:1-6; Proverbs 31:10-31.

¹⁶⁷ Joye, *The Defence of the marriage of priestes*, sig. C ii v-iii r.

¹⁶⁸ Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, pp. 307, 314; see also S. E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603; Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Farnham, 2015), p. 98.

housekeeping' by Wolfe when she documented the work undertaken by seventeenth-century clergy wives in ministering to the sick and needy, offering hospitality and mediating between the minister and his flock.¹⁶⁹ In essence, there was no difference between Joye's 1541 prescription and George Herbert's requirement that the seventeenth-century parson's wife should care for the sick and poor.¹⁷⁰ Indeed, many of the very women to whom Herbert was speaking and whose work Wolfe describes, had actually grown up in the households of sixteenth-century clergymen and their wives.¹⁷¹ Elizabethan clergy wives, by fulfilling the obligations associated with good neighbourliness, demonstrated Christian principles and furthered their husbands' pastoral ministry; in doing so, they fashioned the concept of the archetypal minister's wife.

Significantly, Mendelson and Crawford also perceived that 'various institutions assumed that the men whom they employed had wives who would contribute to the work involved'. Moreover, as this practice was accepted as normal, it has remained invisible in the historical record.¹⁷² These observations have important ramifications for an understanding of the role of the clergy wife. While she could not directly involve herself in the spiritual aspects of her husband's vocation, a minister's pastoral responsibilities fell easily within the remit of a good wife and neighbour. Parishioners would have found this unremarkable for the minister and his wife were not unique within the community in the sense that there were other village offices which, although not open to women, allowed them to be involved in the communal tasks associated with them.¹⁷³ Although the role of clergy wife was a novel one, the assumption that a wife would automatically involve herself in whatever features of her husband's occupation seemed appropriate, could help

¹⁶⁹ Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi', pp. 169-80.

¹⁷⁰ George Herbert, 'A Priest to the Temple or The Country Parson His Character, and Rule of Holy Life' in *The Works of George Herbert*, ed. F. E. Hutchinson (Oxford, 1941), pp. 238-9.

¹⁷¹ Eales, 'Gender Construction', p. 174.

¹⁷² Mendelson and Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England*, p. 141.

¹⁷³ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, p. 257.

explain the lack of explicit instruction for her to do so. In her study of women's wills, besides noting that 'a woman's natural duty within marriage ... [offered] her opportunities to establish her own working identity within a larger community', Susan James identified the ways in which women worked in partnership with their husbands.¹⁷⁴ This would also account for the expectation among parishioners that their parson's wife would be actively involved with the community in support of her husband and that, as a normal occurrence, it would not provoke comment. In general, those who advocated the introduction of clerical marriage seem to have focussed on its intrinsic justification, giving little thought to the ensuing practicalities. Yet, women such as Joan Pendleton, wife of William Bethley, the late vicar of Stapleford (Nottinghamshire), immersed themselves the day to day life of the parsonage. Joan's intimate knowledge of vicarage finances only came to light in court in 1569 when she gave detailed evidence about the tithes collected by her late husband including the payments made by individual parishioners.¹⁷⁵

Collinson lamented that for the sixteenth century, 'we know all too little about what clergy wives of this period did or were expected to do in a pastoral way'.¹⁷⁶ Marshall also bemoaned the lack of 'neutral or positive references' to clergy wives other than the willingness of the churchwardens of Ashburton (Devon) to pay two shillings to 'Sir Nicholas's wife' for washing vestments.¹⁷⁷ There is certainly no abundance of documentary evidence, but my research has uncovered examples of clergy wives undertaking a variety of duties within the parish. The arrangement in Ashburton, for example, was not an isolated case for the churchwardens' accounts from 1562 onwards in the parish of St Matthew, Friday Street, London, reveal that the rector's wife, Mrs

¹⁷⁴ S. E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603: Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Farnham, 2015), pp. 98-9, 147.

¹⁷⁵ University of Nottingham, Libels, Manuscripts and Special Collections, AN/LB215/2/12/2.

¹⁷⁶ P. Collinson, 'Shepherds, Sheepdogs, and Hirelings: The Pastoral Ministry in Post-Reformation England', *Studies in Church History*, 26 (1989), pp. 214-15.

¹⁷⁷ P. Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 172.

Richardson, received four shillings paid annually for ‘washinge the churche lynen’. Her successor maintained the practice and in 1602, Mrs Presse received sixpence for washing the surplice.¹⁷⁸ The need to account for expenditure necessitated the recording of these details, but most routine instances of involvement in parish life required no such formalities. Mundane activities, particularly those performed by women, went unremarked and have left little trace in the archive.

Often, evidence of sixteenth-century ministers’ wives engaged in public housekeeping emerges only as an apparently insignificant detail in an unfolding tale. For example, Alice, wife of Osmond Lake, vicar of Ringwood, Southampton, offered hospitality to Edward Eaton, a passing stranger in 1586. Eaton had contrived a pretext for calling at the vicarage and realizing this, Alice offered him hospitality. He declined dinner, accepted threepence in lieu and then proceeded to demand his dinner, exasperating behaviour which contrasted with Alice’s refusal to respond to provocation. Only the fallout from Eaton’s comments, which were designed to intimidate Alice as a minister’s wife, ensured that evidence of her public housekeeping has survived.¹⁷⁹

The wives of clergymen were under the obligation of all good Christians to offer hospitality and charity to those in need and other examples of this responsibility being honoured do survive. Clergy widows were frequently entrusted with the distribution of money bequeathed to the poor by their deceased husbands with the implied assumption that their knowledge would identify the poorest among his flock.¹⁸⁰ Ministers’ wives also organized charitable giving in their own right. Once her own children had left home, the wife of Thomas Willet, rector of Barley until his death in 1598, established a custom whereby she would ‘call her poor neighbours in, and feeding them ... say “Now again I

¹⁷⁸ *Churchwardens’ Accounts of the Parish of St Matthew, Friday Street, in the City of London, from 1547 to 1603*, ed. W. S. Simpson, *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, 25 (1869), p. 371.

¹⁷⁹ State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1586, SP12/195, f. 126. The implications of Eaton’s behaviour are discussed below, pp. 263-4.

¹⁸⁰ See below, p. 219.

have my children about me”’.¹⁸¹ The will of Avice Helme provides evidence of her involvement in the village life of Sturminster Marshall. She followed the example of her late husband in dispensing charity with most of her benevolence targeted at named individuals and their particular needs. She named, for example, all ‘tenne poore women’ of Sturminster Marshall who were to receive ‘graye frise gownes readie made to theire handes’ and five of the ten were then singled out for additional bequests. She stated that Edithe Sebrow and Mother Jone were also to receive ‘a smocke and a working dayes kerceff’. Jone Curtis received ‘a smocke and a working daies apron’ while ‘Olde Sondaies wife’ and Isbell Cottrell were given ten and twenty shillings respectively. Those related to these poor women were not neglected, for John Barfoote, husband of one of the ten, received a white coverlet and a blanket and Mother Cottrell was the recipient of Avice’s best smock and her ‘old holie daies partlett’.¹⁸² Such bequests suggest that Avice Helme was actively involved within the parish and aware of those in most need. She also appears to have been responsive to their precise needs in the way, for example, that she left money to Hunne, the fletcher, specifically ‘to helpe bringe uppe his children’. Not only was she sensitive to need, she was also discerning of character, for the forty shillings which she left to Robert Mainard, was to be put to his use and profit by her overseers ‘that it come not into his ffathers hande’. In all, Avice made bequests of money, produce, household items and clothing to thirty-one named individuals within the local community including the family of her former servant and the village carpenter and shepherd.¹⁸³

While not detailing individual charitable bequests, other clergy widows remembered the poor in their wills. Marie Robinson, widow of John Robinson of Lincoln Cathedral who had died in 1598, left ten shillings to the poor in each of three parishes.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ Smith, ‘The Life and Death of Andrew Willet’, sig. A2r.

¹⁸² *OED*, A partlet was an item of clothing worn over the neck and upper part of the chest, especially by women to cover a low décolletage.

¹⁸³ TNA, PROB 11/68, Avice Helme, 1585.

¹⁸⁴ TNA, PROB 11/142, Marie Robinson, 1623.

Anne Langley, widow of Thomas Langley who had died in 1583, left five shillings to the poor of Wootton Bassett (Wiltshire).¹⁸⁵ The poor of Lyme Regis (Dorset), received thirteen shillings and four pence in the will of Elizabeth Smyth, widow of the vicar of Sidmouth while the poor of Pitsford (Northamptonshire) were given twenty shillings by Bridget, widow of Edmund Skinner, clerk.¹⁸⁶ Richard Greenham's widow, Katherine Woode, on her death, required the new minister to distribute the twenty shillings which she bequeathed to the poor of Dry Drayton.¹⁸⁷ Although it is difficult to locate the wills of clergy widows and although evidence of charitable giving during their lifetimes is scarce, these clergy widows, as they approached death, acknowledged their Christian duty to the less fortunate. It is difficult to believe that those who had left money in their wills or administered their husband's testamentary charitable bequests, had ignored the needs of the poor while their husbands were alive. Marie Rawlyns epitomizes the generosity expected of clergy wives and unusually, her lifetime generosity is also documented. John Rawlyns had been minister of Attleborough (Norfolk) from 1581 and after his death, Marie was much commended as a woman of 'much kindness to all & of great charitie to the poore in all her widowhood'. She died in 1635, aged 91, and at her funeral, where 'neere 700 ... tooke Almes Doole', the rector embraced this aspect of her life and preached on the theme 'the worke of Charitie & Comendacon & reward therof'.¹⁸⁸

The close identification of the Elizabethan clergy wife with her husband's profession lent greater impact and significance to any public activity that she undertook. The involvement of ministers' wives such as Mistress Vincent in attending churchings and 'other meytings among the wives of the parishe' provided occasion for them to offer

¹⁸⁵ TNA, PROB 11/121, Anne Langley, 1613.

¹⁸⁶ TNA, PROB 11/67, Elizabeth Smyth, 1584; Will of Bridget Skinner, <http://www.the-curates-line.com/the-curates-skinner-line.php> accessed 5 June 2013.

¹⁸⁷ TNA, PROB 11/ 119, Katherine Woode, 1612. I am most grateful to Eric Carlson for providing me with a transcript of this will.

¹⁸⁸ *Attleborough (Church of England) Parish Registers 1552-1840*, ed. E. W. Sanderson and P. Palgrave-Moore, *Norfolk & Norwich Genealogical Society*, 1980, pp. 219, 229. The 'great feast' which she had decreed should follow her burial was attended by her family and forty of her friends and neighbours.

moral guidance and on occasions, censure.¹⁸⁹ A clergyman was expected to function as a peacemaker among his flock and wives could also adopt a conciliatory role.¹⁹⁰ In 1599, while harvesting peas, a Berkshire vicar's wife tried to maintain communal harmony by preventing Joan Church from spreading malicious gossip among her neighbours.¹⁹¹ Three years earlier, colourful and slanderous exchanges had taken place in York minster between the 'bitle [beetle] browed witche', Anne Tattersall, and the 'read hedded ffox', Judith Thorne. Philippa, wife of the clerk Thomas Corney, took charge and reprimanded Judith, telling her to hold her peace. Unlike the other women present, some of whom were also clergy wives, she was prepared to offer an assessment of character and stated that 'she beareth no hatred to William Tattersall nor Anne his wife howbeit she wisheth that if the said Anne would not be more quiete then she is that she were removed furthe of the bedderne'.¹⁹² Both incidents took place when the vicars' wives were engaged in everyday activities and illustrate how close involvement with the women of the parish offered them the opportunity to exert moral influence over their neighbours in a voice that carried greater, albeit informal, authority and respect because they were the wife of the minister.

Wolfe concluded that this informal pastoral role enabled ministers' wives to obtain unofficial influence within the parish.¹⁹³ This was exemplified in 1631, when Anne Fretherne, wife of the rector of Kencot (Oxfordshire), led the investigation into suspicions that Elizabeth Scoulter, granddaughter of the widow Hulet, had 'of late been delivered of a child'. During the subsequent lawsuit, she reminded widow Hulet that 'You told me that I was the chieftest woman in the town and that it behoved me to look to this'.¹⁹⁴ As an exclusively female preserve, childbirth is a useful medium through which to

¹⁸⁹ BI, CP. G.3455.

¹⁹⁰ J. Bossy, 'Blood and Baptism: Kinship, Community and Christianity in Western Europe from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries', *Studies in Church History*, 10 (Oxford, 1973), p. 139.

¹⁹¹ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 276.

¹⁹² BI, DC.CP.1596/7/8/9. The Beddern was the area in which the vicars choral lived.

¹⁹³ Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi', p. 168.

¹⁹⁴ OHC, Oxford Diocesan papers c.26, ff.144-148v.; *Oxford Church Courts: Depositions*, ed. J. Howard-Drake, 1629-1634 (Oxford, 2007), pp. 26-30.

measure the involvement of minister's wives in parish life and to gauge their position within the local hierarchy. Bernard Capp cites the Scoulter case as an example of 'how clerical wives were emerging from their ambivalent status to become influential figures in their own right in shaping public opinion and negotiating neighbourhood morals'.¹⁹⁵

Yet, evidence, although sparse, suggests that Elizabethan clergy wives were already 'immersed' in the 'collective social event' which accompanied the birth of a child and that they spoke with the voice of authority at such times.¹⁹⁶ In 1578, Joan Curteys, wife of the vicar of Cuckfield (Sussex), took the lead in ascertaining the fate of the child of Mercy Gould and in Norton (County Durham), it was the vicar's wife rather than the midwife who interrogated unmarried mothers as to the identity of the father of their child.¹⁹⁷ A tale related by a beggar woman to Elizabeth Shirley also highlights the role of the local minister's wife during the birth of a child even though its real purpose was to describe a miraculous appearance of the Virgin Mary. No specific date is given but the context places the events between 1585 and 1596.¹⁹⁸ In a Derbyshire town, a minister's wife was among the neighbours attending a woman in childbirth. When the woman called on the Virgin Mary for help, it was the parson's wife who forbade her to do so and threatened that, if she persisted, she would remove all the wives from her. The woman continued to cry out in this way, and the threat was indeed carried out; where the minister's wife led, the women of the parish followed.¹⁹⁹

The incident provides evidence of a sixteenth-century parson's wife being able to use her involvement to proffer spiritual censure in a setting from which her husband was

¹⁹⁵ Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, p. 300.

¹⁹⁶ Fletcher, *Gender, Sex and Subordination*, pp. 186, 257.

¹⁹⁷ D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions*, p. 66; P. Collinson, 'Shepherds, Sheepdogs, and Hirelings: The Pastoral Ministry in Post-Reformation England', *Studies in Church History*, 26 (1989), p. 215.

¹⁹⁸ ODNB, Elizabeth Shirley (1564/5-1641): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/45824, accessed 30 March 2015. In 1585, Elizabeth Shirley became housekeeper to her uncle and in 1596 she began her religious profession at St Ursula's in Louvain.

¹⁹⁹ *The Chronicle of the English Augustinian Canonesses Regular of the Lateran, at St Monica's in Louvain (now at St Augustine's Priory, Newton Abbot, Devon)*, vol. 1, ed. A Hamilton (Edinburgh, 1904-6), pp. 102-4.

completely excluded and also demonstrates that the women folk of the parish acknowledged the authority of the parson's wife. As explored more fully in chapter six, ministers' wives stood as godmothers to local children. This too demonstrates that the first generation of clergy wives had become significant figures in the female hierarchy of the parish and that their ability to further the future spiritual and physical well-being of the child was recognized.²⁰⁰ The initial requirements for honesty and sobriety remained the fundamental attributes of the clergy wife but her role had acquired greater definition and scope over the course of the reign.

Conclusion

Using a wide range of sources, it has been possible to assemble a more nuanced picture of Elizabethan clergy wives and to reveal more of their characters, relationships and duties than is present in most discussions of sixteenth-century clerical marriage. Not all ministers' wives were suited to the role and they did not always negotiate the various requirements and pitfalls with success. As a group, however, they have been seriously misrepresented by scholars who have given excessive prominence to women whose reprehensible behaviour has ensured them a place in the archive. There was no official guidance on how a clergy wife was expected behave, but by endeavouring to live up to the precepts demanded of the ideal spouse, the wife of the local parson could establish her own reputation, reinforce the image of the model household and support her husband in leading by example. Unable to involve herself directly in his spiritual role, by taking advantage of the accepted premise that a wife would engage with her husband's occupation and by adapting and expanding the communal involvement expected of a good wife and neighbour, a minister's wife could assist in his pastoral responsibilities. The ecclesiastical authorities, perhaps slow to appreciate the true potential of clergy wives,

²⁰⁰ See below, pp. 290-3.

were outstripped by communal perceptions and by the agency of the women themselves. Communities were quick to understand and assimilate the identification of the clergy wife with her husband's calling and encouraged the emergence of an informal code of behaviour, signalled by their vociferous complaints should the parson's wife fall short of expectations. Although initially their requirements may have amounted to little more than those of a good wife, the minister's wife was soon being judged by criteria which reflected and embodied her unique position within the parish. While she could achieve acceptance and respect through her own agency and strength of character, her authority was ultimately derived from the influence and additional weight afforded by her marital connection. The longer trajectory has made clearer the role of seventeenth-century clergy wives but all the elements, albeit in a less codified form, were in place and practised by their sixteenth-century predecessors; the woman who was married to the local clergyman was expected to be a 'clergy wife'.

5. Clerical Marriage and Charitable Giving

The introduction of clerical marriage was among the Reformation's major changes and one which contemporaries feared would diminish clerical charitable giving. While the subject of poor relief has an extensive historiography, very few scholars have investigated the impact of marriage on ministers' ability and willingness to offer hospitality and to relieve the poor. Among those who have, Joel Berlatsky inquired into the impact of clerical marriage on the benevolence of Tudor prelates and concluded that the wills of married prelates were weighted towards the well-being of their offspring.¹ In her study, Felicity Heal discerned that in the mid-sixteenth century, the concept of hospitality was 'revitalized' and that episcopal enquiries and injunctions demonstrated a commitment, at least in theory, to clerical charitable giving. She made a tentative generalization, based on the behaviour of individual prelates, that among the clergy there was a 'correlation between the existence of large families and reputations for parsimony'.² Evidence of routine clerical philanthropy has left little trace in the historical record and goes a long way towards explaining why this subject has received so little attention. Indeed, Heal concluded that it is 'well-nigh impossible to judge if they [the clergy] were dispensing hospitality'.³ While this observation offers little encouragement for the task in hand, it underlines the need to try.

To begin to correct this omission, it is my intention to examine testamentary evidence for an insight into the extent of charitable giving among Elizabethan clergy and to compare the testamentary behaviour of married and unmarried ministers. Wills proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (PCC) supplemented by evidence from the

¹ J. Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family in a Tudor Elite: Familial Patterns of Elizabethan Bishops', *Journal of Family History*, 3 (1978), p. 8.

² Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990), p. 279.

³ Heal, *Hospitality*, p. 290; R. L. Greaves, *Religion and Society in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 161.

northern province and diocesan probate registries will, therefore, form the basis of this chapter. The discussion will be based on both qualitative research and statistical analysis of charitable giving and sociability in two sample timeframes, 1566-70 and 1596-1600. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of the particular hardships faced by clergy widows and the strategies which were employed to avoid or, at least, to alleviate them.

Wills were written not with the needs of future historians and statisticians in mind but primarily to dispose of wealth and possessions and to prevent disputes.⁴ As Claire Cross has demonstrated, they cannot offer a complete view of clerical behaviour as many clergy did not make wills and, even among those who did, the documents themselves may no longer exist.⁵ The testamentary evidence which does survive poses its own challenges. Caroline Litzenberger has described wills as ‘a potentially fruitful, but problematic, source’ whose contents are ‘not directly quantifiable’ although fortunately she does offer some encouragement by indicating that ‘these problems can be overcome’ using ‘a combination of textual content analysis and statistics’.⁶ This is very much the approach to be adopted here.

Clergy wills depict the attitudes and behaviour of the more affluent members of the profession, particularly when selected, as here, from the PCC. This court represented the superior probate court of England and Wales, where in theory, testators died with property of a minimum value of £5 held in more than one probate jurisdiction or diocese in southern England. The evident poverty endured by many married parochial clergy has been advanced as a reason for their inability to honour their charitable obligations but this should not apply to testators whose wills survive in these probate records. Any

⁴ K. Wrightson and D. Levine, ‘Death in Whickham’, in J. Walter and R. Schofield (eds), *Famine, Disease and the Social Order in Early Modern England Society* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 158.

⁵ C. Cross, ‘The Incomes of Provincial Urban Clergy, 1520-1645’, in R. O’Day and F. Heal (eds), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), p. 71. Cross concluded that wills or inventories remain for fewer than half the clergy thought to have been resident in the archdeaconry of Lincoln in the second part of Elizabeth’s reign.

⁶ C. Litzenberger, ‘Computer-based Analysis of Early-modern English Wills, *History and Computing*, 7 (1995), p. 143.

philanthropic shortcomings on the part of the clergy in this study should probably be attributed more to a lack of inclination than to a lack of means.

Any analysis based on testamentary evidence has to consider that bequests do not necessarily account for a testator's whole estate, that establishing the value of legacies is complicated by the number of gifts made in kind and that the extent of the residue remains undefined. Marsh's warning that 'wills are not a source into which historians can dip for swift and reliable results' has to be heeded but, when handled with care, the difficulties encountered are not sufficient to invalidate the findings.⁷ Wills constitute a significant resource and on a subject where so little direct evidence survives, historians cannot afford to ignore any material which contributes to the debate.

In some cases, the objections raised are less restrictive than they at first appear. For example, while wills indisputably record a lifetime's attitude and experience from the point at which it ends, in doing so, they also offer an insight into traits of character. Indeed, Tim Cooper contends that only in a priest's will can we gauge the extent of his social concern and gain 'a rare insight' into his perception of community.⁸ Although Cooper was referring to pre-Reformation clergy, the same holds true for their Elizabethan successors whose wills offer an indication of clerical household and kinship arrangements, economic circumstance, involvement with the wider community and 'occasionally ... something of their interior lives as well'.⁹

It is, on occasions, possible to link testamentary evidence of generosity towards the poor with corroborative evidence of life-time benevolence.¹⁰ Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall (Dorset) was renowned for his generosity and it is commemorated

⁷ C. Marsh, 'In the Name of God? Will-making and Faith in Early Modern England', in G. H. Martin and P. Spufford (eds), *The Records of the Nation* (Woodbridge, 1990), p. 248.

⁸ T. Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy* (Woodbridge, 1999), p. 161.

⁹ M. M. Sheehan, 'English Wills and the Records of the Ecclesiastical and Civil Jurisdictions', *Journal of Mediaeval History*, 14 (1988), p. 3.

¹⁰ It would, of course, be dangerous to assume that a lack of charitable bequests necessarily equates with a lifetime's disregard for the poor.

in a brass in St Mary's church. Helme, was described as 'a frynde and father of the poore' and it was noted that he built the vicarage, 'the bayle howse'.¹¹ In his will, he bequeathed £9 in money and large quantities of wheat and malt to the poor of five parishes. In addition, the residue of his estate was to be sold and divided with preference given to the needy in the households of the faithful and those 'visited and punished withe sickenes or otherwise and [in] wante [of] releif and comferte'.¹² His widow, Avice, was equally generous in her will. She made bequests to thirty-one named individuals and demonstrated an intimate knowledge of the personalities and needs of her husband's parishioners which suggests a long term involvement with their lives.¹³ Adrian Schaell, rector of High Ham (Somerset), had maintained the village school and comparing himself to his predecessor, claimed that while he had entertained his richer neighbours 'more bountifully', he had 'not bin unmindful to relive the poore'.¹⁴ This was probably no empty boast for in his will, he left a stock of £100 to provide woollen cloth for the poor of two parishes, £7 to the poor of four additional parishes and six shillings and eight pence to the local poor house. He had 'sustained a greater family' through a policy of improvement and by cultivating the glebe himself rather than letting it out.¹⁵ Such wills demonstrate a correlation between lifetime philanthropy and testamentary behaviour and serve to reinforce the view that wills are an important indicator of long term attitudes to charitable giving.

¹¹ W. de C. Prideaux, 'The Ancient Memorial Brasses of Dorset', *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club*, 32 (1911), pp. 219-20.

¹² TNA, PROB 11/64, Henry Helme, 1582.

¹³ TNA, PROB 11/68, Avice Helme, 1585. See above, pp. 78, 193.

¹⁴ *Adrian Schaell's Memoir of High Ham Church and Rectory, AD 1598*, ed. C. D. Crossman, *Proceedings of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, 20 (1894), p. 119; <https://slp3.somerset.gov.uk/schools/highham/school%20info/church.aspx>, accessed 11 January 2015.

¹⁵ TNA, PROB 11/93, Adrian Schaell, 1599.

Expectations

Pre-reformation attitudes, as described by Janelle Werner, defined the priest's concubine as a woman whose greed diverted tithes from the parish and drained church finances.¹⁶ Evangelical writers were all too well aware of this legacy and that catholic polemicists would eagerly articulate and exploit the fear that charity and hospitality would be diminished by the introduction of a married ministry.

Charitable giving was the mark of a true christian and parishioners could justifiably expect that the minister who exhorted others to give generously to their less fortunate neighbours would himself lead the way in philanthropy. Yet the introduction of clerical marriage, following on from a long tradition of concern over the diversion of church funds, allowed clerical parsimony to be attributed directly to the presence of ministers' wives and children in the parsonage. In *A Stronge Defence of the Maryage of Pryestes*, John Veron summarized the familiar argument thus:

if they be suffered to marye, that wil minister a greate occasion to them
to be couetous, and to kepe nygarde houses, so that the poore shall not
be refreshed by theym as they ought to be, they wyll geue theym selues to
purchace houses and lande for theyr brettes: What hospitalytye then shall
they be able to keepe?¹⁷

Often struggling on an inadequate income, the married clergyman was required to balance his duty to the poor against his responsibilities as a husband and father; the obligation to provide for one's family was after all itself enshrined in scripture (1 Timothy 5:8).¹⁸ Nicholas Wilson, clerk of Scrayingham (Yorkshire), asserted in his will of 1586 that it was the 'duetic of every good christyan man to provyde for his wyfe children and famylie

¹⁶ J. Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives': Priests and Concubines in England, 1375-1549" (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), pp. 52, 130.

¹⁷ John Veron, *A Stronge Defence of the Maryage of Pryestes*, (London, 1562), STC (2nd edn) 24687, sig. B3r.

¹⁸ 1 Timothy 5:8, 'But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel'.

otherwyse he is accompted by saynt paule to be worse than an infydell'.¹⁹ In 1589, Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, sought to counter accusations that the clergy prioritized the advancement of their families and the accumulation of wealth above the needs of their parishioners. In doing so, he too referenced Paul's judgement that a man who did not make provision for his family was worse than a heathen and could not 'escape the blame of an unkinde husband, or unnatural parent'. As Cooper went on to explain, not only did a minister have to meet the daily needs of his family, he also had to ensure that they could survive his own demise, for a clergy widow with inadequate provision faced a precarious and dismal future.²⁰

Veron's defence was to attack the nobility who voraciously acquired land yet begrudged the clergy 'one small cottage for theyr wyves and chyldren'. Although some ministers could be accused of greed, many, Veron asserted, had 'the feare of God before theyr eyes' and did 'from the bottome of theyr hartes detest and abhorre couetousenesse'.²¹ A 'lowde lye' was Thomas Becon's response to suggestions that married clergy would neglect the poor. While the financial burden associated with priests' 'concubines, whores ... and unlawfully begotten children' might appear to undermine regard for the married ministry, Becon claimed that Paul had specifically linked marriage and hospitality. The lack of a wife led to the 'haunting of Innes, Tavernes [and] Alehouses', but in contrast, 'where maryage is, there an occasion is geven for hospitalitie'.²² Since the introduction of clerical marriage William Harrison also maintained that, 'touching hospitality, there was never any greater used in England' and that the poor were 'oftener fed generally than heretofore they have been'.²³

¹⁹ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Nycholas Wilson, proved 1600.

²⁰ Thomas Cooper, *An Admonition of the People of England, 1589*, ed. E. Archer (Birmingham, 1882), p. 114.

²¹ Veron, *A Stronge Defence*, sigs B6r-8r.

²² Thomas Becon, 'The Boke of Matrimony', *The Worckes of Thomas Becon* (London, 1564), STC 913:01, ff. 613v-614v.

²³ William Harrison, *The Description of England*, ed. G. Edelen (Ithaca, 1968), p. 37.

For all the efforts of these writers, the view expressed by the Duke of Northumberland that married clergy were ‘so sotted with their wives and children that they forget both their poor neighbours and all other things which to their calling appertaineth’ proved remarkably persistent.²⁴ Cecil himself observed that both bishops and clergy ‘by hospitallite and releyving of the poore men wyn creditt amyngst the people’ but that they were failing in this respect largely as a result of their pursuit of wealth in the interest of their wives and children.²⁵ Mary Prior has demonstrated that both courtiers and Puritans blamed bishop’s wives for their husband’s attempts to maximize revenues.²⁶ Similar views existed among more humble levels of society. In 1576, William Lucas of Dymchurch (Kent) ultimately acknowledged that ‘it is meet that every minister should have his wife’ but previously he had said that ‘ministers should have no wives, for the goods that they have should sustain the poor, where now it doth maintaine them, their wives and children’.²⁷

Understandably Catholics found this trope too compelling to relinquish. Sir John Bourne, a thorn in the side of Edwin Sandys, Bishop of Worcester, confessed his ‘misliking of priests marriages’ as it showed their ‘covetousness, wantonness and carelessness to do their office’. He took particular exception to Sandys’ marriage and interpreted all the bishop’s actions in terms of the needs and demands of Cicely, his wife. According to Bourne, Sandys had allowed his house at Grimley to fall into disrepair so that its bricks could be used to build a ‘washing house, necessary for the womens laundry’ and with money from the hall at Northwicke, he had built a nursery at his palace, necessitated by his wife ‘being of good fecundity, and a very fruitful woman’. The wives

²⁴ P. F. Tytler, *England under the Reigns of Edward VI and Mary*, vol. 2 (London, 1839), p. 153.

²⁵ Quoted in Heal, *Hospitality*, p. 257.

²⁶ M. Prior, ‘Wives and Wills 1558-1700’, in J. Chartres and D. Hey (eds), *English Rural Society* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 137-8.

²⁷ P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), pp. 165-6, fn. 15. Lucas still maintained that clergy wives should be ‘sober, wise, discreet, ancient and women past children’.

of the cathedral prebendaries were similarly denounced. The pipes of the organ, built at a cost of £200, had been melted down to provide them with dishes and its case used to furnish them with bedsteads. He also claimed that the wives were guilty of selling their portion of grain ‘not in Worcester market, but at the dearest in the best interest of the seller’. Moreover, the prebendaries ‘decked their wives so finely for the stuff and singular fashion of their garments’ that they stood out from the other women in the city.²⁸ Clergy wives were particularly vulnerable on this front. Finery was a very visible sign of extravagance and particularly distasteful among those who should set an example of moderation. Apparel also defined status so by wearing clothing that was deemed inappropriate to her station, a minister’s wife could easily arouse resentment and be accused of attempting to advance her position within the local hierarchy.

Continued criticism of this kind, as Archer observed, heightened Protestant sensitivities to suggestions of widespread misappropriation of church funds as a result of clerical marriage. In a sermon at Paul’s Cross in 1578, Laurence Chaderton acknowledged that ‘the papistes always cast in our teeth the great and famous hospitalitie of their nobility and cleargie’.²⁹ In 1585, Thomas Wilson, Dean of Worcester, somewhat apologetically wrote in his will, that ‘touchinge such goodes and chattells as god hath lent me in this worlde, the greatest part therof I purpose to leave unto my wife and children *as nature movethe me*’ [my italics]. Although readily admitting the instinctive desire to prioritize the needs of his family, he remembered the poor and left £12 to be widely distributed among them.³⁰

There is scant evidence by which to judge levels of routine clerical philanthropy.³¹

During the 1560s and 1570s, William Sheppard, the unmarried rector of Heydon (Essex),

²⁸ J. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol. 1, (London, 1735), pp. 402-3.

²⁹ I. Archer, ‘The Charity of Early Modern Londoners’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 12 (2002), p. 226.

³⁰ TNA, PROB 11/69, Thomas Wilson, 1585.

³¹ Greaves, *Religion and Society*, p. 161.

detailed the substantial contributions which he made to the needy among his parishioners, but such extensive accounts are rare.³² The biography of Andrew Willett, rector of Barley (Hertfordshire), suggests that the entire Willett family took their charitable responsibilities very seriously. His father Thomas used the income from one of his benefices to feed the poor and when Andrew took over the parish, he ‘never gave an alms grudgingly in all his life’, refusing to use his fourteen children as ‘a fair pretence to withhold his bounty’.³³ Although Dry Drayton (Cambridgeshire) provided Richard Greenham with a comfortable living, his commitment to those in need left him in financial difficulty to the extent that his wife had to borrow money to enable him to bring in the crops from his glebe.³⁴ Glimpses such as these, and the generosity of Helme and Schaell outlined above, offer an all too infrequent insight into the dispensation of clerical charity.

References made by testators to their earlier charitable undertakings provide a useful supplement to such narratives. For example, on his death in 1591, the widower, William Master, vicar of Shipton under Wychwood (Oxfordshire), left instructions that twenty of the poorest parishioners were to receive their dinner at the vicarage on the day of his burial in what he described as his ‘olde manner’.³⁵ William Herne, parson of St Petrock, Exeter (Devon), left money to the poor of two almshouses and he insisted that they be paid ‘one peney more as I did sometyne pay to the poore by my life tyme’.³⁶ Yet, only exceptionally are the charitable deeds of a lifetime hinted at and the veil lifted from the “dark figure” of face-to-face charity.³⁷

³² M. Byford, ‘The Price of Protestantism: Assessing the Impact of Religious Change on Elizabethan Essex; the Case of Heydon and Colchester, 1558-94’. (Unpublished DPhil Thesis, University of Oxford, 1988), pp. 49-55, Appendix 1.

³³ P. Smith, ‘The Life and Death of Andrew Willet, Doctor of Divinitie’, in Andrew Willet, *Synopsis Papismi* (London, 1634), STC 2070:08, sigs, B3r-v.

³⁴ E. J. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 65.

³⁵ TNA, PROB 11/78, William Master, 1591.

³⁶ TNA, PROB 11/48, William Herne, 1566.

³⁷ Archer, ‘The Charity of Early Modern Londoners’, p. 242.

However, when clerical wills list individuals who are to receive strikes of wheat, bushels of barley, lambs, pieces of clothing and small monetary bequests, it is difficult to imagine that ministers ignored the needs of these parishioners during their lifetimes. It is equally unlikely that wives who were entrusted with the distribution of their late husbands' charitable requests would have been given such responsibilities had they not already been involved in these aspects of public housekeeping. William Roote, parson of St Peter's Northampton, who required his wife, Mary, to distribute one penny to the house of every poor person in the parishes of St Peter's, St Mary's and Kingsthorpe at her own discretion, clearly believed that she possessed the requisite knowledge to undertake the task.³⁸ The wills of ministers such as Master, Schaell and Helme, demonstrate a correlation between lifetime philanthropy and testamentary behaviour and serve to reinforce the view that wills are an important indicator of long term attitudes to charitable giving. A close scrutiny of clerical wills will move the debate beyond rhetoric and generalization and begin to establish how married clergy reconciled the competing claims of family and the poor.

Methodology

The surviving wills of individuals whose status was described as clerk, parson, minister, curate, vicar or rector provide a substantial body of testamentary material with which to undertake an investigation of clerical charitable giving and sociability. While wills from the diocesan courts and the northern province have been included in the initial qualitative discussion, extensive statistical analysis has been restricted to those drawn from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury. Two samples spanning the five-year periods, 1566 to 1570 and 1596 to 1600, have been subjected to quantitative evaluation. The earlier period was chosen to allow sufficient time to elapse for the very first generation of married clergy to begin to die and provides a benchmark against which later attitudes and developments

³⁸ NthRO, Wills, William Roote 1562. Roote also left monetary bequests to the almshouses of St Thomas and St John.

can be measured. The second period enables the behaviour of married and unmarried clergy to be compared and contrasted but also allows trends in charitable bequests and sociability to be measured over time. The study examined the wills of clergymen making monetary bequests: 29 unmarried and 12 married clergy for the earlier period and 17 unmarried and 46 married clergy for the later period. Charitable bequests usually took the form of small sums of money to the poor of named parishes, contributions to the poor man's box or monetary gifts to named individuals. Echoing the approach adopted by Berlatsky in his analysis of the relative generosity of married and unmarried Tudor bishops, the total value of all monetary bequests was calculated and the charitable component established.³⁹ Non-monetary bequests can only be included in the study of the destination of charitable bequests although they also contribute to the later discussion on sociability.

As Peter Marshall has observed, wills are 'indicative only of the outlook of the comparatively well-to-do' and this is even more apparent when the wills selected are predominantly, as in this study, from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.⁴⁰ The unrepresentative nature of the samples, however, is negated to some extent by the comparative nature of the analysis in that the behaviour of married and unmarried clergy of similar means is assessed. As the clergymen studied here were among the wealthier members of their profession, they were best placed to be generous towards the poor. They clearly do not fall into the category of those whose meagre resources were entirely consumed by the needs of wife and family. There is no suggestion that the legacies and bequests in the sampled wills represent the entire estates of the individuals concerned or that they denote the only provision made for dependants or the poor. Some testators specifically refer to arrangements made in earlier documents so that the last will and

³⁹ Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family' pp. 8, 18-19.

⁴⁰ P. Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 203.

testament became, in the words of Cressy, ‘a final adjustment to a series of *inter vivos* wealth divestments that had been taking place for years’.⁴¹ For example, in his will of 1597, John Wyncoll, clerk of Clopton (Suffolk), referred to arrangements made in an earlier document which were to remain in force.⁴² In other instances, particularly where sons had left home or daughters had married, it is made clear that, having already received their portions, such individuals are granted only a token bequest in the will itself. This balancing of lifetime and deathbed gifts is spelled out unambiguously in the will of Robert Isham, the unmarried rector of Pytcheley (Northamptonshire). His reduced bequest to his Aunt Wykam is occasioned ‘because I did give her of late a pece of money therefore I gyve now to her but twentie shillinges’.⁴³ In his study of late medieval wills, Clive Burgess noted that testators were ‘explicit about only a relatively small proportion of their estate’.⁴⁴ Statistics and conclusions derived from an analysis of wills, therefore, can only indicate proportions based on the monetary bequests made in the will itself as the value of the total estate cannot be deduced.

A further limitation is the unspecified nature of some of the bequests. Wives, children and other relatives received houses, tenements and rents, the value of which frequently remains unstated. Similar difficulties are encountered when trying to calculate the monetary value of philanthropic bequests. In the earlier period, it was common for testators such as John Swayne, parson of Churchstanton (Devon), to leave the profits from the sale of the residue of their estate to the poor.⁴⁵ Indeed ten of the testators from the earlier period left all or part of the proceeds from such a sale to the poor. In the later period, this trend has been superseded by the desire that unspecified charitable donations

⁴¹ D. Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), p. 60.

⁴² TNA, PROB 11/91, John Wyncoll, 1598.

⁴³ TNA, PROB 11/50, Robert Isham, 1568.

⁴⁴ C. Burgess, ‘Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence reconsidered’, in M. Hicks (ed.), *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, (Gloucester, 1990), p. 15.

⁴⁵ TNA, PROB 11/52, John Swayne, 1570.

be made at the discretion of a wife or executor.⁴⁶ Although Burgess describes ‘unequivocal evidence’ revealing ‘widows discharging pious and social responsibilities with largesse and aplomb’, the imprecise nature of such arrangements renders them unquantifiable.⁴⁷

Other testators made bequests in kind which further complicates numerical analysis; a problem noted by Lorraine Attreed when trying to determine estate values in sixteenth-century northern England.⁴⁸ In 1568, Simon Gylbert, parson of Kenchurch (Herefordshire), left two bushels of wheat and two of rye to every householder without tenure while in 1598, Lewes Morgan, parson of Chilton Foliat (Wiltshire), left a heifer as a stock for the poor. In the same county in 1570, James Hall, clerk of Wroughton, made no monetary bequests at all but remembered twenty-nine individuals with sheep and produce. This study has not attempted to commute gifts in kind but this information has been used in Table 9 in a breakdown of charitable priorities.

The lack of precision in enumerating beneficiaries also presents difficulties and all too often it is impossible to determine how many children, households, householders or prisoners are receiving bequests. Robert Isham is exceptional in the meticulousness employed throughout his seven page will. In leaving ten shillings to each of his Aunt Calcott’s children, he added that they were ‘vij in nomber’ and likewise we are told that his sister Pagette had six children and that his brother John’s children numbered four.⁴⁹ When amorphous phrases are employed, the historian can never know how many individuals were to be provided for but must take comfort from the tendency among testators to be more specific if large amounts were involved. In the small number of wills, usually of a nuncupative nature, where clerics have simply left ‘all’ to a particular

⁴⁶ TNA, PROB 11/90, Walter Coshe, 1597. The unmarried parson of Durweston (Dorset) was the only cleric to leave the sale of the residue to the poor in the later sample.

⁴⁷ C. Burgess, ‘Late Medieval Wills’, p. 21.

⁴⁸ L. C. Attreed, ‘Preparation for Death in Sixteenth-century Northern England’, *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 13 (1982), p. 39.

⁴⁹ TNA, PROB 11/50, Robert Isham, 1568.

individual or individuals these have had to be discounted in an analysis of the proportion of wealth donated to charitable purposes, but it has been possible to include them in other aspects of the study.

Identifying the marital status of some testators proved unexpectedly problematic. Reference to a wife has been accepted as incontrovertible evidence of marriage and widowhood has been inferred from bequests to children and grandchildren. More difficult are wills that make no mention of a wife or child. An assumption of an unmarried state has been made in such cases but this does mean that on occasion childless widowers could have been placed in the wrong category.

It is easy to identify with Jordan's admissions that he has 'dealt with sources very often difficult to assess' and that his findings are not exact as 'they derive in some measure from human judgement compounded by human error'. While such considerations cannot be disregarded, it is still possible to achieve meaningful comparisons between married and unmarried clergy and to observe changes in patterns of charitable giving and sociability across the reign. In short, wills provide one of the best sources of quantifiable evidence available for an examination of these themes within the context of clerical marriage.

Charitable Giving

The variety of testamentary bequests made by ministers demonstrates that they could and did use their wills as vehicles for substantial and elaborate philanthropic gestures. These could be delivered in simple monetary form, as quantities of produce or as schemes designed to ensure long term relief. Robert Gibson, parson of Kirkheaton (Yorkshire), in 1587, expressed his wish that twenty strikes of rye be distributed among his poorest parishioners and that ten pounds be taken from his children's portions until they came of age. Under the supervision of some of his 'honeste and discrete neighboures' and relatives, he decreed that this money was to be lent to 'the poorer sorte of my parishioners who are throughe dearthe, payeing intereste upon usurie and such like casualtyes sore

and much decayed in their occupations and trades'.⁵⁰ Walter Jones, canon of Hereford cathedral, took his responsibilities seriously and left £7 10 shillings to be divided between three hospitals and the poor of seven parishes while not forgetting his poor kinsfolk in Brecknock.⁵¹ Leaving £500 to his wife and son, Edward Morecroft, canon of Windsor (Berkshire), was certainly in a position to be generous. In his will of 1580, he gave £27 to the local poor and laid down that one quarter of the residue of his goods be sold to benefit the poor in six towns across the country.⁵² In 1597, Thomas Bluet, parson of Bramshott (Hampshire), specified the ten poor maidens of whom each was to receive 40 shillings.⁵³ Lawrence Nowell, Dean of Lichfield, directed the sum of £100 to the poor of places where he had been in charge, the same amount as he gave to each of his daughters.⁵⁴ Married clergy of more moderate means such as John FitzRandall left a stock to fund an annual payment of three shillings to the six poorest householders of Winestead (Yorkshire) where he was rector.⁵⁵ By these schemes and arrangements, some married clergymen were fulfilling lay expectations that a minister should offer practical assistance to their poor parishioners and set an example of charitable giving.⁵⁶

These particularly generous married ministers contrast with those who ignored their obligations to the poor in their testamentary provision. Among the married ministers who omitted any reference to charity is John Morgan, the well-connected curate of Ipsden (Oxfordshire). His long will of 1574 was predominantly concerned with seeking reimbursement of £2725 arising from a catalogue of debts and controversies in Kingston

⁵⁰ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Robert Gibson, 1587/8; C. A. Hulbert, *Annals of the Church and Parish of Almondbury, Yorkshire* (London, 1882), p. 114, 6 August 1583, Gibson married Esther Armetedge at Huddersfield.

⁵¹ TNA, PROB 11/55, Walter Jones, 1573.

⁵² TNA, PROB 11/62, Edward Morecroft, 1580.

⁵³ TNA, PROB 11/90, Thomas Bluet, 1597.

⁵⁴ TNA, PROB 11/59, Lawrence Nowell, 1577.

⁵⁵ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, John FitzRandall, 1580.

⁵⁶ Other particularly generous married clergy include TNA, PROB 11/58, George Johnson, 1576; 11/64, William Palmer, 1582; 11/69, William Austen, 1586; 11/75, John Garbrand, 1590; 11/69, Robert Tower, 1586; 11/73, Thomas Dilworthe, 1589; 11/79, Robert Norwood, 1592; 11/85, Lewis Price, 1595.

upon Hull (Yorkshire).⁵⁷ In 1575, Edward Bowne, clerk of Newbold on Avon (Warwickshire) left nothing to the poor but £20 to each of his eight children.⁵⁸ The following year, Thomas Gravinor, parson of Whitney (Herefordshire), similarly prioritized his immediate family bequeathing £24 to his wife and each of his 5 children as well as £10 to his illegitimate son.⁵⁹ Testamentary deficiency of this nature was not, however, restricted to those with wives and children, unmarried clergy acted in a similar manner. The main preoccupation of Thomas Price of Clerkenwell (London) appears to have been the fate of his 45 or more books.⁶⁰ Although Richarde Cornwall had no wife, his kindred were in receipt of £120 while the poor received nothing.⁶¹ In 1568, Symon Gylbert, parson of Kenchurch (Herefordshire), directed all his bequests to family members.⁶² Thomas Symondes, parson of Thorndon (Devon), made bequests to the poor but these were meagre in relation to his generosity towards his nephews and other family members.⁶³ William Ricarde, parson of Grateley (Hampshire) did not completely ignore the needs of the poor but his 'fathefull and trustie servant' Barbara Granger received the residue of his goods and the debts owed to him, very much as a married minister would behave towards his wife.⁶⁴ As William Harrison had reminded those who were offended by the prospect of clergy leaving their possessions to their wives and children, the clergy,

⁵⁷ TNA, PROB 11/65, John Morgan, 1574.

⁵⁸ TNA, PROB 11/57, Edward Bowne, 1575.

⁵⁹ TNA, PROB 11/57, Thomas Gravinor, 1575. Other married ministers who left nothing to the poor include TNA, PROB 11/58, Edmond Harvie, 1576; 11/59, Robert Cole, 1577; 11/59, Robert Kynsey, 1577; 11/60, John Northbrooke, 1578; 11/68, John Jackson, 1585; 11/70, Nicholas Williamson, 1587; 11/72, Edward Bridges, 1588; 11/72, John Fielde, 1588; 11/72, Richard Frithe, 1588; 11/78, William Steward, 1591; 11/79, Thomas Cole, 1592; 11/80, Vincent Tuke, 1592; 11/81, Thomas Gatacre, 1593; 11/84, Thomas Robinson, 1594; 11/85, Thomas Sommerton, 1595; 11/85, John Hill, 1595; 11/85, Thomas Weller, 1595; 11/89, Hugh Thorneley, 1597; 11/90, Evan Davys, 1597; 11/90, Fraunces Hunte, 1597; 11/90, Thomas Elmat, 1597; 11/94, Thomas Nunn, 1599.

⁶⁰ TNA, PROB 11/68, Thomas Price, 1585.

⁶¹ TNA, PROB 11/48, Richard Cornewall, 1566.

⁶² TNA, PROB 11/50, Symon Gylbert, 1568.

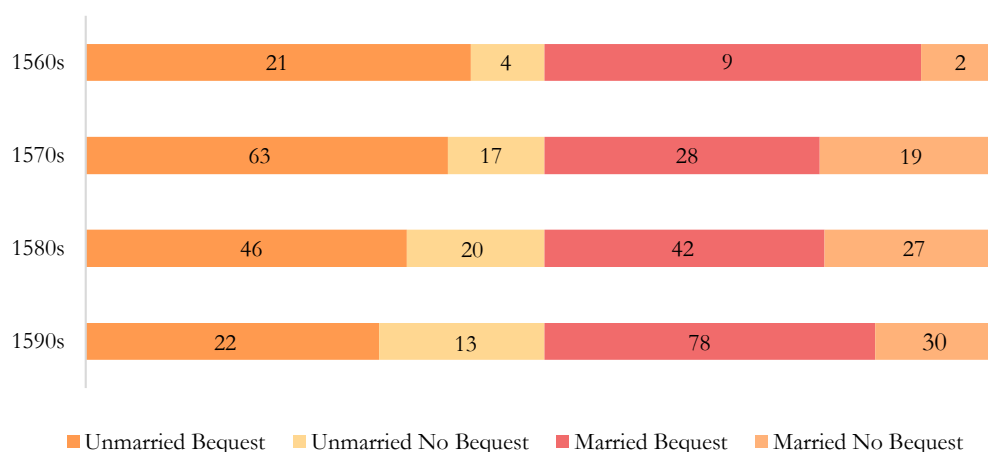
⁶³ TNA, PROB 11/52, Thomas Symondes, 1570.

⁶⁴ TNA, PROB 11/93, Willyam Ricarde, 1599. See also 11/48, Thomas Price, 1566; 11/90, Henry Niccolls, 1597; 11/89, Thomas Pounfolde, 1597.

prior to the introduction of clerical marriage, had always bequeathed their goods to ‘their brethren and kinsfolks’.⁶⁵

However, from an analysis of 440 PCC wills, it does appear that it was less common for unmarried clergy to omit charitable bequests entirely from their wills (Figure 4). During the 1560s, the behaviour of both married and unmarried clergy was remarkably similar but a divergence occurred during the subsequent two decades when married ministers became more likely to leave philanthropic references out of their wills. Only in the final decade of the reign was the trend reversed. Regardless of marital status, over the course of the reign, the majority of the clergy remembered their charitable obligations but testamentary evidence would appear to suggest that their behaviour was being modified by their marital status.

Figure 4. The Relationship between Marital Status and Testamentary Charitable Provision expressed as a percentage (actual numbers of clergy displayed)



Source: Clergy Wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury

⁶⁵ Harrison, *The Description of England*, p. 37.

Yet, to cite examples of clergy who demonstrated either a generous awareness or an apparent disregard for the poor, risks ignoring those who fell somewhere between the two extremes. A statistical analysis, therefore, promises a clearer overview of clerical benevolence. To this end, the charitable giving of clergy in the two periods 1566-1570 and 1596-1600 has been examined in detail.

Table 8. Clergy Making No Charitable Bequests

Sample Date	Status	No Charitable Bequests	
		Number	%
1566-1570	Unmarried	2	7
	Married	2	17
1596-1600	Unmarried	7	41
	Married	10	22

Source: Clergy Wills proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury

1566-70: 29 unmarried clergy, 12 married clergy

1596-1600: 17 unmarried clergy, 46 married clergy

All subsequent Figures and Tables within this chapter are based on these figures unless otherwise stated

During both timeframes, the majority of clergy made some form of charitable bequest (Table 8). Although the number of married clergy failing to do so was slightly higher in the later period, this was mirrored by an apparent increase in the number of unmarried clergy also failing to remember the poor. These observations reflect the overall patterns established in Figure 4. However, the number and nature of the wills themselves, in part, provide possible explanations for the changed situation in the 1590s. In the later sample, two wills were nuncupative and all except one of the later unmarried group produced brief wills with one or only a handful of beneficiaries. This may indicate that imminent and unexpected death produced a hastily crafted document concerned only with the transfer of the principal aspects of the estate. Similar reasoning could be applied to the wills of six of the married clerics in this period but the smaller sample of unmarried

clergy means that the impact is amplified. The demographic of this group may also be of significance as some appear to have been young, as evidenced by bequests to parents. The increase in testamentary generosity among the married ministers may indicate that they were responding to the pressure placed upon them to act with greater compassion at a time of economic and social distress.⁶⁶

Table 9. **Percentage of Testators Making Bequests to Various Charitable Causes**

Charitable Bequests	Clergy 1566 - 1570		Laity	Clergy 1596 - 1600		Laity	Northern England 1558 - 88
	Unmarried	Married		Unmarried	Married		General Population
General Bequests to the Church	24.1	33.3	6.7	0	4.3	19.5	11.7
Repair & Building of Churches	34.5	16.7	0	17.6	15.2	14.6	5.5
Poor	89.7	66.7	60	58.8	73.9	73.2	38.5
Municipal Programmes	0	8.3	0	5.9	0	0	4.9
Prisons	17.2	8.3	0	0	0	4.9	3.7
Dowries	3.4	0	6.7	0	2.2	0	1.4
Education	3.4	8.3	0	0	2.2	0	4.6

Source: Wills from the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (1566-1570: 29 unmarried, 12 married clergy; 1596-1600: 17 unmarried, 46 married clergy); L. C. Attreed, 'Preparation for Death in Sixteenth-century Northern England', *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 13 (1982), p. 46.

In her study of northern wills, Lorraine Attreed categorized the different forms of charitable bequest and established the percentage of the population making donations to each category. A slightly modified version of her classification has been utilized in this study to determine the beneficiaries of clerical philanthropy.⁶⁷ Attreed's findings for the period 1558 to 1588 have been added to those drawn from PCC clerical wills and are

⁶⁶ The circumstances particular to this later period are explored below, p. 228; Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 258-9, 272-5, 286; C. Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church* (Oxford, 1968), p. 202.

⁶⁷ Attreed, 'Preparation for Death', p. 46.

displayed in Table 9. The results drawn from a sample of lay wills chosen for their contiguity to the clerical wills is also included. The clergy, both married and unmarried, were more generous to the poor than both the testators in Attreed's sample and those in Caroline Litzenberger's study of Gloucestershire wills where 31.1% of Elizabethan male testators made bequests to the poor.⁶⁸ Perhaps more significantly, married clergy were behaving in a remarkably similar way to the members of the laity whose wills were proved in the PCC, most of whom were married and who were of comparable means. This similarity suggests that it was not only the episcopate that 'sustained charitable causes to a degree that differed little from the laity'.⁶⁹

Although marriage did not eradicate charitable awareness among the majority of married clergy, it is important to ascertain the value of their bequests. There are several problems inherent in such an undertaking, particularly for the period 1566-70 when many of the bequests were made in kind. These took the form of bushels of wheat and rye, bread, barrels of beer, wood to an almshouse, a cartload of coal and in the case of John Swayne, parson of Churchstanton (Devon), shirts and smocks (although very thoughtfully he does value these at £25 6s 8d).⁷⁰ The most problematic of these unquantifiable bequests is the profit from the sale of the residue of the estate. Fourteen of the 29 unmarried clergy (48 per cent) and five of the 12 married clergy (42 per cent) in this early period made charitable bequests in kind. By the later period only three unmarried (18 per cent) and one married (2 per cent) continued this tradition. The generosity exhibited also tends to be underestimated in the earlier period because some

⁶⁸ C. Litzenberger, 'Local responses to changes in religious policy based on evidence from Gloucestershire wills (1540-1580)', *Continuity and Change*, 8 (1993), p. 433; K. Crowe, 'Charity and the Economy of the Poor in an Essex Parish: Canewdon in the Early Modern Period', *Essex Archaeology and History*, 33 (2002), pp. 311-12. Crowe calculated that, in Canewdon itself, in the period 1560-70, 50 per cent of testators made bequests to the poor and in the 1590s, 55 per cent did so. However, in south east Essex as a whole, in the 1550s, 40 per cent of testators gave to the poor, but the figure fell to 25 per cent during the 1590s.

⁶⁹ Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family', p. 19.

⁷⁰ TNA, PROB 11/52, John Swayne, 1570.

clergymen made small monetary bequests to long lists of named individuals who cannot automatically be classed as being poor. Examples of such behaviour can be seen in two wills from 1568. John Braban, rector of Wolverton (Berkshire), made relatively small bequests to a total of 95 people while Robert Isham, rector of Pytchley (Northamptonshire), named 104 non-family members in his will even though he had already left in excess of £16 to charitable causes.⁷¹ There is a tendency, therefore, to underestimate the generosity of the clergy in the earlier period particularly among the unmarried who favoured this type of bequest. The absence of such lists among the majority of married clergy can be explained in part by the actual presence of their spouse who was tasked with administering charity at her own discretion thereby obviating the need for explicit delineation.

Table 10. Average Monetary Amount given to Charitable Causes in Clerical Wills

	Sample Date	All Charitable Bequests	Bequests to the Poor
Unmarried	1566-1570	>£7 12s	£5 15s
	1596-1600	£7 3s	£5 3s
Married	1566-1570	>£8 12s	£4 10s
	1596-1600	£6 4s	£4 14s

The average monetary contributions made by the clergy are displayed in Table 10. While married clergy were less generous than their unmarried counterparts by the end of the sixteenth century, the average contribution made by the clergy as a whole was in decline; a decline that would have been exacerbated by the ravages of inflation. This trend does not match that of the steady rise in charitable benefactions from the mid-1560s to

⁷¹ TNA, PROB 11/56, John Braban, 1568; 11/50, Robert Isham, 1568.

the end of the century charted by Jordan in his major study, *Philanthropy in England*.⁷² Jordan decided against factoring the impact of inflation into his analyses, a decision which has aroused debate and considerable criticism and which has spawned numerous attempts to modify or deflate his figures.⁷³ Instead of a steady rise in charitable benefactions from the mid-1560s to the end of the century, Bittle and Lane's recalculation of his results suggest that there was actually a decline in giving between 1560 and 1570, a very slight rise between 1570 and 1590 and a decline over the next ten years.⁷⁴ Even without taking inflation into account, the level of testamentary benefaction for the clergy as a whole ended at a lower point in 1600 than in 1570.

Table 11. **Charitable Bequests expressed as Percentages**

Marital Status	Sample Date	All Charitable Bequests	Charitable Bequests as a % of all Monetary Bequests	Bequests to Poor	Bequests to Poor as % of all Charitable Bequests
Unmarried	1566-1570	> £7 12s	11.6	£5 15s	75.6
	1596-1600	£7 3s	3.6	£5 3s	72.0
Married	1566-1570	> £8 12s	14.7	£4 10s	52.4
	1596-1600	£6 4s	4.7	£4 14s	75.8

In order to minimize the impact of Elizabethan inflation, the charitable proportion of the total monetary bequests has been calculated (Table 11). Also, as a direct comparison is made between the behaviour of married and unmarried ministers, the significance of inflation is minimized. Although lacking the sophistication of the calculations undertaken by the various contributors to the debate surrounding Jordan's

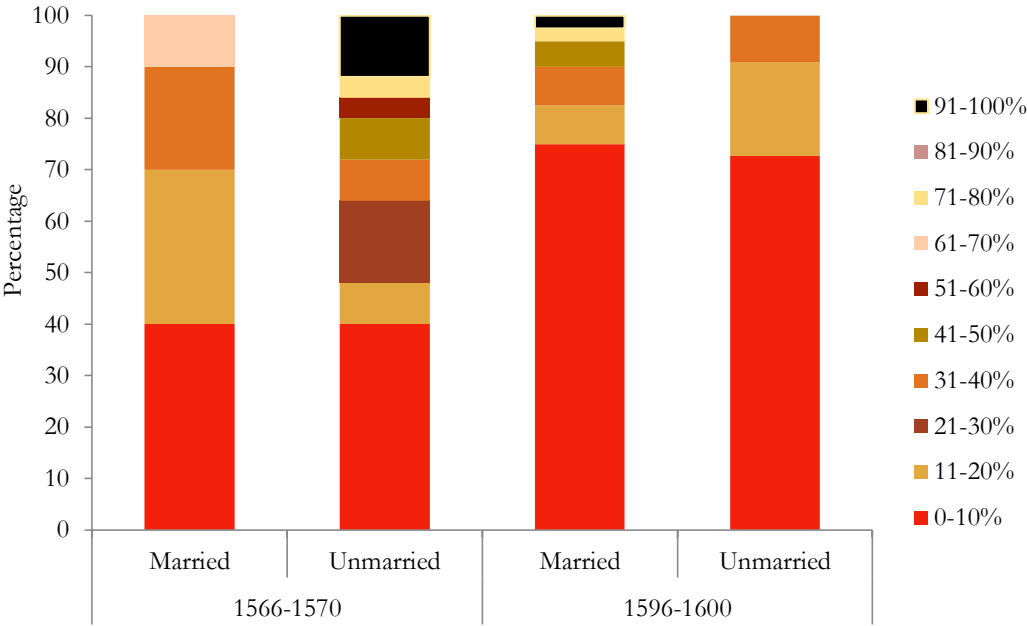
⁷² W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660* (London, 1959).

⁷³ W. G. Bittle and R. T. Lane, 'Inflation and Philanthropy in England: a Re-assessment of W. K. Jordan's Data', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 29 (1976), pp. 203-10; D. C. Coleman, 'Philanthropy Deflated: A Comment', *Economic History Review*, 2nd series, 31 (1978), pp. 118-120; J. D. Gould, 'Bittle and Lane on Charity: An Uncharitable Comment', *idem*, pp. 121-3; W. G. Bittle and R. T. Lane, 'A Re-Assessment Reiterated', *idem*, pp. 124-128.

⁷⁴ Bittle and Lane, 'Inflation and Philanthropy in England', p. 208.

work, there is a real and marked decline in charitable giving by 1600 which complements the conclusion reached by Bittle and Lane. Although Table 10 indicates that the married clergy of the later period were leaving less to good causes in monetary terms, Table 11 reveals that this actually amounted to a larger proportion than that of the unmarried clergy.

Figure 5. **Percentage of Total Monetary Bequests directed towards Charitable Causes**



In Figure 5, the distribution of bequests expressed as a percentage of all monetary bequests is displayed. This has been undertaken to reduce the impact of the particularly generous contributions made by a handful of individuals. As the number of clergy within each group and in each period varies, the actual numbers are also expressed as a percentage of the group. The pre-Reformation church expected its incumbents to expend a third of their net income on charitable and hospitable purposes.⁷⁵ In the earlier period,

⁷⁵ F. Heal, 'Economic Problems of the Clergy', in F. Heal and R. O'Day (eds), *Church and Society in England Henry VIII to James I* (London, 1977), p. 100.

70 per cent of the unmarried clergy actually achieved this ideal in their wills. The proportion giving less than 10 per cent of their monetary bequests to charity was remarkably similar for married and unmarried clergy and by the later period accounted for the majority of both groups. Between 1566 and 1570, the unmarried clergy displayed a wider variation in their benevolence than their married counterparts whose charitable bequests fell within the lower bands. In the 1596-1600 sample, a few married clergy were willing to commit a larger percentage of their testamentary legacy to charity.

Sociability

Although primarily concerned with the disposal of wealth and property, wills would appear to offer the historian an insight into what David Cressy depicts as ‘a very complex web of personal relationships, with their attendant obligations and competing demands’.⁷⁶ However, just as final bequests should not be taken as the sole indication of a testator’s concern for the poor, Cressy also warns against seeing the extensive lists of beneficiaries as ‘a complete roll-call of relations or even testators’ “effective” kin’ and suggests that probate documents create a picture that might be ‘narrow, filtered and incomplete’. The paucity of alternative sources renders clerical wills, even with their limitations, an indispensable resource for a comparison of the sociability of unmarried and married Elizabethan clergy.

Did clerical marriage mean that clergy turned their backs on the wider community and concentrated their resources and attention on their immediate families? Did married clergy behave as one would expect for married men or did professional obligations and considerations modify their behaviour? Considerable debate surrounds the extent and importance of kinship ties among early modern English families and their relative strength over time. However, some consensus over the behaviour of married men has

⁷⁶ D. Cressy, ‘Kinship and Kin Interaction in Early Modern England’, *Past and Present*, 113 (1986), pp. 38-41; Wrightson and Levine, ‘Death in Whickham’, p. 159.

emerged. According to Richard Vann, in his study of wills in Banbury, 'married men with children [were] the group least likely to leave bequests outside the immediate family'.⁷⁷ This tendency is also noted by Cressy who asserts that 'testators generally intended their property to stay within the family, and to pass through a simple lineal descent'. Only if testators had not married or if they had no issue or no surviving issue would they make lateral bequests and remember neighbours and friends in their wills.⁷⁸ Research suggests, therefore, that as married men, clergy would primarily bequeath money and items to a restricted kinship group that was essentially of lineal descent. Unmarried clergy could be expected to leave legacies both to more kin and more unrelated individuals.

Cicely Howell has also concluded that the pattern of giving was determined by the age and family responsibilities of the testator so that 'only those who had fulfilled their obligations, such as grandparents, widows, widowers, or those who had no such obligations, such as bachelors and single women, left legacies to the wider kin-circle'.⁷⁹ A lack of immediate dependents appears to have afforded married clerical testators a greater degree of flexibility in disposing of their estate. In 1596, John Rathbie, vicar of Exton (Rutland), poignantly expressed his intention to marry Anne Forest, 'yf god give me life'. Whether he had married Anne in the twelve months which elapsed between the writing of the will and the granting of probate is unknown, but regardless, he left her £10, his household stuff and his lifetime gifts. He also stipulated that a penny white loaf be given to every cottager in Exton every Sunday and that this should be 'contynewed for ever'.⁸⁰

Those of advanced years with adult children or whose wives had predeceased them were also freed from the constraints of family provision. It is unsurprising,

⁷⁷ R. T. Vann, 'Wills and the Family in an English Town: Banbury, 1559-1800', *Journal of Family History* (1979), p. 366.

⁷⁸ Cressy, 'Kinship and Kin', pp. 63, 69.

⁷⁹ C. Howell, *Land, Family and Inheritance in Transition: Kibworth Harcourt, 1280-1700* (Cambridge, 1983), pp. 255-7.

⁸⁰ TNA, PROB 11/81, John Rathbie, 1593.

therefore, that their testamentary behaviour was reminiscent of unmarried clergy. Over forty individuals profited from the will of Yorkshire clerk and widower, Thomas Dun, the breadth of his bequests resembling that of an unmarried cleric.⁸¹ Other widowed ministers behaved in a similar way especially if, as in the case of Richard Poore, vicar choral of Salisbury, they were childless. His 1568 will included gifts to a large number of his and his deceased wife's kin but also to those at the cathedral and the inhabitants of two almshouses. His main charitable bequest was the allocation of the rents of his tenement to the poor of two parishes for the following twenty years. Significantly, Poore did not intend that this income should be permanently lost, for at the end of this period, it was to revert to a poor kinsman with the proviso that, should his line fail, the poor were to become the beneficiaries in perpetuity.⁸² John Cooper, parson of Okeford Fitzpaine (Dorset), a widower with grandchildren, left a stock of £10, the interest on which was to be distributed among the parish poor.⁸³ A considerable part of the will of William Master, the aged and widowed vicar of Shipton under Wychwood (Oxfordshire), was devoted to the precise arrangements required to establish an elaborate scheme involving a stock of twenty milk cows.⁸⁴ George Naisshe, clerk of Wilden (Bedfordshire), had lost both his wife and son and while he did not ignore his wider kin, his generosity towards municipal improvements and the poor in various parishes was substantial totalling £87.⁸⁵ Such schemes were not, of course, the exclusive preserve of the widowed for John Chaunte, parson of Hatch Beauchamp (Somerset), left a stock of twenty shillings to provide monthly loans 'at anie tyme the poore need and hathe no worcke'. Agnes, his wife, was still alive and received the residue of his goods but it does appear that the couple were

⁸¹ BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, vol. 27, f. 707, Thomas Dun, 1599.

⁸² TNA, PROB 11/50, Richard Poore, 1568.

⁸³ TNA, PROB 11/81, John Coope, 1593.

⁸⁴ TNA, PROB 11/78, William Master, 1591.

⁸⁵ TNA, PROB 11/59, George Naisshe, 1577.

childless.⁸⁶ Once freed from meeting the immediate needs of dependents, married ministers reverted to the testamentary patterns more closely associated with unmarried clergy.

Table 12. Testamentary Beneficiaries

Marital Status	Type of Beneficiary and Bequest	1566-1570		1596-1600	
		Average	Combined Average	Average	Combined Average
Unmarried	Family Monetary	5.76	8.03	5.71	6.70
	Family Non-Monetary	2.28		1.00	
	Non-Family Monetary	10.82	15.03	5.18	7.41
	Non-Family Non-Monetary	4.21		2.23	
Married	Family Monetary	3.91	6.58	5.28	8.30
	Family Non-Monetary	2.67		3.02	
	Non-Family Monetary	5.83	7.66	3.65	5.00
	Non-Family Non-Monetary	1.83		1.35	

To assess the involvement of the clergy within their communities, bequests, both monetary and non-monetary, have been differentiated and counted for both family and non-family members within the two time periods. An analysis of the number of beneficiaries (Table 12) reveals that the number of family members who received monetary bequests from the unmarried clergy remained remarkably consistent over the two periods.⁸⁷ As the historiography suggests, the married clergy did make monetary bequests to a smaller number of family members. When non-monetary bequests were included, the wills of the married clergy encompassed slightly more family members than

⁸⁶ TNA, PROB 11/91, John Chaunte, 1598; 11/92, Richard Fox, 1598, is a further example; 11/67, Humfrey Ellys, 1584. Not all widowers behaved in this way, Ellys, parson of Sagwell (Leicestershire), a widower, left his entire estate to his son and daughter and her children but with the comment that her husband was 'very unthriftye' and could not maintain them; 11/89, Edmund Marmion, 1597. Although his wife was deceased, Marmion, parson of Brixton Deverill (Wiltshire) made no charitable bequests.

⁸⁷ These numbers are derived from the main body of the will and do not include the general bequests to 'the poor' already discussed in the section on charitable giving.

did those of the unmarried. The most noticeable observation is that on average unmarried clergy made monetary bequests to twice as many non-family members as did their married counterparts in the period 1566-1570. This suggests that clerical marriage had indeed impacted on clerical sociability and involvement in the wider community. However, the prolific number of beneficiaries included in the wills of John Braban and Robert Isham, distorts the results for the early unmarried group. Braban included 95 and Isham, 104, non-family beneficiaries in their respective wills far exceeding those listed in the wills of the next two most sociable unmarried clerics.⁸⁸ In the later period, the number of beneficiaries among the unmarried clergy had halved but they were still involving more non-family members in their wills than their married colleagues.

The total number of testamentary beneficiaries per clerical testator has been calculated and used as the basis for Figures 6 and 7.⁸⁹ For the majority of clergy, at both the beginning and end of Elizabeth's reign, bequests were made to ten or fewer beneficiaries irrespective of marital status. In the period 1566-1570, the percentage of clergy remembering up to five beneficiaries within and beyond the family was remarkably constant and marital status does not seem to have had a major impact on the number of non-family members included in wills. Among the unmarried clergy, a few particularly generous individuals are evident and they outperform the most generous among the married clergy. However, it is also evident that the married clergy are focussing their bequests on a more intimate circle of immediate family members.

For the later period, 1596-1600, a few generous individuals are apparent but again for both groups, the number of beneficiaries does not tend to exceed 30. There is also less consistency overall. The unmarried clergy concentrated their giving on a smaller number of family members than previously whereas the married clergy had begun to

⁸⁸ TNA, PROB 11/56, John Braban, 1568; 11/50, Robert Isham, 1568.

⁸⁹ Robert Isham has been omitted from Figure 6.

Figure 6. **Percentage and Type of Testamentary Beneficiaries 1566-1570**

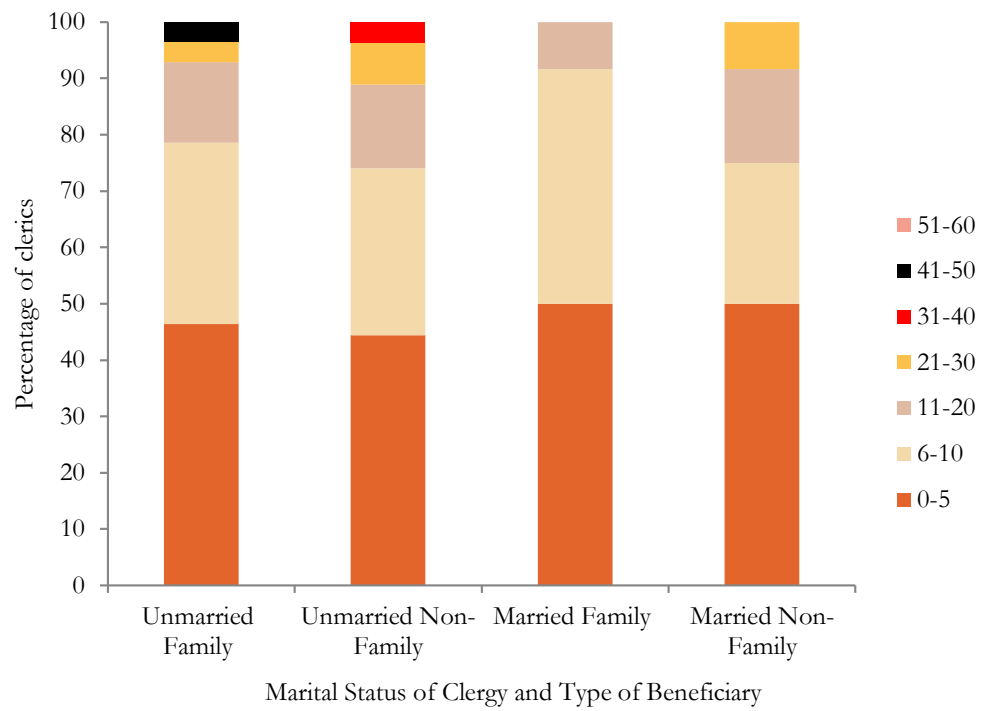
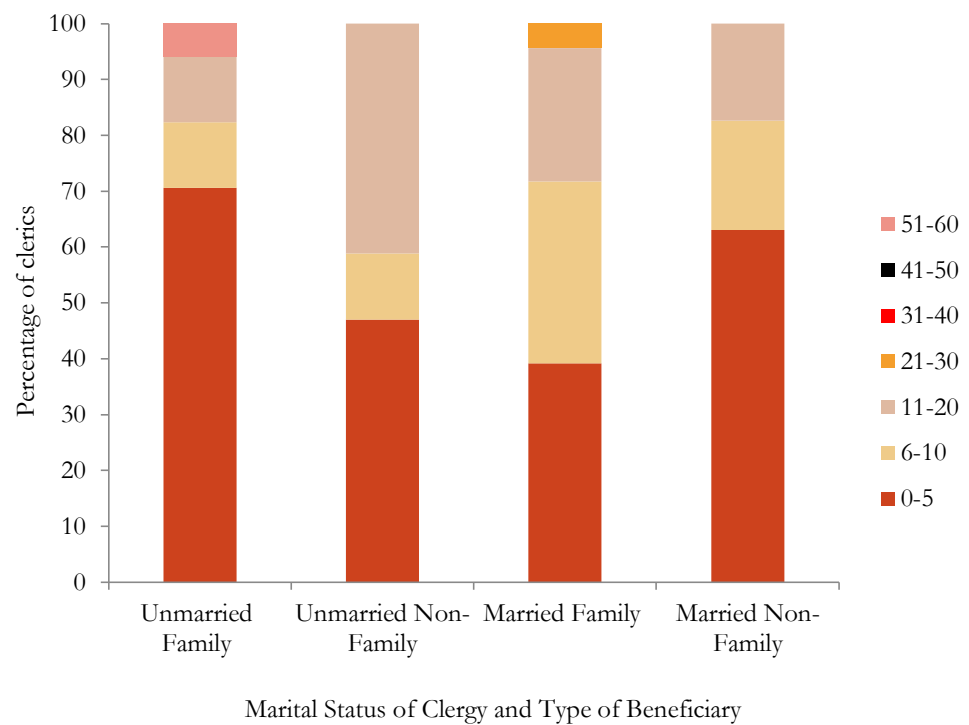


Figure 7. **Percentage and Type of Testamentary Beneficiaries 1596-1600**



include a larger number of family recipients which presumably reflects the presence of children and grandchildren. By the end of the reign, married clergy were concentrating their bequests on a smaller number of non-family beneficiaries suggesting that, as with their charitable giving, they were prioritizing their family needs over those of the wider community.

The Importance of Family Provision and the Plight of the Clergy Widow

Although the presence of a dependent wife and children did not put an end to clerical charitable giving, among married clergy, it did affect testamentary provision for the poor. However, changing patterns of charitable giving cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of clerical marriage. As Heal argues, in response to the development of the Elizabethan system of parish-based poor relief, perceptions of clerical responsibility towards the maintenance of the poor were amended and reliance on the clergy was diminished. In addition, the ecclesiastical hierarchy itself increasingly placed less weight on the importance of clerical charitable giving. Regular episcopal enquiries into the fulfilment of charitable obligations declined towards the end of the 1580s and only when plague and famine struck during the 1590s, and under instruction from the Privy Council, did Whitgift again direct the clergy to give generously to the poor in an attempt to encourage their flocks to do likewise.⁹⁰ However, the clergy wife was an easy scapegoat for clerical parsimony especially while parishioners adapted to both the concept and reality of clerical marriage. In his study of the impact of marriage on the Tudor episcopacy, Berlatsky considered that redirection of bishops' assets was only seen as 'abusive' because 'the community ... was not yet fully adjusted to the concept of a married episcopate.'⁹¹ Although housekeepers and servants had always figured in the running costs of the parsonage, a family could be perceived as a more permanent and more substantial

⁹⁰ Heal, *Hospitality*, pp. 258-9, 272-5, 286; Hill, *Economic Problems of the Church*, p. 202.

⁹¹ Berlatsky, 'Marriage and Family', p. 20.

financial commitment. Harrison maintained that clergy wives ensured the efficient running of parsonages and enhanced a minister's ability to offer hospitality, but the economic contribution made by wives to the clerical household remains difficult to quantify.⁹²

Charitable giving cannot be isolated from the problem of inadequate livings and consequent clerical impoverishment which served to reduce the ability of clergy to devote resources to the poor.⁹³ Although clergy were able to supplement their incomes from a variety of sources, there were many for whom poverty was a reality especially if they lacked tithes and glebe land.⁹⁴ Even Bernard Gilpin, the unmarried and wealthy incumbent of Houghton (Durham), found that his regular commitment of offering dinner to his parishioners every Sunday from Michaelmas to Easter became an increasing burden financially.⁹⁵ Less affluent individuals such as William Sanderson, whose curacy in Berwick was insufficient to maintain his wife and family, would have lacked the means to fulfil their obligations towards their parishioners.⁹⁶

Beyond the natural inclination to care for one's family, there were considerations specific to the clerical profession which necessitated judicious planning and forethought. In his discourse, Thomas Cooper, Bishop of Winchester, emphasized the need for a married minister to consider how his family would survive after his demise and in doing so, focussed on the potential plight of the clergy widow, for here lay the peculiarity of the clerical situation. For any woman, the loss of a husband was 'an economic catastrophe'

⁹² Harrison, *The Description of England*, p. 37; Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 202; P. W. Brooks, 'The Social Position of the Parson in the 16th century', *Journal of the British Archaeological Society*, 3rd series, 10 (1945-7), p. 37. In rural parishes, a wife and children were assets as a source of additional, unpaid labour but in an urban environment, they were unable to contribute in this way.

⁹³ Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 200.

⁹⁴ Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 207; Heal, 'Economic Problems', p. 108; R. O'Day, 'The Reformation of the Ministry', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds), *Continuity and Change: Personnel and Administration of the Church in England 1500-1642* (Leicester, 1976), p.57; M. L. Zell, 'Economic Problems of the Parochial Clergy in the Sixteenth Century', in R. O'Day and F. Heal (eds), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), pp. 32, 36, 40.

⁹⁵ Hill, *Economic Problems*, p. 202-3.

⁹⁶ State Papers, Foreign, Elizabeth, 1561-2, SP 59/5, f. 213.

but the widow of a clergyman found herself in a particularly hapless situation.⁹⁷ Cooper explained that once ministers died or lost their livings ‘because they have no state but for life, their wiues and children without consideration are turned out of doors. And if in their husbandes time they have not some place provided, they hardly can tel how to shift for themselves’. Indeed so parlous was the state of the wives and children of ‘divers honest and godly Preachers’, he claimed, they were hardly able ‘to scape the state of begging’ in this ‘uncharitable, unkind, and unthankfull world’.⁹⁸ Although a recognized problem, nothing was done to resolve it, and twenty years later George Downname again highlighted the unique position of married ministers in that their ‘maintenance ... dieth with them; and out of the annual receites, which the parent hath for terme of life, his posteritie must be prouided for; and in that respect an inheritance to bee permitted vnto them’.⁹⁹

This was not empty rhetoric. The prospect of destitution for the clergy widow was real and not confined to the spouses of the lower clergy. The case of Doctor Tomson, the queen’s chaplain, highlights the consequences of an untimely death. Tomson had travelled ‘to the benefitt of the church and aduancement of the gspell’ and thereby ‘altogether neglected his own benefitt and preferment to livinges’. His wife and three small children were left three hundred pounds in debt which they had no hope of repaying. They did, however, have powerful friends and the Lords of the Privy Council petitioned the Archbishop of Canterbury on their behalf and asked for a collection to be made across the dioceses under his control.¹⁰⁰ Tomson was not alone, for John Barefoote, Archdeacon of Lincoln, used his will to make a direct plea to his supervisors, the

⁹⁷ S. Mendelson and P. Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford, 1998), p. 176.

⁹⁸ Cooper, *An Admonition*, p. 114.

⁹⁹ George Downname, *Two sermons the one commending the ministerie in generall: the other defending the office of bishops in particular: both preached, and since enlarged by George Downname Doctor of Diuinitie*, 1608, STC (2nd edn) 7125, pp. 79-80.

¹⁰⁰ *Elizabethan Peterborough, Tudor Documents 3*, W. T. Mellows and D. H. Gifford (eds), *The Publications of the Northamptonshire Record Society*, 18 (1944), pp. 37-8.

Archbishop and Sir John Puckeringe. As he and ‘moste men’ believed that his work on the Queen’s behalf had impaired his health and shortened his days, he urged them to ‘looke into the pittifull estate of my poor wiefe ... and use some good meanes to her majestie that there maie be some recompence made unto my saide wiefe for the greate paynes and charges that I have bene att in her Majesties service’.¹⁰¹ In 1583, the dean and chapter at York remitted £40 of the £70 owed by Ralph Coulton, archdeacon of Cleveland, on the condition that Margaret, his widow, gave to each of their five children £6 13s 4d over and above their father’s legacy.¹⁰²

Married clergy from all levels of society made pleas that friends or relatives in their capacity as overseers should do all within their powers ‘to stand good frendes to my executrix if any go about to trouble her wrongfully’ as John Howseman, parson of Englefield (Berkshire), phrased his request.¹⁰³ Howseman was particularly well-connected and appointed as overseers men who were learned in the law and royal officials, but those of standing within any local community were in a position to offer support and assistance to wives and children and to defend their interests against those who sought to profit from their change in circumstance.¹⁰⁴ Richard Tandy, parson of Shrawley (Worcestershire), appointed William Gower, gentleman, and Alen Clyff, parson of Whitley, as overseers and helpers to his joint executors Margery, his wife, and Kateryn, his servant, ‘bicause of their impotency’.¹⁰⁵ Thomas Wythers, parson of Toddington (Bedfordshire), sought the help of Sir Henry Cheney to assist his wife Joan in case ‘eny

¹⁰¹ TNA, PROB 11/87, John Barefoote, 1596.

¹⁰² C. Cross, ‘Exemplary Wives and Godly Matrons: Women’s Contribution to the Life of York Minster between the Reformation and the Civil War’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 77 (2005), p. 173.

¹⁰³ TNA, PROB 11/72, John Howseman, 1588.

¹⁰⁴ Other examples include: TNA Probate, 11/57, Thomas Gravinor, 1575; 11/64, William Palmer, 1582; 11/84, Thomas Robinson, 1594; 11/85, Robert Wood, 1595.

¹⁰⁵ WRO, Probate Registry, 1562, Richard Tandy, 76.

person wolde offer or do her wronge or iniury or wolde in any wise be eny ympediment or hynderaunce'.¹⁰⁶

Wrightson observed that as executors, wives and children were 'invariably challenged by very close relatives', a susceptibility of which all will-makers seem to have been aware.¹⁰⁷ In my sample of clerical testators, 11 per cent asked others to assist their wives whereas similar pleas were made by only 7 per cent of those in the control group of lay will-makers. This may reflect a perception among the clergy that, in view of their novel and ill-defined status, their wives and families were in an unusually vulnerable position.

The suit brought by one clergy widow, fifteen years after her husband's death, illustrates the difficulty encountered by women in obtaining sums of money to which they were entitled. Alice Rustat, widow of Henry Stubbing, parson of Hickling (Nottinghamshire), was mother and guardian of their daughter Anne, and was joint executor of her husband's will of 1598. Henry had divided his estate into three parts two of which were to go to Alice and Anne, with the remaining third going to his parents and siblings. In 1613, Alice had to bring a suit against William Stubbing, her fellow executor and Henry's brother, for failure to pay the £107 5s 6d still owed to her.¹⁰⁸

There was also the possibility that clergy widows would be pursued for dilapidations by the next incumbent.¹⁰⁹ In their wills, some ministers, such as John

¹⁰⁶ TNA, PROB 11/51, Thomas Wythers, 1569; other instances include TNA, PROB 11/59, 1577, Robert Cole, parson of St Mary Bow, London, beseeched his 'welbeloved friends ... to be good to his children and given them godd Cownsaill' requiring his children 'in god his name that they obey theire Cownsaill as if it were I myselfe'; TNA, PROB 11/63, 1581, George Magnus, clerk of Potter Heigham (Norfolk), desired his overseers 'everye of theyme to be aydinge, healpinge and assisting'.

¹⁰⁷ K. Wrightson, *Ralph Taylor's Summer: A Scrivener, His City and the Plague* (New Haven, 2011), p. 133.

¹⁰⁸ University of Nottingham, Manuscripts and Special Collections, AN/LB 222/3/11, Cause Papers, Rustat v. Stubbing, 26 November 1613, 26 February, 1614; BI Chancery wills, mf. 1630, Henry Stubbinge, 1598; BI, Archbishop's Register, 31, f. 133, Henry Stubbing, 1598. An obligation subsequent to her remarriage states that Alice will perform her duties as guardian and pay the sums due to her daughter, Anne, and is lodged after Henry's will.

¹⁰⁹ *OED*, The action of pulling down, allowing to fall into a state of disrepair, or in any way impairing ecclesiastical property belonging to an incumbency. The sums charged against an incumbent or his representatives to make good such damage incurred during his incumbency.

FitzRandall, directly addressed this particular problem. FitzRandall insisted that glass, partitions and doors in the house were not to be removed but also that ‘four poundes ... be payed to his successor for all manner of delapidations, my executors acquitted for ever’.¹¹⁰ With similar intent, Edward Roodes, vicar of Newark (Nottinghamshire), in 1573, bequeathed an impressive collection of Latin books to his successor on the condition that he did not sue his executors, his wife and son, for dilapidations.¹¹¹

Even widows from the ecclesiastical hierarchy could find themselves destitute and contemporaries appear well-attuned to the predicament of these women. Eleven years after his death, the widow of Edmund Allen, bishop elect of Rochester, appeared in a list of poor women in need of relief. She and her eight children received 3 shillings 4d and two yards of cloth worth 25 shillings. These women were among the beneficiaries of Robert Nowell’s considerable fortune.¹¹² A section entitled ‘Mynisteres wydowes releived wt clothe & money’, directed almost thirty pounds to thirty-two poor women. Widow Walker, late minister’s wife, the wife of Mr Turner, preacher, and a minister’s widow from Appleby with ‘suettes in the lawe’, all received relief. The title was subsequently amended and the word ‘Ministeres’ crossed out suggesting that not all the named women were in fact clergy widows. However, the original intention which identified this group as requiring assistance, should be interpreted as a recognition and appreciation of their predicament.¹¹³ Although in the seventeenth century, various charitable institutions were established to aid and house clergy widows and their children, the problem had not been entirely resolved, for Richard Stock, rector of All Hallows, Bread Street, left £30 for ‘the relief of such poor ministers and ministers widows’ as his wife and overseers should ‘think

¹¹⁰ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, John FitzRandall, 1580.

¹¹¹ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Edward Roodes, 1573; Archbishop’s Register, 30, f. 149v, Edward Rodes, 1572/3.

¹¹² Robert Nowell, a lawyer of Gray’s Inn, was the brother of Alexander and Laurence Nowell.

¹¹³ *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell of Reade Hall. Lancashire: Brother of Dean Alexander Nowell 1568-1580*, ed. A. B. Grosart (1877), pp. 126-9.

fit'.¹¹⁴ Thomas Gataker, on his death in 1654, left £5 to eight poor ministers' wives and specifically named Katherine, widow of William Bradshaw, among the recipients. Gataker took care to secure the future of his own wife, should she outlive him, by buying a private house for her so that she would not be 'subject to another's courtesy for removal' from the rectory house at Rotherhithe.¹¹⁵

In her study of widows in Abingdon (Berkshire), Barbara Todd described the unique position of the clergy widow as 'particularly pathetic'. She reinforced Cooper's claim that wives and children were evicted from their homes 'without consideration' as they 'simultaneously lost both husband and home'.¹¹⁶ In this respect, their position contrasted with that of the lay widow who, as Amy Erickson concluded, continued to occupy the family home.¹¹⁷ For a minister's widow, the loss of her home meant that she could not even take in lodgers to ease her financial distress and, unlike other widows, she could not, of course, support herself by continuing her husband's trade.¹¹⁸

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that ministers should be anxious to provide for their wives and prioritize their needs. Nowhere is this more apparent than in their wills. For example, in 1587, Nicholas Sheppard, clerk of Hougham (Lincolnshire), left two annuities for the upbringing of his children and the 'mayntennc of my wyfe during her widowehood'.¹¹⁹ The clerk John Hill, who died in 1595, explained that he had bought lands in the name of his son for his wife Mary's 'better mayntennc of livinge'.¹²⁰ Also in 1595, Thomas Sommerton, parson of Foxearth (Essex), required that his son provide his

¹¹⁴ B. J. Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow: a Stereotype Reconsidered', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), p.72; ODNB, Richard Stock (1568/9-1626): doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/26540 accessed 12 September 2015.

¹¹⁵ ODNB, Thomas Gataker, (1574-1654), doi:10.1093/ref:odnb/10445, accessed 12 September 2015.

¹¹⁶ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 71.

¹¹⁷ A. L. Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London and New York, 1993), p. 163.

¹¹⁸ V. Brodsky, 'Widows in late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations', in L. Bonfield, R. M. Smith and K. Wrightson (eds), *The World We Have Gained* (Oxford, 1986), p. 132.

¹¹⁹ TNA, PROB 11/71, Nicholas Sheppard, 1587.

¹²⁰ TNA, PROB 11/85, John Hill, 1595.

wife Joan, with ‘sufficient and necessarye meate drincke clothing and other necessaryes accordingly to be had for one of her degree’.¹²¹ But it was the provision of a suitable home that was at the forefront of the concerns of many. Alexander Wymesherste demonstrated this by giving his wife Alice ‘towards the buyeing of a lease of some prety house Tenne poundes’.¹²² John Pollye, curate of Middleton Stoney (Oxfordshire), arranged that his wife Elizabeth should pay an annual rent of ten shillings to Edward Stone for the lease of a house in Deddington.¹²³ William Kinge, clerk of Windsor (Berkshire), left to his ‘loving wife’, Elizabeth, ‘the use and occupacion of that my howse in Pescodd Streete’.¹²⁴ In 1586, Robert Lylle, clerk of Babworth (Nottinghamshire), left his house and lands in Newark to his wife during her natural life and his other properties to his son.¹²⁵ These testators placed no conditions on their wives’ tenure of these properties, but others stipulated that a widow who married should forfeit the property. John Sheparde, vicar of Bridford (Devon), for example, left his wife the use of two houses ‘duringe her widdowe estate’.¹²⁶ In 1569, Rose Lathburye, wife of John Lathburye, parson of Todenham (Goucestershire), was to enjoy the use of his house ‘duringe the tyme of widdowes estate and noe longer’.¹²⁷

Although clergy widows have received little attention in the historiography, widowhood and the associated issue of remarriage have been the subject of several investigations.¹²⁸ In her evaluation of the social, economic and personal factors which

¹²¹ TNA, PROB 11/85, Thomas Sommerton, 1595.

¹²² TNA, PROB 11/51, Alexander Wymesherste, 1569.

¹²³ TNA, PROB 11/75, John Pollye, 1590.

¹²⁴ TNA, PROB 11/76, William Kinge, 1590.

¹²⁵ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, Robert Lylle, 1586; Other examples include, BI, Prerogative and Exchequer wills, Henry Scholey, vol. 26, f. 206, 1595. Scholey, clerk of Wragby, left his house at Wragby, which he made clear was in his own tenure, to his wife Alice; TNA, PROB 11/78, John Bell, Dean of Ely, who in 1591 left his house and land in Fulborne to his wife and he hoped that she would be contented for if she were not ‘she did him grate iniurie’.

¹²⁶ TNA, PROB 11/66, John Sheparde, 1583.

¹²⁷ TNA, PROB 11/51, John Lathburye, 1569.

¹²⁸ V. Brodsky, ‘Widows of Late Elizabethan London’; Erickson, *Women and Property*, part iv; J. D. Griffith, ‘Economy, Family and Remarriage: Theory of Remarriage and Application to Preindustrial England’, *Journal of Family Issues*, 1 (1980), pp. 479-96; Todd, ‘The Remarrying Widow’; B. J. Todd, ‘Demographic Determinism and Female Agency: the Remarrying Widow Reconsidered ... again’, *Continuity and Change*, 9 (1994), pp. 421-50; J. Whittle, ‘Inheritance, Marriage, Widowhood and Remarriage:

could encourage a woman to abandon the increased independence afforded by her widow's estate, Todd indicated that older, wealthier widows and the widows of professional men were least likely to remarry.¹²⁹ Jane Whittle also concluded that although around half of widows remarried, this was not evenly distributed across all social groups.¹³⁰ Indeed, those of the middling sort were most predisposed to remarriage, unlike the wealthy who had the means to survive alone and the poorest who had little to offer a second husband.¹³¹

Married ministers whose wills were proved at the Prerogative Court of Canterbury seem to have acknowledged the possibility that their widows would remarry although the majority expressed it in conditional terms - 'should my wife fortune to marry' - rather than the more resigned 'whensoever she happen to marrye againe' of Robert Tower, parson of Great Leighs (Essex).¹³² Remarriage was, therefore, both anticipated and accepted, which echoes Wrightson's conclusion that remarriage was not 'a disturbing proposition' to testators.¹³³ Among PCC clerical wills, 10 per cent of testators made reference to a widow's remarriage, a figure which mirrors that among the lay wills examined by Erickson and Todd.¹³⁴ This, of course, means that most widows received legacies for the term of their 'natural life' or that there was no mention of widowhood or remarriage; 'punitive' clauses, therefore, featured in only a minority of wills.¹³⁵ Todd interprets the increased incidence of such clauses, which she dates to around 1570, as

a Comparative Perspective on Women and Landholding in North-east Norfolk, 1440-1580', *Continuity and Change*, 13 (1998), pp. 33-72.

¹²⁹ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 55-6, 61, 68-9.

¹³⁰ Whittle, 'Inheritance', p. 62.

¹³¹ Brodsky, 'Widows of Late Elizabethan London', p. 128; Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 196; E. Foyster, 'Marrying the Experienced Widow in Early Modern England: the Male Perspective', in S. Cavallo and L. Warner (eds), *Widowhood in Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Harlow, 1999), p. 112; Whittle, 'Inheritance', p. 62.

¹³² TNA, PROB 11/69, Robert Tower, 1586.

¹³³ K. Wrightson, 'Kinship in an English Village: Terling, Essex 1500-1700', in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 327.

¹³⁴ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 166; Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 72, 'a little more than 10 per cent'.

¹³⁵ Brodsky, 'Widows of Late Elizabethan London', p. 144; Wrightson, 'Kinship in an English Village', pp. 327-8.

evidence of growing hostility among wealthy testators to their widows' remarriage based on a desire to preserve family wealth from an acquisitive second husband.¹³⁶ Although there is disagreement over the motivation behind restrictive clauses, particularly regarding the extent of a testator's jealousy over his wife's person, the conclusion that testators were not prepared to allow another to obtain their land simply by marrying their widow has much to recommend it.¹³⁷

Less affluent clergymen, like the poorer laymen in Whittle's study, were most likely to give their land to their wives without restrictions. My survey of the clerical wills proved in the diocesan courts of Worcester and Leicester found that restrictions 'for the duration of her widowhood' are a rarity. If economic necessity was the driving force, as Whittle speculates, a widow would find it easier to attract a new husband and obtain financial security if she were in possession of land. In actively seeking to help their wives remarry rather than to hinder their prospects, these clergymen were acknowledging practical necessity and ensuring their wives' and children's futures.¹³⁸

The tipping point for an increase in the imposition of restrictions in clerical wills occurs a decade later than that observed by Todd and with the greatest prevalence concentrated in the last decade of the sixteenth century. For testators, as well as safeguarding property, a major consideration for the clerical testator appears to have been that a future marriage would endanger the inheritance of his children.¹³⁹ Indeed, most stipulations in clergy wills concerning remarriage merely required bonds of security to ensure that legacies were paid to their offspring; the protection of children's portions against 'the possible depredations of a future stepfather' noted by Brodsky in her study

¹³⁶ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 73.

¹³⁷ Erickson, *Women and Property*, p. 166; Whittle, 'Inheritance', p. 57.

¹³⁸ Whittle, 'Inheritance', p. 57.

¹³⁹ Whittle, 'Inheritance', pp. 56-7. Whittle maintains that remarriage was in all probability the best option for a widow and her offspring and husbands recognized this but she does not believe that restrictions were designed to protect the interest of the first husband's children.

of London widows.¹⁴⁰ William Pettingar, vicar of Mattersey (Nottinghamshire), in his will of 1581, spelled out his concerns for the future of his children. The guardians of his children and their portions were ‘to taiketh them and their Rightes if my wiffe doo marrye agayne and that her husband doo nott use them well in ordning & educating them’. If the guardians felt that Isabell’s new husband was taking good care of the children and their interests then they were ‘to contynue still in their custodye if all soo please & that they thinke ytt good’.¹⁴¹ Although children could be viewed as ‘negative capital’, widows with young children were in fact most likely to remarry, justifying the anxiety exhibited by these clergymen.¹⁴²

The simplest solution was for the widow to repay the children’s legacies prior to her second marriage, as both Anne Howeseman, wife of John Howseman, vicar of Englefield (Berkshire), and Eleanor Flint, wife of Richard Flint, parson of Sherrington (Wiltshire), were required to do.¹⁴³ However, most clergy preferred a more robust legal arrangement and insisted on guarantees that obligations would be met. Occasionally, as in Pettingar’s will and that of Thomas Gravinor, parson of Whitney (Herefordshire), the overseers or executors of the will were to step in and take over the administration of children’s portions.¹⁴⁴ More usually, a widow or her future husband was required to provide sufficient sureties to guarantee the payment of the children’s legacies as was expected of Margaret Kiffin, wife of Richard Kiffin, vicar of Horsham (Sussex).¹⁴⁵ Margaret, wife of John Bungey, minister of Chatham (Kent), was to make a similar arrangement with the Dean and Chapter who were to determine the value of the

¹⁴⁰ Brodsky ‘Widows of Late Elizabethan London’, p. 144.

¹⁴¹ BI, Chancery wills, mf.1630, William Pettingar, 1581; Archbishop’s Register, 31, ff. 90v-91r, William Pettingar, 1581.

¹⁴² Griffith, ‘Economy, Family and Remarriage’, pp. 486-8, 493; Whittle, ‘Inheritance’, pp. 56-7, Todd, ‘The Remarrying Widow’, p. 68.

¹⁴³ TNA, PROB 11/72, John Howseman, 1588; PROB 11/91, Richard Flint, 1598.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, PROB 11/57, Thomas Gravinor, 1575.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, PROB 11/56, Richard Kiffin, 1574.

sureties.¹⁴⁶ The second wife of the Essex parson Thomas Morse was, in 1597, to be relied on ‘to bringe upp my children in Learnynge with all thinges fitt for them until she shall place them in some honest services’. However, his will stated that if Margaret ‘doe dispose her selfe to marrye’ then she and her husband must enter into sufficient bonds to her eldest son to discharge her obligations. A refusal to do this would see her deprived of her executorship.¹⁴⁷ Remarriage could even result in a loss of control of a testator’s children as in the case of Joan, wife of Hugh Thorneley, parson of Greystoke (Cumberland). In Thorneley’s will of 1597, Joan was appointed guardian and governor of his children but ‘noe longer then shee keepeth her selfe widowe’. As long as she remained unmarried, she could occupy any of the houses bequeathed to his son Timothy but as soon as she remarried, she would lose this right and her guardianship.¹⁴⁸ Alice, ‘welbeloved’ wife of John Barber, clerk of Witherley (Leicestershire), found herself subject to similar constraints and her own will indicates that she died a widow in 1597.¹⁴⁹ Any decision to remarry, therefore, required a fine balancing of personal inclination and circumstance on the part of the clergy widow.

As clerical wills record the instructions of ministers, they cannot acquaint us with the subsequent marital decisions of their widows who usually return to historical obscurity.¹⁵⁰ It has, however, been possible to trace a handful of clergy wives who

¹⁴⁶ TNA, PROB 11/87, John Bungey, 1596. Similar arrangements are to be found PROB 11/54, Roger Banyster, 1572; PROB 11/93, Garrett Peter, 1599; PROB 11/95, Thomas Howell, 1600; PROB 11/62, John Baron, 1580.

¹⁴⁷ TNA, PROB 11/89, Thomas Morse (Minister of God’s Word, Essex), 1597.

¹⁴⁸ TNA, PROB 11/89, Hugh Thorneley, 1597.

¹⁴⁹ TNA, PROB 11/82, John Barber, 1593; PROB 11/89, Alice Barber, 1597; Other examples of restrictions can be found in PROB 11/89, Edward Fenton, 1597. Fenton bequeathed all his tenements in Essex to his wife Joan on the condition that she kept herself ‘sole and unmarried’; PROB 11/78, Christopher Alnot, 1591, the clerk of Rotherfield Greys, Oxfordshire, bequeathed his house in the High Street in Henley upon Thames to his wife Marjorie ‘yf she so longe contynewe unmarried or keepe her self widdowe’ but should she marry, their son Zachary was to inherit.

¹⁵⁰ Todd, ‘The Remarrying Widow’, p. 58; The difficulty of reconstructing the number of widows marrying is described in M. Hodges, ‘Widows of the “Middling Sort” and their Assets in Two Seventeenth-Century Towns’ in T. Arkell, N. Evans and N. Goose (eds), *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2004), p. 313; see also B. A. Holderness, ‘Widows in Pre-industrial Society: an Essay upon their Economic Distress’ in R. M. Smith (ed.), *Land Kinship and Life-Cycle* (Cambridge, 1984), p. 435.

remained widows, such as Anne, wife of Thomas Langley, vicar of Wanborough (Wiltshire). Anne's entitlement to various lands, tenements and rents in Kent and her share of other goods depended on her remaining 'sole and unmarried'. Her own will was proved in 1613, and, complete with a reference to her 'many yeres', shows that she had indeed remained a widow and she alluded to what she then considered to be *her* lands in Kent.¹⁵¹

Anne Langley can be traced precisely because she maintained her widowhood and because her late husband had provided her with sufficient financial security to do so. Others were less fortunate. The fifty-nine poor ministers who received hand-outs from Robert Nowell's estate, for example, would have been in no position to guarantee their wives' futures.¹⁵² For widows without adequate means to survive alone, remarriage was the most obvious solution. It appears that clergy widows had occasioned comment by their hasty and imprudent second marriages. William Harrison leapt to their defence and claimed that their propensity to 'bestow themselves not so advisedly as their calling requireth' was an exaggeration. He also observed that widows among the laity were also guilty of ill-considered second marriages.¹⁵³ If clergy widows were remarrying more quickly than was considered seemly or with men of humble status, this apparent lack of circumspection may have originated from the absence of a viable alternative. Such behaviour, as Griffith perceived, was indicative of 'desperation rather than choice'.¹⁵⁴

Necessity may well have accounted for the behaviour of the two clergy widows traced in Abingdon by Todd. Dorothy Scottesford, married a glover even before she had proved her first husband's estate and Magdalen Wolf, whose husband's inventory totalled

¹⁵¹ TNA Probate 11/121, Anne Langley, 1613.

¹⁵² *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell*, pp. 118-24.

¹⁵³ Harrison, *The Description of England*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁴ J. D. Griffith, 'Economy, Family and Remarriage: Theory of Remarriage and Application to Preindustrial England', *Journal of Family Issues*, 1 (1980), pp. 486-8, 493.

£11 6s 2d, married a blacksmith.¹⁵⁵ Parish registers sometimes bring these hurried marriages to light. One of the swiftest must be that of Margaret Coste, widow of Thomas Coste or Costelat, minister of Christ church, Newgate Street, London. Only two months after Thomas's demise in September 1565, Margaret married Robert Payne.¹⁵⁶ At Monk Fryston (Yorkshire) in February 1587, Jane Proctor married Robert Wilkinson, five months after the death of her minister husband Nicholas.¹⁵⁷ In 1587 in Dalston (Cumberland), the vicar, Thomas Nicholson, married Anne Edgar who was apparently the widow of his predecessor, Mark Edgar.¹⁵⁸ Other clergy widows waited longer before remarrying, as in the case of Helen Hedge who married the widower, John Harward, in 1576, a year after her husband, Richard Hedge of Heybridge (Essex), had been buried.¹⁵⁹ Helen had observed the year of widowhood recommended in conduct books and sermons but the influence of such sources is debatable. The timing of remarriage depended on age, social status, financial security, personal inclination and location.¹⁶⁰

Accounts of the desperate circumstances experienced by individual sixteenth-century clergy widows have not survived. Records from the seventeenth century, however, do reveal the continued struggle faced by clergy widows to keep a roof over their heads and it was only then that charities were set up specifically to offer assistance to this group of women.¹⁶¹ In Norway, a clergy widow was allowed to live in the parsonage

¹⁵⁵ Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', p. 71.

¹⁵⁶ Parish Register of Christ Church, Newgate Street, London, *London Harleian Society*, 21 (1895), pp. 195, 265.

¹⁵⁷ *The Registers of Monk Fryston, 1538-1678*, ed. J. D. Hemsworth, *The Parish Register Society*, 5 (1896), pp. 33-4. Jane's daughter, Katteren, had been christened six months before her husband's death.

¹⁵⁸ *The Parish Registers of Dalston, Cumberland, vol. 1*, ed. J. Wilson (Dalston, 1893), pp. xi, 103, 147, 154. Necessity, occasioned by the presence of at least ten children, may have hastened Anne's remarriage. She died, once again a widow, in 1602.

¹⁵⁹ SEAX, Parish Register of Heybridge; SEAX, Parish Register of Mucking. Elizabeth Gower, widow of James Gower, vicar of Mucking, allowed a respectable two years to elapse before marrying the widower, John Knight.

¹⁶⁰ Brodsky, 'Widows of Late Elizabethan London', pp. 130-4. Brodsky observed speedier remarriage in London than in provincial parishes where on average nineteen months elapsed between marriages.

¹⁶¹ *Warwickshire County Records, Quarter Session Order Book, vol. 4*, ed. S. C. Ratcliff and H. C. Johnson (Warwick, 1938), pp. 87, 126, 130. The cases of three seventeenth-century Warwickshire clergy widows indicate the reality of their predicament. Joan Pearce, widow of Raphael Pearce 'minister of the word of God' at Long Itchington, and her six children were left 'in necessity and want unprovided of any substance' by his death

for a year after the pastor's death, after which the parish was required to find a home for her and her children. If the new pastor was unmarried, then he was encouraged to resolve the situation by marrying his predecessor's widow; the pressure to do so was so strong that it became 'almost a social obligation'.¹⁶² This strategy was never routinely employed in England, but some clergy widows may have sought to continue their occupation of the conjugal home by marriage to their husband's successor. In May 1567, Alice Taylor, widow, married Roger Selwall, clerk, less than four months after the burial of John Taylor, clerk, her previous husband.¹⁶³ At Little Canfield (Essex), the parson and patron, David Price, was buried in July 1598 and within four months Ellen Price, widow, had married his successor, Edward Dod, having presented him to the benefice.¹⁶⁴

The varied reasons for clerical endogamy have been explored earlier, but for some clerical families, it may have been motivated by the very practical consideration of avoiding eviction from the family home.¹⁶⁵ For example, Persis, daughter of William Hopkinson, rector of Warbleton (Sussex) between 1571 and 1604, married Thomas Lord, her father's successor.¹⁶⁶ In 1610 in Humberstone (Leicestershire), Alice Wilson married Thomas Warriner, clerk, and as Thomas Wilson, minister, had only recently been buried, it is possible that his daughter was quickly married to the next incumbent.¹⁶⁷ In 1585,

in 1651. It was determined that 'a public collection' should 'be made in all churches, chapels and places of public assemblies for the service of Almighty God throughout this whole county ... to contribute to the relief of the said Joan Pearce and her children'. In 1656, Mistress Moore, widow of the late minister of Ufton, petitioned that as the house provided for her by the overseers of the poor 'will not keep her and her children dry in regard it raineth through and is like to be the death of her and her children', it should be repaired or she should be moved to another house that was 'fit for her to dwell in'. Three years later, Mary Ryland, widow of the minister of Morton Baggott, petitioned for maintenance and somewhere to live as her husband's death 'hath left her more in debt than his estate will amount unto and that [she] ... hath ten children (and most of them small) to provide for and that she and her children are put out of their habitation and are in great want'. She was granted eighteen pence maintenance but had to return to court on two subsequent occasions as for six months this sum had not been forthcoming and she still had not been provided with a habitation; Todd, 'The Remarrying Widow', pp. 79, 82.

¹⁶² O. Chadwick, *The Early Reformation on the Continent* (Oxford, 2001), p. 149; G. Jacobsen, 'Nordic women and the Reformation' in S. Marshall (ed.), *Women in Reformation and Counter-Reformation Europe* (Bloomington, 1989), p. 54.

¹⁶³ *Burford Parish Registers, 1558-1812*, ed. W. G. D. Fletcher, *Shropshire Parish Register Society*, 16 (1915), p. 5.

¹⁶⁴ SEAX, Parish Register of Little Canfield.

¹⁶⁵ See above, pp. 77-8, 113, 133-8.

¹⁶⁶ P. Collinson, *The Religion of Protestants* (Oxford, 1982), p. 116, fn. 96.

¹⁶⁷ *Marriages at Humberstone, Leicestershire Parish Registers, vol. 9*, ed. T. M. Blagg (London, 1913), p. 123.

Alice Lively, daughter of Richard Lively, married Robert Buddle who took over her father's benefice after his resignation.¹⁶⁸ In Boxworth (Cambridgeshire) in 1596, Miss Holt, daughter of the previous incumbent, married John Boyse 'soon after' he took up his position as rector there.¹⁶⁹ Susanna Worsley, whose father, the late parson of Thurning (Northamptonshire), was buried in January 1572, married his successor, John Bingnet, in May of the same year.¹⁷⁰ While it is impossible to determine personal inclination, the possibility that these marriages represent a strategy for avoiding penury cannot be discounted. Ministers' preoccupation with ensuring the financial security of their families can be best appreciated against the backdrop of the uncertain futures faced by clergy widows with inadequate means.

Conclusion

Statistical analysis and quantification have to rely on a series of value judgements and imperfect accounts so that an indication of behaviour and a suggestion of trends is perhaps the best that can be achieved. The testamentary charitable contributions of both groups of clergy declined in monetary value across the reign and as this reflects the general decline in later sixteenth-century philanthropy, it reinforces the view that changing patterns of charitable giving among the clergy cannot be attributed solely to the introduction of clerical marriage. Although heightened contemporary concerns that clerical marriage would result in the complete collapse of clerical philanthropy and sociability were not borne out by the lived experience, married ministers were anxious to provide for their families and did prioritize this responsibility. This natural instinct was exacerbated by the difficult and particular circumstances in which a clergy wife found herself on the death of her husband. It does seem, therefore, that married ministers were,

¹⁶⁸ *The Register Book of the Parish Church of Maxey, Co. Northamptonshire, 1538-1713*, ed. W. D. Saunders (London, 1892), p. 19.

¹⁶⁹ *West Stow Parish Registers, 1558-1850 and Wordwell Parish Registers, 1580-1850*, ed. S. H. A. Hervey (Woodbridge, 1903), p. 124.

¹⁷⁰ NthRO, *Thurning Parish Register*, 326P/3, pp. 16, 22.

in general, proportionally less generous than their unmarried colleagues and did focus their testamentary bequests on a smaller number of recipients outside their immediate kinship group. But we should not exaggerate their inward-looking behaviour or claim that they entirely turned their backs on their communities and abandoned their parochial responsibilities.

6. The Reception of the Clergy Wife: Reactions to a Religious and Social Innovation

When Joan Beale called Alice, the wife of the minister John Wilcox, ‘a priestes Jellett, a priestes Riddmare & the Divills Ridmare’, she was using age-old terms of abuse employed to describe women who associated with priests.¹ Joan had chosen her words with care and, as she intended to maximize the insult and hurt, she ensured that their meaning and significance was fully appreciated. But this altercation took place in 1590, and Joan felt the need to add, by way of explanation, that ‘it was a name for such as she ... was before she was borne’. The possible implication was that such insults were no longer current and that Alice would not have been conversant with them. It would be easy to dismiss the encounter as yet another example of the hostility faced by clergy wives in their bid to gain acceptance in a country which was in no hurry to embrace Protestantism. Yet, when the entries from both the Act and Deposition Books are read together, it is less evident that we are witnessing a straightforward attack on the reputation and standing of a minister’s wife. Joan was not, it would seem, expressing disapproval of clerical marriage per se, or of clergy wives in general, but apparently had launched an insult aimed directly at Alice Wilcox in reaction to what she felt were ‘very badd speeches from the wiffe of Mr Wilcox’.²

This scene from Berrow (Worcestershire) demonstrates the difficulties encountered when trying to assess reactions to the introduction of a married ministry and to clergy wives themselves. Among historians, ministers’ wives often feature as a

¹ *OED*, Jillett, a giddy or flighty young woman; a jilt; sometimes, a familiar or contemptuous term for a girl or young woman, a wench; J. Werner, “‘Just as the Priests have their Wives’: Priests and Concubines in England, 1375-1549” (Unpublished PhD Thesis, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2009), p. 136. ‘The term “mare” was not as widely used as “harlot” or “strumpet,” and on first glance, could be taken as a mere synonym for wife or concubine, but it also hinted at the base sexuality of priests’ concubines’.

² WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/4, ff. 110r & v; WRO, Act Book 1587-93, 794.011/2513/4, f. 612.

barometer for gauging communal response to religious change, an approach which risks devaluing them as individuals and disregards the reality of their lived experience. Unimpeded by the lack of research into the personal lives of Elizabethan clergy wives, confident assertions have been made as to their reception in society as whole. Tindal Hart believed that ‘the prejudice against parsons’ wives died hard’.³ A. G. Dickens talked of ‘a widespread popular taboo’ and ‘genuine popular antipathy’ towards clerical marriage that would require ‘many decades’ to overcome.⁴ Assessments of reaction have softened slightly over time but they still emphasize the negative. Anne Barstow claimed that ministers’ wives ‘faced several generations of suspicion and hostility from many sides’.⁵ Peter Marshall concluded that, in the reign of Elizabeth, hostility towards clerical marriage ‘remained a relatively common phenomenon’.⁶ Christopher Haigh also considered that ‘it was a long time indeed before people got used to married clergy, and learned to be polite to their wives’.⁷ In general, revisionist historians have accentuated negative references to clergy wives and used them to underpin their depictions of conservative and ingrained Catholic resistance to the Reformation at the local level. Carlson stands alone in playing down the idea of an enduring opposition and has indicated that clerical marriage and clergy wives were quickly accommodated. He concludes that, in the context of sixteenth-century defamation, remarks against clergy wives were ‘neither surprising nor particularly suggestive of any deep resentment against the institution of clerical marriage’.⁸

Within the current scholarship there is scope, therefore, for a re-evaluation of the reception afforded to clergy wives and one which adopts a more holistic approach. Interpretations have focussed on clerical marriage as a theological issue but it will be

³ A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy 1558-1660* (London, 1958), p. 35.

⁴ A. G. Dickens, *The English Reformation*, 2nd edn (London, 1989), p. 245.

⁵ A. L. Barstow, ‘The First Generations of Anglican Clergy Wives: Heroines or Whores?’, *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church*, 52 (1983), p. 15.

⁶ P. Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 170, 172-3.

⁷ C. Haigh, *The Plain Man’s Pathways to Heaven* (Oxford, 2007), p. 204.

⁸ E. J. Carlson, ‘Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation’, *Journal of British Studies*, 31 (1992), p. 27.

argued here that they have not sufficiently explored the wider implications of this momentous social change. The mistaken assumption that the lived experience of clergy wives is itself beyond recovery has in part helped to fix attention on the doctrinal debate. The minister's wife did personify religious change, but clerical marriage also heralded a major social upheaval which was played out in a volatile mix of personality, confessional identity and the underlying tensions of parish life. Scholarly interpretations of parochial reactions to the advent of the clergy wife have relied heavily on examples from the records of the church courts. It is my aim to look at these more closely and rather than assembling a catalogue of opposition, to analyse some of the incidents more deeply for a clearer understanding of the background to the exchanges depicted. Collinson judged that there was a 'polarity of public attitudes towards this still unfamiliar practice' and the voices of those who made negative pronouncements are particularly well preserved.⁹ Those who were more at ease with the change, however, struggle to be heard. Reactions such as mild aversion, indifference, resigned acquiescence and cautious acceptance are more difficult to locate, practically and methodologically difficult to measure and impossible to quantify.

Nonetheless, by expanding the range of sources, this chapter seeks to bring the wives to the forefront of the discussion and to seek a deeper appreciation of the reality of their lives and of communal attitudes towards them. To this end, it is imperative that the presence of the minister's wife is investigated as a social as well as a religious innovation. After studying reactions based on doctrinal objections, this chapter will examine more closely the difficulties which ministers' wives encountered and explore how their relationship with the local community changed over time as the institution of clerical marriage became embedded within society, themes which build on and enhance the understanding of the role of the clergy wife advanced in chapter four. An opening

⁹ P. Collinson, *The Birthpangs of Protestant England* (Basingstoke, 1988), p. 67.

reflection on the language of abuse and antagonism will serve to contextualize the subsequent discussion.

The Language of Abuse

The language of sexual insult was frequently employed against individual clergy wives as well as in the negative discourse surrounding clerical marriage. This is unsurprising as the word 'whore', sometimes substituted by one of its synonyms, was the most common slander against women in general.¹⁰ For example, in 1571, Robert Long of Salcott (Essex) said that 'ministers' wives were whores and their children bastards' and as a result was required to do penance in Colchester market and parish church on two Sundays.¹¹ In the 1570s in Norwich, Mr Blake held a similar opinion for he said that 'all bishops wives and priests wives in England were whores'.¹² If not used explicitly, the connotation was implied. In 1577, Richard Turvill of Newent (Gloucestershire), 'discommendeth the marriage of priests, and sayeth their children be not legitimate' and William Wood had expressed his 'misliking with priests' marriages' and had said that 'he would ride his horse forty miles to make a priest cuckold'.¹³ In 1580, five northern women had to make public declarations in their parish churches that they were at fault for telling their curate that his marriage was unlawful and his children bastards.¹⁴

Although the word 'whore' signified actual sexual misconduct, it was frequently a more vague term of abuse denoting a disruptive and dishonest woman.¹⁵ A woman's credit was dependent on good neighbourliness, quiet living and hard work, but Laura

¹⁰ L. Gowing, *Domestic Dangers* (Oxford, 1996), p. 63; J. A. Sharpe, 'Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York', *Borthwick Papers*, 58 (1980), p. 10; R. Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation 1520-1670*, (Oxford, 1979), p. 81; Werner, "'Just as the Priests have their Wives'". See pp. 130-7 for an extensive exploration of words of abuse aimed at women who associated with priests.

¹¹ Haigh, *Pathways*, p. 204.

¹² *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst, Bishop of Norwich, compiled during the years 1571-5*, ed. R. A. Houlbrooke, *Norfolk Record Society*, 43 (1975), p. 259. Blake himself was 'complayned upon ... for whordome'.

¹³ Haigh, *Pathways*, p. 204.

¹⁴ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 26.

¹⁵ C. Peters, *Patterns of Piety: Women. Gender and Religion in Late Medieval and Reformation England* (Cambridge, 2003), pp. 334-5.

Gowing has shown that her honour was defined primarily in sexual terms and according to James Sharpe such honour was of ‘greater importance to married than to unmarried women’.¹⁶ However, the inherited cultural prejudices against women who associated with priests gave the phrase ‘priest’s whore’ an additional potency which a libel case brought by Margaret Ailwaye in Worcester in 1561 amply demonstrates. Joan Powell recalled that she had heard Joyce Hewet call Margaret ‘a hore and *worest* a prystes lyman’ [my italics].¹⁷ In 1560, John Prout denounced Thomasine Bligh in similar terms and in 1568, John Steele accused John Homes of saying to his wife ‘what are thowe but a preestes lemanne’.¹⁸ There appears to have been no clerical involvement in any of these three cases but the addition of the clerical prefix was undoubtedly designed to heighten the abuse.

As Helen Parish observes, the lexicon of insult aimed at clergy wives was ‘both limited and constant’ as it employed terms of abuse commonly used in pre-reformation days. Whore and priest’s whore, supplemented by jade, drab, queen, leman, harlot and strumpet, were the most popular choices with children referred to as priest’s calves and bastards.¹⁹ Those on either side of the confessional divide, Catholic opponents of Edwardian clerical marriage and reformers attacking unchaste Catholic priests, had revitalized and reinforced these stereotypes and it was a habit that died hard.²⁰ The 1586 Puritan survey identified clergymen such as David Ireland, of Offchurch (Warwickshire), as a ‘whoremonger’ and recorded that Mr Phippe of Barling (Essex) was ‘convicted of whoredom’ and that Nicholas Arscot of Cubert (Cornwall) ‘keepeth a whore’.²¹ As Haigh noted, the term ‘priest’s whore’ had become a ‘standard insult whenever anyone got into

¹⁶ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, pp. 4, 115, 128-9; J. A. Sharpe, ‘Defamation and Sexual Slander’, p. 27.

¹⁷ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/1, f. 17v.

¹⁸ R. Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, 1989) p. 128; NA, *Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeacon of Nottingham 1565-1675*, ed. R. F. B. Hodgkinson, DDTS addit. 14/26/1, p. 63.

¹⁹ Werner, “‘Just as the Priests have their Wives’”, pp. 130-7.

²⁰ H. L. Parish, “‘It Was Never Good World Sence Minister Must Have Wyves’: Clerical Celibacy, Clerical Marriage, and Anticlericalism in Reformation England’, *Journal of Religious History*, 36 (2012), p. 68.

²¹ *The Seconde Parte of a Register*, vol. 2, ed. A. Peel (1915), pp. 104, 158, 172.

an argument with a minister's wife'.²² Used freely in society, it was nevertheless the epithet of choice when making derogatory comments about a minister's wife as the term unlocked an ingrained and well-understood subtext. The case of Joan Beale, however, hints that there was an actual shift in the vocabulary directed at ministers' wives, a phenomenon which will be given greater consideration below.

The use of clichéd expressions reveals the persistence of popular idiom and oral traditions as well as, among some parishioners, a continuing and persistent undercurrent of dislike for clerical marriage. The historiography makes much of the transference of the vocabulary and identity of the pre-Reformation priests' whore to the Elizabethan clergy wife. Once clerical marriage was permitted, Barstow explained, the reformers had to seek to counteract the popular perception of 'women who consorted with priests' as whores, harlots and concubines.²³ References to priests' whores had certainly permeated popular culture and common parlance but the discussion in the first chapter of this study has demonstrated that the reality was more complex. Alongside the traditional portrayal of the clerical concubine as a woman of low status and dishonourable reputation there is scope for a more nuanced interpretation. In the European context, Marie Kelleher, recognizing that concubines 'enjoyed varying levels of regard', indicates that they 'defy simple categorisation' while Susan Karant-Nunn cautions against assuming that concubines 'elevated to the dignity of pastor's spouse' invited calumny.²⁴ Perhaps, unlike the ecclesiastical authorities, parishioners were more inclined to differentiate between the promiscuous priest with his succession of bedfellows and the couple who lived unobtrusively in a quasi-married state. Communal response may have been dependent on

²² Haigh, *Pathways*, p. 204.

²³ Barstow, 'The First Generations', p. 4.

²⁴ M. A. Kelleher, "'Like man and wife': Clerics' Concubines in the Diocese of Barcelona', *Journal of Medieval History*, 28 (2002), p. 359; S. C. Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family in the German Reformation: The Parsonage as a Site of Socio-Religious Change', in C. Scott Dixon and L. Schorn-Schutte (eds), *The Protestant Clergy of Early Modern Europe* (Basingstoke, 2003), p. 81.

the nature of the relationship and while the courts failed to differentiate between fornication and concubinage, it is by no means clear that parishioners viewed them in the same way.

Hostility towards a Religious Change

The confused and inauspicious circumstances which accompanied the introduction of clerical marriage have been chronicled and analysed by Helen Parish. She highlights the struggle for acceptability faced by clergy wives based on a reputation coloured by rhetoric and polemic and the practical confusion derived from the Marian deprivations. Lay attitudes to clerical marriage at this point, she concludes, ranged between ‘uncertainty, fear and outright opposition’.²⁵ Cases from church court records in Essex and Kent between 1561 and 1563 certainly depict parishioners responding with bemusement and suspicion. In Boughton Malherbe (Kent) in 1561, Thomas Langley was married to a woman who had allegedly borne a child in Queen Mary’s day and whose husband was thought to be still alive. The parson of St Mildred, Canterbury (Kent), during the period 1563 to 1564, apparently lived forty miles from his wife.²⁶ In Braintree (Essex), Robert Basseloe had lived incontinently with Katherine Baker who was with child by him with a suggestion that she might have been his unrecognized wife.²⁷ Charles Askew of Minster Sheppey (Kent), was said to have two wives if not three, revealing a somewhat over-enthusiastic, if not opportunistic, approach to marriage.²⁸ The conjugal arrangements of the curate John Blackhall seemed particularly convoluted. He was presented at Snave (Kent) for marrying Elizabeth Essex although he already had a wife. He abandoned Elizabeth after a mere eleven weeks and his whereabouts were unknown. His ‘other’ wife possibly resided at Shadoxhurst where he was presented for keeping company with a

²⁵ Parish, ‘It Was Never’, pp. 63-6, 68.

²⁶ *Church Life in Kent being the Church Court Records of the Canterbury Diocese 1559-1565*, ed. A. J. Willis (London and Chichester, 1975), p. 13, nos 63, 68.

²⁷ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life, vol. 2, Morals and the Church Courts* (Chelmsford, 1973), p. 218.

²⁸ *Church Life*, p. 13, no. 65.

widow three or four nights a week.²⁹ However, although such antics failed to imbue the institution of clerical marriage with any semblance of dignity, we should exercise caution before viewing them as representative of early clerical marriage in general.

Confusion did not, of course, always result in animosity. The situation in Sheepy Magna (Leicestershire) highlights the complexity surrounding attitudes to clerical sexual relationships. In 1554, John Typpinge recalled that four years earlier, when Joan Vincent, the vicar's wife had been riding in nearby Sibson, Mistress Johnson had offered her a drink. Mistress Johnson had referred to Joan as 'good wif Standley' to which Joan had replied that 'hir name was not Standley but maistres Vincent'. Yet, in spite of being unclear as to whether Joan Standley was the wife or concubine of the vicar, Mistress Johnson had offered her hospitality.³⁰ Further testimony indicates that Joan Vincent was well-integrated within the community for she 'went to churchings and other meytyns among the wives of the parishe' and as a couple, she and her husband had been seen at Sibson and Alderson 'sittinge and making merie'.³¹ The references to her as Joan Standley rather than Vincent may be a recognition that by this time she had lost the right to be called Joan Vincent. However, as the references predate the deprivation, it is more probable that the idea of clerical marriage had not yet been absorbed into the communal psyche. Regardless of the confusion over her actual relationship with the vicar, Joan was part of the network of female interaction as is evident in depositions made by several witnesses. Perhaps the female parishioners were exercising their own judgement on Joan's moral worth and decided that she was a woman of good repute. In doing so, they were able to prioritize her character as an individual over her connection to the vicar about which they may or may not have had reservations.

²⁹ *Church Life*, p. 18, no. 65, p. 60, no. 478.

³⁰ BI, CP. G.3455.

³¹ Ibid.

As the populace had yet to embrace the protestant ideal, it is unsurprising that, in the early years of Elizabeth's reign, when listing their objections to religious change, individuals included a dislike of clerical marriage. The provocation suffered by the Bishop of Worcester and his wife at the hands of Sir John Bourne has been documented earlier but other members of Bourne's household were involved in trying to intimidate the wives of the cathedral clergy.³² In 1563, Mrs Avice and Mrs Wilson, wife of the Dean, both 'honest and sober' women, were violently assaulted when crossing the River Severn in their own boat. Sir John Bourne's wife, son Anthony, and several servants joined them and the son, 'blaspheming and swearing', announced 'Now you are among Papists. As for you Mrs Avice, you are a Shrew. And Mrs Wilson, your Husband is a good Fellow. Yee can want no Help; if yee do, send for me'. One of the servants then assaulted Mrs Avice.³³

Also in Worcestershire, in 1566, Robert Barnes of Bushley made several speeches against the religious changes employing decidedly colourful language. He wished that 'we might have the Latyne service ageyne within this realme', indeed, he had 'as lyff one shulde shite in his potage as reede unto hym thenglyshe service'. He would go twenty miles to hear a mass and was prepared to 'carye a fagot vij myles to burne one of this religion now professed'. He stated that all priests were 'false knaves' so it unsurprising that he was no admirer of clergy wives. When the mason William Smyth announced, presumably in hope, that 'prierstes wyffes shall shorteley were grene gownes & redde cappes', Barnes had agreed adding that 'then they shalbe knowen lyke stronge whores or harlots as they bee'.³⁴

'A contempner of the minister of God's holy word', John Smythe, a tailor from Kent, was revealed in Archbishop Parker's visitation of 1569, to have called John Forcett, vicar of New Romney, a knave. In the alehouse and openly in the street, not only did he

³² See above, pp. 205-6.

³³ J. Strype, *Annals of the Reformation, vol. 1* (London, 1735), pp. 390-1.

³⁴ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/1, ff. 99 -100v.

call the vicar's wife an 'errant whore' but he also declared that 'all the married Priests in England are knaves, and their wives are very whores, and that he would abide by it'.³⁵ In the same year, at Hernhill, Humphrey Sackewell was taken to despise 'matrimony in our minister, [and] did railingly call his wife bitch whore [and] fox'.³⁶ Both perpetrators were considered to be men of ill-repute. Smythe, was described as a 'common Drunkard, a common Ribald, a common Railer', and Sackewell was a 'drunkard and a railer against divers men and women, and a carrier of tales from one to another'. Drink appears to have liberated their deeper personal convictions; anger produced a similar effect in others. For these two men, the minister's wife became another target for their general malevolence but one for whom there were ready-made and age-old insults. As the personification of religious upheaval, it was easier to rail against the parson's wife rather than to articulate disquiet over the finer points of doctrinal change. An attack on clerical marriage or a clergy wife could serve as an outlet for pent up frustration at the bewildering array of unwelcome religious reforms which they may have feared were acquiring an air of permanence.

The parishioners of Minstead in the New Forest in 1566 simply could 'not brook' that the minister there should have a wife, and Nicholas Stannarde of Laxfield (Suffolk), in 1571, declared that 'the mariage of preistes are [sic] not lawfull, and that no maryed preist is of the church of God'.³⁷ Among the objectors to clerical marriage, there were a few who based their disapproval on scriptural knowledge and an understanding of the subtleties of doctrinal debate. In Ribchester (Lancashire), in 1574, a parishioner showed concern over the effective administration of the sacraments as he said that 'he would rather receive the holy communion at the devil or a dog than at the hands of [him] being

³⁵ *Archbishop Parker's Visitation*, transcribed by A. Hussey, *Home Counties Magazine*, 5 (1903), p. 114.

³⁶ *Archbishop Parker's Visitation*, p. 10; N. B. Bjorklund, "'A Godly Wyfe is an Helper': Matthew Parker and the Defence of Clerical Marriage", *Sixteenth Century Journal* 32, 2 (2003), p. 360; E. J. Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford, 1994), p. 63.

³⁷ C. Haigh, *Plain Man's Pathways*, p. 204; *The Letter Book of John Parkhurst*, p. 120.

a married minister'.³⁸ In York in 1570, William Allen, alderman, believed that the preacher, Ralph Tonstall, lied in saying that the apostles were married and lived with their wives.³⁹ Some were troubled by the impact of a married ministry on the life of the parish. In Dymchurch (Kent) in 1576, William Lucas finally conceded that clergy wives should be 'sober, wise discreet, ancient and women past children' but had previously declared that 'ministers should have no wives for the good[s] they have should sustain the poor, where now it doth maintain them, their wives and children'.⁴⁰ He was reflecting the view that now permitted to marry, ministers would divert the resources of the parish away from the less fortunate and towards the needs of their immediate family. In 1581, William Nightingale of Wye (Kent) believed ministers 'ought to be married to their books and not to their wives'.⁴¹

Over a decade after clerical marriage was permitted, the authenticity of a married ministry was still questioned by some. Those who remained steadfast in their conservative religious views continued to use the issue of clerical marriage as the focus of their dissension and continued to promulgate arguments against it. Doubts about the validity of clerical marriages were most prevalent in the first decade of the reign, timing which suggests difficulty in accepting the concept and reality of clerical marriage. However, as the institution became more firmly established and as confessional identities became more polarized, opponents appear to have voiced their feelings more unambiguously.

Events in the archdeaconry of Northampton demonstrate that elements of resistance to clerical marriage on doctrinal grounds continued. The county, which Haigh believed only showed evidence of any real commitment to Protestantism after 1570,

³⁸ Carlson, *Marriage*, p. 63; C. Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge, 1975), p. 216; H. L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation* (Aldershot, 2000), p. 182.

³⁹ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', pp. 26-7; C. Cross, 'Exemplary Wives and Godly Matrons: Women's Contributions to the Life of York Minster between the Reformation and the Civil Wars', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 77 (2005), pp. 173-4.

⁴⁰ Collinson, *Birthpangs*, pp. 165-6, fn. 15.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

possessed leading local families which favoured Puritan ideology alongside a 'hard core of recusant families'.⁴² John Turnor, the schoolmaster at Irtlingborough, as well as being suspected as a sorcerer, was described in 1577 as 'a great rowseler up of them [the inhabitants] in Romish and corrupt religion'. Moreover, the presentment states that 'he useth to speake against the marriage of ministers' as exemplified 'in a foolish scrole herunto pinned' which sadly does not survive.⁴³

In 1570, a 'Papisticall Byll' condemning the institution of clerical marriage circulated on the streets of Northampton. The handbill revisited the themes of earlier debates which it rehearsed in vocabulary directly impugning the sexual integrity of ministers' wives. It had declared that 'every preaching knave must have a whoore in house to treade' and that there was 'not now a strumpet whore in all the land to have' as they had been 'sodainly snatched up with some Geneva knave'. Unsurprisingly, it also labelled ministers' children as bastards. A robust response in a similar format was soon formulated. The answering ballad asserted that clerical marriage had put an end to the stews frequented by unchaste priests and asserted the value of preaching.⁴⁴ Northampton as a town had embraced Protestantism and would seem, therefore, an unlikely setting for such a direct attack on clerical marriage. However, the verses specifically aimed at 'Maister Wiborne' suggest that the original ballad was in part provoked by the Puritan leanings of a powerful faction within the town.⁴⁵ In the turf wars between competing confessional

⁴² C. Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics, and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford, 1993), p. 278; W. J. Sheils, *The Puritans of the Diocese of Peterborough 1558-1610* (Northampton, 1979), p. 112.

⁴³ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/12, f. 118r.

⁴⁴ *An answer to a papisticall byll, cast in the streetes of Northampton, and brought before the iudges at the last syes* (London, 1570), STC (2nd edn) 15030.

⁴⁵ W. J. Sheils, 'Religion in Provincial Towns: Innovation and Tradition', in F. Heal and R. O'Day (eds), *Church and Society in England: Henry VIII to James I* (London, 1977), pp. 168-71. In 1571, shortly after the publication of the two bills, Percival Wiburn intended to establish the order of Northampton which, with the permission of the mayor and Bishop, aimed to follow the Genevan template and merge the religious and civic institutions of the town. When aware of its full implications, Bishop Scambler quickly moved to suppress the order.

ideologies, clerical marriage proved a simple and obvious mark of differentiation and an easy target for exploitation.

Continuing criticism of clerical marriage could even come from within the ranks of the clergy. In 1582, Edward Vaughan, curate of Lowick (Northamptonshire) and an evident church papist, made known from the pulpit his views on a married ministry. Although unlicensed to preach, Vaughan had defied episcopal authority and done so in his own and other parish churches where he had expounded the view that the marriage of priests was 'not lawfull by the word of god'. Seeming to honour his promise to recant, Vaughan had, as instructed, begun a sermon in Islip church by rehearsing the teachings in support of clerical marriage before veering off message and proceeding to refute them. What Hosea had said of the priests of his time, namely that 'the priestes & prophetes have the sperit of fornicacion', Vaughan claimed, could also be said of current ministers. He went on to declare that 'the women whom the apostles laid with then were nonnes' and that the apostles 'forsoke their wyves and never used them after they were chosen into the ministrie'. According to Vaughan, 'praying & fasting were sufficient to kepe any man unmarried' and the doctrine that those whom god had joined together let no man put asunder, did not apply to ministers 'for god hath not ioyned them together'. These were not comments made in the heat of the moment but a serious and reasoned attack on clerical marriage. Furthermore, coming from within the church, indeed from the pulpit of the parish church, they occasioned real concern among the diocesan hierarchy. Bishop Scambler's hope that Vaughan's public denunciation of his former statements would neutralize the impact of his sermons had gone horribly wrong. Frustration and awareness of the implications can be heard in the tone of Scambler's response. He admonished Vaughan saying that many hearers had been 'drawn to thinck the mariage of ministers on

thes dayes unlawfull by your doctrine'.⁴⁶ The long term consequences of Vaughan's intervention are impossible to assess although there is little evidence of overt hostility to married ministers or their wives in the Northampton Correction books. The only incident which does not appear to arise from a personal altercation occurred much later when, in 1588, Elizabeth Smith of Abington was said 'to have scolded againste the minister wyfe sayeing the Minister was a wicked man and that shee was a paultry prests wyfe', claiming also that the minister 'preched nothinge all whitsontyde but baderye' [bawdry].⁴⁷

Several of the enduring adages against clergy wives betray a longing for times past. The view that 'it was never a good world since ministers must have wives', expressed by Anne Grecyan of Seamer (Yorkshire), in 1586 seems to have become an accepted trope. Richard Fox articulated a similar sentiment in Nottinghamshire two years earlier saying 'it was never a good world synce prestes were maryed' and calling the wife of the vicar of Gringley 'paynted stocke'. He had also said that 'prestes calves and byshoppes calves would over rone the Realm'.⁴⁸ In 1572, Robert Midlam in Burnham (Somerset) said that 'never an honest woman in England would marry anie priest or Bisshopp' and it was reported that he had 'often and sundrye tymes' said that 'it was never merrie in England synce the newe laws began nor never wilbe as long as yt doth last and he hoped to lyve so longe to see the laws turne againe'.⁴⁹ This nostalgic figure of speech proved particularly long-lived for, in 1610, Hugo Holland and his wife of King's Sutton (Northamptonshire) were presented for saying 'the world was never merry since priests were married'. The Hollands had also remarked that the first night that Mrs Smith was married to her minister husband, she 'gave hir selffe to the divell'. In so saying, they were repeating another long-

⁴⁶ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X608/17, ff. 4-5.

⁴⁷ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X609/21, f. 208v.

⁴⁸ *Transcriptions of Proceedings*, p. 54-51.

⁴⁹ SHC, Deposition Book, D\D/cd15. Midlam himself had 'disquieted and molested dyvers of his neighbors' including the previous vicar and several women reported his unwelcome sexual advances. By organizing bear-baiting on Sundays and enticing 'many of Burnham parishe' to absent themselves from the sermon, he had not endeared himself to the vicar, George Carrant or the more devout among the congregation.

established and commonly uttered sentiment and one that apparently predated the introduction of clerical marriage.⁵⁰ In 1572, for the benefit of a young woman who was staying at the vicarage, the mistress of the aged vicar of Tugby (Leicestershire) made a point of temporarily declining his nocturnal invitation with the words that ‘who so did putt there foote in a pristes bed, dyd put yt in the devells mowthe’.⁵¹ As late as 1634, some Oxfordshire women jested that the local minister’s wife was ‘in dangerous case for she that put her leg into the parson’s bed did put her foot into hell’.⁵² At New Malton (Yorkshire), a libel against ministers and their wives was circulating in 1580.⁵³ Collinson documents two examples of sayings from Kent which compromised the dignity of clergy wives. One, a song, contained the refrain ‘all priests wives are drabbles or queens’ and the other, almost proverbially, stated that ‘there is a never new trick but ministers’ wives bring them first of all up’.⁵⁴ Upheavals in the fundamentals of religious belief triggered a nostalgia for ‘merrier’ times which manifested itself in complaint not only against ministers’ wives but against preachers, Puritans and services in English, all of which shared the distinction of being easily identifiable symbols of change.⁵⁵

There seems little doubt that the ecclesiastical authorities, ministers and their wives would be sensitive to criticism given the language in which opposition to clerical marriage was expressed. As late as 1576, the unmarried William Dorington, rector of St Peter’s in Chester, for example, was quick to defend his married colleagues against a

⁵⁰ Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy*, p. 35.

⁵¹ LRO, 1D41/13/8/18v, 19r.

⁵² P. Marshall, ‘Discord and Stability in an Elizabethan Parish: John Otes and Carnaby, 1563-1600’, *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*, 71 (1999), p. 196; P. E. H. Hair, *Before the Bawdy Court* (London, 1972), p. 201; B. Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2003), p. 274; D. Loades, ‘Anticlericalism in the Church of England before 1558: “An Eating Canker”’, in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), p. 3. ‘Coarse humour and amused contempt’ did not necessarily equate to active hatred.

⁵³ C. Haigh, ‘Anticlericalism and Clericalism, 1580-1640’, in N. Aston and M. Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism in Britain c.1500-1914* (Stroud, 2000), p. 22.

⁵⁴ Collinson, *Birthpangs*, pp. 67-8; an extensive search has failed to reveal the mocking of minister’s wives as a theme in ballads.

⁵⁵ Haigh, *Pathways*, pp. 204-5.

perceived attack. When Dorington commented that ‘he had but xli a yere’, William Ball commiserated saying that it was ‘but a smalle lyvinge to kepe a Gennet’.⁵⁶ Dorington, admitting that he did not know what a gennet was, had chosen to interpret it to mean that the ‘mariages of mynisters be vnlawfull’ and had replied that ‘he wold finde no fault with their mariages let them marrie in godes name’.⁵⁷ The rector had misheard or misunderstood but his sensitivity on the subject possibly led him to confuse the word gennet with jellet and its far less innocuous meaning.

In such an atmosphere of vulnerability, it could be supposed that all those who spoke against clerical marriage in general, and clergy wives in particular, would be pursued through the courts. The frequent use of the terms ‘whore’ and ‘priest’s whore’, given both the subtext and the fragility of a woman’s reputation, was not easy to ignore. When cases came to court, they were presented as office rather than instance cases which indicates that the ecclesiastical authorities considered that an attack on a minister’s wife should be taken seriously not only for the damage done to her reputation but because by implication, it impugned the integrity of the ministry itself. This is amply demonstrated by proceedings against Joan Gonan in 1579. Joan had not directly criticised the minister’s wife, or clergy wives as a group, when she said she would never marry a minister. Her rejection of the advances of ‘Sir Peter, a minister ... [and] a sutor unto her in the way of marriadge’, were no doubt personally wounding but rather than simply declining his hand, Joan had embellished her refusal with forthright comments. She had reportedly said either that ‘she had lever have to doe meaninge in adulterie with as manie men as can stand in the churchyard rather then to be a priestes wyfe’ or that ‘she had lether have to doe with as manie men as coulde stande in an half acre of lande then marrie with hym’. Whatever the exact wording, the meaning, which was clearly and crudely expressed, was deemed to

⁵⁶ *OED*, a gennet or jennet, a small Spanish horse; *OED*, Jillet, a giddy or flighty young woman; a jilt; sometimes, a familiar or contemptuous term for a girl or young woman, a wench.

⁵⁷ Cheshire Archives and Local Studies, EDC 5 1576.4. I am indebted to Patricia Cox for this reference.

be offensive to ministers' wives in general. It was also interpreted as an insult to the wife of her own minister, in recognition of which, it was required that on the next Sunday she 'openlie in the church of Myddlezoie ... aske the vycar his wife forgiveness in offendinge hir'.⁵⁸

However, the tally of unfavourable comments, as revealed in my research and in the wider historiography, is small. The numbers accrued from the extensive geographical coverage and the length of the reign, do not support the idea of widespread opposition and condemnation so frequently depicted. In the diocese of Ely, Carlson was unable to find a single example of a verbal attack on either the concept of clerical marriage or on an individual clergy wife which led him to dismiss suggestions that there was 'deep resentment' against clerical marriage.⁵⁹ The attitude of the bishops, as represented in their articles of visitation, lends weight to this argument. Had parishioners regularly subjected clergy wives to abuse, articles of enquiry drawn up for episcopal visitations would have been the obvious means of actively seeking out perpetrators yet the bishops remained silent on the issue. Their anxieties over clerics and the opposite sex continued to focus entirely on the age-old issue of 'suspect' women entering their dwellings.⁶⁰ When Edwin Sandys asked about words or violence, he referred solely to abuse of the minister, and made no mention of the minister's wife.⁶¹ As both he and his wife had been at the receiving end of John Bourne's taunts, he was not unaware that clerical marriage had its opponents but he does not seem to have perceived it as a widespread problem and there is very little evidence of opposition to clerical marriage within the Worcester Deposition

⁵⁸ SHC, Act Book, D\D/ca/61.

⁵⁹ Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 27; D. Spaeth, 'Words and Deeds: Gender and the Language of Abuse in Elizabethan Norfolk', *History Workshop Journal*, 78 (2014), p. 21, fn. 64. The situation in Norfolk was little different for Spaeth found that 'in the 1580s, there were 107 prosecuted challenges to questmen or churchwardens, 79 to ministers or preachers and three to the wives of ministers or questmen'.

⁶⁰ References to the attire of clergy wives have been discussed above, see pp. 170-2.

⁶¹ *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Period of the Reformation, vol. 3, 1559-1575* (London, 1910), W. H. Frere and W. P. M. Kennedy (eds), p. 227.

books.⁶² Episcopal inaction, while not proof that opposition was entirely absent, does suggest that it was considered insufficiently pressing to require intervention.

In fact, only towards the end of the century do articles begin to consider criticism of clerical marriage. By 1586, Bishop Aylmer of London had added the phrase ‘and specially raylers against Ministers, and against their marriages’ to the corresponding article of 1577 which enquired after ‘sowers of discord’.⁶³ Bishop Vaughan followed his predecessor’s example and asked the same question in his 1605 visitation. In the first half of the seventeenth century, Overall of Norwich, Hewson of Oxford, Wren at Hereford and then at Ely and Owen of St Asaph all sought out those who had spoken against ministers’ marriages in general or against their wives in particular.⁶⁴ In the years immediately after the introduction of clerical marriage articles of this nature would not have occasioned surprise. Their absence may be an indication that the ecclesiastical hierarchy felt it better not to anticipate, highlight or encourage opposition but it seems unlikely that an extensive problem would have been met with such apparent inertia. The appearance of references to minister’s marriages in episcopal visitations occurs at the end of the reign when clerical marriage ‘no longer seems to have caused comment’.⁶⁵ As the question is tacked on to articles about anti-social behaviour including the abuse of ministers, it perhaps reflects a closer identification of the minister’s wife with the clerical team and a recognition that she, like her husband, needed to be protected from abusive comments and behaviour.

The later references may well also be an indication of the increasing polarization of confessional identity within England and a means of identifying those of a catholic

⁶² See above, pp. 205-6, 253.

⁶³ [*Articles to*] *be inquired of within the dioces of London, in the visitation of the reuerend father in God, Iohn Bishop, of London* (London, 1586), STC (2nd edn) 10252; 1577, STC (2nd edn) 10251; 1598, STC (2nd edn) 10253.

⁶⁴ *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, vol. 1*, ed. K. Fincham (Woodbridge, 1994), pp. 36, 96, 166, 195; *Visitation Articles and Injunctions of the Early Stuart Church, vol. 2*, ed. K. Fincham (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 142, 154-5, 178.

⁶⁵ P. Tyler, ‘The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy’, in *Studies in Church History*, 4 (1967), pp. 87-8.

persuasion. Haigh offers an assessment of the dynamics of acceptance of clerical marriage which accords with his more general argument for the measured progress of Protestantism.⁶⁶ He also observed that where married ministers and their dependants were 'subjected to frequent abuse', vilification was centred mainly, but not exclusively, in conservative parts of the country.⁶⁷ Yet three Essex cases from the 1590s demonstrate the pockets of opposition could remain even in areas noted for their advanced Protestant views; John Mous at Little Stambridge, the Wakelins at Hempstead, and Benedict Mayers at Bradfield, all repeated the time-honoured comments about whores.⁶⁸ Elsewhere, Catholics continued to disapprove of clerical marriage. In 1596, the wife of Nicholas Calverde of St Lawrence, Walmgate (York), was said to have called Mr Patten's wife 'priest whore, and his children priest calves and priest bastards'.⁶⁹ Nicholas Burstowe of Tatsfield (Surrey) apparently hoped to see married ministers separated from their wives. In 1591, he said publicly 'that he did hope to live the day to see 20 ministers wives to be widows and their husbands alive; and that not only he did hope to see it but a great many more as well as he did hope to see it' As Burstowe was frequently indicted for recusancy, his confessional leanings are clear.⁷⁰ Similar sentiments continued to be expressed in Sussex which held a significant recusant population. In 1593, a woman claimed 'that all priests wives were counted trulls' and the minister's wife was 'the mistress of a reading priest's trull'.⁷¹ In 1605, John Snepp told John Frewen, the rector of Northiam (Sussex) that since ministers 'ought not to marry' their children were 'not legitimate'.⁷² In 1586, Edward Eaton, seeing a portrait of the Queen in the hall of the vicarage at Ringwood

⁶⁶ C. Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', in P. Marshall (ed.), *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640* (London, 1997), p. 251.

⁶⁷ Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and Clericalism', p. 22.

⁶⁸ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 215.

⁶⁹ Cross, 'Exemplary Wives', p. 173.

⁷⁰ *Calendar of the Assize Court Records: Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (London, 1980), p. 386, no. 2327. See also p. 61, no. 309, p. 738, no. 129, p. 240, no. 1364, p. 351, no. 2088, p. 373, no. 2239, p. 375, no. 2245, p. 418, no. 2516.

⁷¹ R. L. Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis, 1981), p. 94.

⁷² *Ibid.*

(Hampshire), predicted that she would not live long and appeared to anticipate a return to Catholicism on her death when married ministers and their wives would ‘kno for it’ and there would be ‘better houses kepte ere it be longe’. He then threatened the vicar’s wife, Alice Lake, saying that he would ‘make a marcke upon the dore’ and that among the ministers and wives who would ‘rue it’, she would be ‘the firste’.⁷³ References to priests’ whores and priests’ bastards continued to provide a ready taunt for those who still wished to register ‘their disaffection with their English Protestant minister’ or indeed with the Protestant faith.⁷⁴

Reactions to a Social Experiment

The instances of abuse quoted so far have largely been impersonal comments aimed generically at the wives of ministers and voiced as objections to religious change or the introduction of clerical marriage as an institution. This was not always the case, as the invective and insult directed at the spouses of ministers could and did become intensely personal. The opening vignette, demonstrates that to avoid jumping to the conclusion that every attack on the moral probity of a parson’s wife originated in hostility to her very existence, it is helpful to understand the background to the case itself. A dissection of some of these exchanges opens a window into the realities of parish life and the difficulties faced by these women. Unfortunately, entries in church court records do not always specify the nature of a confrontation let alone its cause. Although in 1565, Alice Stewkley, widow brought a defamation case against Elizabeth Sutton, wife of Richard Sutton, clerk of Raunds (Northamptonshire), the details of the circumstances are not given.⁷⁵ In 1577, Thomas Cole was presented for abusing the vicar of Hambledon and his wife but the entry concludes ‘in wordes as [blank]’.⁷⁶ In 1602, Collett Pickard of

⁷³ State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1586, SP12/195, f. 126.

⁷⁴ M. Wolfe, ‘The Tribe of Levi: Gender, Family And Vocation in English Clerical Households, circa 1590-1714’ (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Ohio State University, 2004), p. 198.

⁷⁵ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, ML 558, f. 96v.

⁷⁶ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X608/15, f.75r.

Thurmaston (Leicestershire) was presented as a common scold for slandering the minister's wife but again her actual words and motivation go unrecorded.⁷⁷

In 1578 in Pisbrooke (Bisbrooke, Rutland), events had taken a more violent turn. Jane Robinson was brought before the church court where it was alleged that she 'came runninge forth of her maisters house and did strike the vicars wife maliciouslie in the churchyarde'. A few pages later the wife of Simon Palmer, clerk, appeared before the court where it was said that she did strike Jane Robinson in the churchyard and that the said Jane did strike her againe'.⁷⁸ Although the entries fail to establish who struck the first blow and why, rather than a deep-seated aversion to clerical marriage, this seems to have been an altercation based on personal grievances. The court's astute decision in a 1583 Nottinghamshire case suggests that officials recognized that sometimes arguments simply got out of hand. Hector Walkingham, vicar of Hayton, initiated a suit against Barbara Chamber [alias Clomber] 'for calling Mr Hector's daughter preastes calfe'; that she would 'not be rueled by her parentes' suggests Barbara possessed a somewhat wayward nature. Anne Walkingham was also required to appear and the court dismissed the two parties on condition 'that they lyve in quyetnes together'. They were 'to move no discord amongst theyre frendes And presently in open court to aske the one to the other forgeveness'.⁷⁹ On this occasion, common sense seems to have prevailed.

The choice of words employed in a violent confrontation in a street in Halifax (Yorkshire) suggests that the vicar's wife came under attack on account of her marriage. Actually it was Magdalene, wife of the vicar Christopher Ashburn, who was being presented for the use of sexually defamatory language as she had called Margaret Waterhouse 'a hoore and a bawdy hoore'. In her defence, Magdalene claimed that Margaret and various other women had lain in wait for her 'rayling and scoldinge and

⁷⁷ LRO, Archdeaconry Court, Act Books, Office Causes, 1D41/13/25/19v.

⁷⁸ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, ff. 88v, 95r.

⁷⁹ *Transcriptions of Proceedings*, vol. 1, p. 54-30-1.

callinge [her a] common hore and bad hir geat hir sonne hir basterde with manye suche lyke words' before proceeding to beat her.⁸⁰ This scene fits Haigh's observation that it was usually local women who mocked a minister's wife.⁸¹ Name-calling and the exchange of derogatory words between women are far from unusual in church court presentments. Indeed, Houlbrooke concluded that defamation cases before the Norwich diocesan records, mainly derived from a 'vigorous slanging match with a neighbour'.⁸² The early date, 1564, and the insult to her son that may lead us to suspect Magdalene's attackers were not in favour of ministers taking wives but significantly they had called her a 'common' whore not a priest's whore. In the German context, Susan Karant-Nunn perceived difficulties in distinguishing hostile reactions that were personal from those which 'reflected difficulty in adjusting to the suddenly imposed clerical marriage'.⁸³ However, Magdalene's attackers refrained from calling her a priest's whore and nowhere in the proceedings is there any testimony to substantiate an interpretation which suggests disapproval based purely on religious grounds.

While it is not possible to uncover the cause of the breakdown in the relationship between Edmund Marsh, vicar of Sherburn in Elmet (Yorkshire), and some of his female parishioners, accusations of whoredom were again bandied about freely. In 1589, Edmund's wife, Susan, accused Margaret Hailey of calling her variously a 'hoore', a 'queane' and a 'drabbe', and her husband gathered witnesses to challenge Margaret's denials. In the ensuing argument, Marsh called Margaret a 'drabbe to denye [the accusations]' and she retaliated by telling him to go home to 'that drab thy wife and taik upp hir drabb skirtes and wype thy mouthe with theme' before finally admitting that she

⁸⁰ BI, CP.G.1160

⁸¹ C. Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', in C. Haigh (ed.), *The English Reformation Revised* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 35.

⁸² Houlbrooke, *Church Courts*, p. 81.

⁸³ Karant-Nunn, 'The Emergence of the Pastoral Family', p. 81.

had indeed insulted his wife.⁸⁴ The reason for the original outburst is never divulged. A year later, however, tensions resurfaced and at a churching dinner with as many as twenty goodwives present, Marsh called Ellen Hailey ‘a whoore, arrand whoore, common whoore’ and accused her of being ‘a bawde’ to her daughter Elizabeth Taylor. Those present claimed to have been offended by his words and thought the good name of Ellen Hailey ‘muche hurte to be so termed abowte to her owne daughter in the presence and hearing of so many of her neighbors’; the court agreed and Ellen won her case.⁸⁵ Recurring interpersonal tension seems to have defined and blighted the relationship between Marsh, his wife and his female parishioners.

As the debate surrounding anticlericalism has shown there were many potential flashpoints in the relationship between a minister and his flock for the ‘the working life of a minister brought unavoidable dispute’.⁸⁶ ‘Problems of personality and style’, in Cressy’s view, compounded social, cultural and financial factors and produced a ‘brittle and uncomfortable’ relationship. The resulting abuse amounted to ‘a standard occupational hazard’.⁸⁷ Disagreements between parishioners and their minister could provoke outbursts of frustration and resentment, but they were usually attacks on the individual not on the ministry in general.⁸⁸ From the inception of the letter testimonial, parishioners had been encouraged to identify the clergy wife with her husband’s vocation so that it is unsurprising that she became a proxy for displeasure in matters which were often beyond her control. In her study of the ministry in the seventeenth century, Wolfe observed that the ‘central position of a minister in his community’ rendered the clerical

⁸⁴ BI, DC.CP.1589/3.

⁸⁵ *OED*, drabbe, a dirty, untidy woman, a slut or slattern; BI, DC.CP.1590/3; BI, DC.CP. 1592/6, Marsh was again in court as the defendant in 1592 although on this occasion he won his case.

⁸⁶ Haigh, ‘Anticlericalism and Clericalism’, p. 23; Opposition to the financial implications of clerical marriage is considered in Chapter 5.

⁸⁷ D. Cressy, *Travesties and Transgressions in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 139-42.

⁸⁸ Cressy, *Travesties*, pp. 155, 159-60.

family ‘very likely to be embroiled in local conflicts’, a situation to which the sixteenth-century clerical family was equally susceptible.⁸⁹

By unpicking some of the incidents where the account is more expansive, the trigger, if not the root cause of the friction, can sometimes be ascertained. A disagreement which arose in Nottinghamshire, and in which John Hudleston, gentleman, had called the wife of the parson Robert Blackwood, a ‘Skottishe queane’, had originated in a clash over the rights to the living of Kirton. Hudleston had called Blackwood himself a ‘false knave ... hooreson, drunken slave’ and had threatened them both with destitution. This confrontation, unrelated to Blackwood’s marital state, had lapsed into the familiar vocabulary of insult where ministers were knaves and whoremongers and their wives queens, drabs and whores.⁹⁰

This type of language was not invoked in an incident in St John’s Bedwardine (Worcestershire) in 1590. Joan, wife of the vicar, was confronted by an angry and distressed parishioner named Tiler. In her husband’s absence and disregarding the advice of others that ‘it was not her fault’, Tiler had said ‘what art thou, thou art but the priestes wief, Tom Lennards wief’. His anger stemmed from the vicar’s failure to christen his child. One of the ‘gossips’ had failed to appear so the vicar had departed to sing evensong in the cathedral. Distraught that his three day old child and wife were close to death, Tiler sent a neighbour to beg Lennardes to return and christen the child promising to pay him five times the two pence that he received for singing in the choir. The vicar refused on the grounds that there was no-one else to sing bass thereby highlighting what Cressy characterizes the ‘different sense of urgency’ towards infant baptism displayed by the clergy and their parishioners. Although the clergy varied in their understanding of the

⁸⁹ Wolfe, ‘The Tribe of Levi’, p. 211; R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London, 1987), p. 253. In Germany too, pastors’ wives were caught up in ‘the dislike accorded to their husbands’.

⁹⁰ BI, HC.CP, 1590/13.

exigency, and indeed efficacy, of the sacrament, Tiler, believed that Lennartes was failing in his priestly duty. He accused the minister of setting 'more by a scald ijd then by his neighbours' and claimed that by 'godes blud, I am as good as he'. Cressy cites various presentments which mirror the frustration and anger felt in Worcester but it is the involvement of Mrs Lennartes that is of significance here.⁹¹

Lennartes and his wife do not come out of this well. Witnesses testified that Tiler's words were spoken in 'his anger and in a great fright of his child that was then unchristened' but an unsympathetic Lennartes refused to let Tiler seek his forgiveness. According to the testimony of Thomas Chance, gentleman, Lennartes had insisted that the matter be heard before the bishop. Others accused the couple of bribing the witnesses, described as 'poore folkes' in receipt of alms and of doubtful character; Mrs Lennartes had given 'a frise coate' and her husband had sent food. On this occasion at least, the minister and his wife had lost the support of the middling and better sort of his parishioners.⁹² This incident reveals the extent to which a clergy wife was identified with her husband's ministry. She could be blamed for his actions, or in this case inaction, and by supporting her husband, she could be drawn deeper into controversy.

Tiler had not employed the usual invective against minister's wives, but had resorted to another familiar tactic of claiming social parity with both the minister and his wife. Two years earlier, Elizabeth Smith of Abington (Northampton) had similarly sought to demean the social status of the minister's by referring to her as a 'paultry prests wyfe'.⁹³ Cressy notes that the profession of social parity with the clergy was a regular feature of verbal assaults directed at ministers but in these cases anticlerical sentiment and behaviour

⁹¹ D. Cressy, *Birth, Marriage and Death, Ritual, Religion and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), p. 105.

⁹² WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/4, ff. 88-89r, 90v-91r, 94v, 118v-119v, 119av, 122r & v.

⁹³ NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X609/21, f. 208v.

was extended their spouses.⁹⁴ As the parson's wife was closely identified with her husband's profession, parishioners assigned the same approach to her as they did to the minister himself. The timing of these later incidents is significant for they coincide with the increased professionalization of the clergy which further distanced ministers socially, economically and educationally from their parishioners.⁹⁵ No longer so often toiling alongside parishioners in the fields, sometimes embroiled in financial disputes and often parachuted into livings in which they had no existing family connections, establishing ties was difficult and protracted which allowed misunderstandings to develop and resentments to fester.

Haigh concluded that women mocked the minister's wife 'often because a social pre-eminence was claimed for her' and Tyler referred to villagers' resentment of a change in the 'pecking order'.⁹⁶ Haigh cites Mrs Austen of Aveley (Essex) who in 1609 criticised her husband's parishioners apparently in the belief that her position as the vicar's wife gave her the authority to do so and Mrs Plat of Graveney (Kent) who asserted her social superiority.⁹⁷ Mrs Plat felt that her position as the minister's spouse justified her appropriation of the 'chiefest pew in all the church', the seat of Judge Martyn and his wife. Her own seat, 'a blemishe to the church', she did not consider 'fyt for any the meanest of the parishioners ... muche lesse for the ministers wife'.⁹⁸ As parishioners were acutely aware that church seating symbolically defined the social order, it is hardly surprising that reseating was usually undertaken at the behest of the 'more substantial parishioners'.⁹⁹ Significantly, pew disputes involving women tended to reflect local

⁹⁴ Cressy, *Travesties*, p. 155.

⁹⁵ Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', p. 23; Tyler, *The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy*, p. 87.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', pp. 28, 35.

⁹⁸ Collinson, 'Shepherds', p. 215.

⁹⁹ M. Berlin, 'Reordering Rituals: Ceremony and the Parish, 1520-1640', in P. Griffiths and M. S. R. Jenner (eds), *Londinopolis: Essays in the Cultural and Social History of Early Modern London* (Manchester, 2000), p. 54; A. Flather, *The Politics of Place: a Study of Church Seating in Essex, c. 1580-1640* (Leicester, 1988), pp. 36,

rivalries which spilled into the church or were deliberately aired there as a means of drawing them into the public sphere.¹⁰⁰

The significant social standing acquired by clergy wives was derived from a combination of factors: a mandate based on their association with the ministry, their own social background, their literary ability and their own character and personal authority. It appears that individual clergy wives shared what Cressy describes as the late Elizabethan ministers' 'elevated view of clerical dignity' and some in exercising authority may have aroused resentment by their insistent and antagonistic behaviour.¹⁰¹ Regardless of the source of the clergy wife's assumed authority, if other members of the female parish network refused to defer graciously then tension was not easily avoided.

Historians and sociologists agree that communities are 'messy affairs' in which physical and metaphorical boundaries, in terms of inclusion and exclusion, relationships between individuals, and balances of power, are constantly renegotiated as part of their 'dynamic' construction.¹⁰² Although it is rarely possible to follow a quarrel from its origin to conclusion, the majority of disputes between ministers' wives and parishioners or the women of the parish, appear to lack any theological basis. The advent of the clergy wife at the parochial level, it would seem, was perceived as a social rather than a doctrinal change and initiated a process of realignment which was not always achieved without contention and friction.

135, 142; C. Wright, 'The Spatial Ordering of Community in English Church Seating, c. 1550-1700' (Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Warwick, 2002), pp. ii, 3, 172-85, 315.

¹⁰⁰ Flather, 'Politics of Place', pp. 43-5.

¹⁰¹ Cressy, *Travesties*, p. 141.

¹⁰² P. Burke, *Languages and Communities in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 6; R. W. Scribner, 'Communities and the Nature of Power', in his (ed.), *Germany: A New Social and Economic History, vol. 1* (London, 1996), p. 320; A. Shepard and P. Withington (eds), *Communities in Early Modern England: Network, Place, Rhetoric* (Manchester, 2000), p. 4; K. E. Spierling and M. J. Halvorson, *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe* (Aldershot, 2008), pp. 2-8.

The Impact of Abuse

Previous scholarship, concerned primarily with recording instances of abuse, makes little attempt to assess its impact on the recipients. While acknowledging the personal cost, Wolfe's focus was less on the wife than on her husband's ministry. She concluded that 'by undoing the honour and authority of both the master and mistress of the parsonage, such accusations disrupted the functioning of their household and his congregation'.¹⁰³ The impact on the wives, however, could be grave and in some instances, physical injury was incurred. In Lanford (Wiltshire) in 1579, the curate, William Hutchinson, complained on account of the injuries done to him by one John Stantor 'but especiallie for [the] beating of his wiefe'.¹⁰⁴ In 1572, in Hartlip (Kent), Joan, wife of the vicar, William Lambe, actually died from the injuries inflicted when Elizabeth and William Chadwicke, yeoman, broke into their home.¹⁰⁵ During the 1563 assault on the two cathedral clergy wives in Worcester, one of the servants of Anthony Bourne 'rushed on Mrs Avyce's Shoulders with his Buckler, and tear her Coat almost a Foot long and pierced unto the Skin, and hurt her'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the incident put the two women 'in great Fear'.¹⁰⁶

Those seeking redress in the courts were, of course, at pains to emphasize the harm done to the injured parties. Even when allowance is made for such embellishments, it is difficult to believe that the victims escaped entirely unscathed. Parker's 1569 visitation of Kent illustrates the effect of name-calling on one minister's wife. After Humphrey Sackewell insulted the pregnant wife of the minister of Hernhill, she was put in 'such fear, that since that time she hath been sick unto this day'.¹⁰⁷ While the origins of the 1580 dispute between Richard Perriall, clerk of St Michael, Ber Street, Norwich and William

¹⁰³ Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi', p. 203.

¹⁰⁴ Acts of the Privy Council, vol. 11, 1578-80, PC 2/12, f. 475.

¹⁰⁵ *Calendar of the Assize Court Records: Kent Indictments, Elizabeth I*, ed. J. S. Cockburn (London, 1979), no. 610, p.109; CAR Kent Maidstone Ass 1 Sept 1572; Jone Lambe was buried in 1572. <http://search.findmypast.co.uk/results/world-records/kent-burials>, accessed 8 February 2105.

¹⁰⁶ Strype, *Annals of the Reformation*, vol. 1, pp. 390-1; See above, pp. 205-6, 253.

¹⁰⁷ *Archbishop Parker's Visitation*, p. 10.

Fyddell are obscure, the consequences of Fyddell's behaviour on Katherine Perriall are clear. Both minister and wife had defamed Fyddell, having called him a 'whore maister' and 'whoremaisterly knave'. In his defence, Perriall explained how Fyddell had made Katherine's life difficult in that he:

woulde have knowen of my wyfe when I shoulde be forthe and from home to the entente he mighte have come to have been naughte with her. And when he sawe and percyved that he coulde not obteyne his purpose she coulde walke in no place in the stretes nether to markette nor ells where in reste for him but that he woulde have carried her to alehouses and Innes and toulde her that they shoulde have a chamber with locke and keye to yt to serve their purpose.¹⁰⁸

Although no physical violence had been employed, the threat had intimidated Katherine sufficiently to prevent her from undertaking her domestic duties.

Although slightly beyond the timeframe of this study, two libel cases brought before Star Chamber in the first decade of the seventeenth century are worthy of study for the level of detail which they contain and the conspicuous impact on the women involved. They also demonstrate the apparent helplessness of ministers' wives in the face of a determined attempt to undermine their good name. In both cases the wife was the subject of a locally distributed obscene verse which in itself challenges Prior's assertion that 'the abuse hurled at clergy wives lacked the cheerful bawdiness of popular songs'.¹⁰⁹ The studies of Adam Fox and Martin Ingram have demonstrated the mnemonic advantage of rhyme as a vehicle of abuse and the guaranteed repetition that derived from its capacity to entertain.¹¹⁰ Although distressing to the individual concerned, it was a

¹⁰⁸ NRO, DN/DEP18/19, 1580-1, ff. 232r-238.

¹⁰⁹ M. Prior, 'Reviled and Crucified Marriages: the Position of Tudor Bishops' Wives', in M. Prior (ed.), *Women in English Society 1500-1800* (London, 1985), p. 126.

¹¹⁰ A. Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule in Jacobean England', *Past and Present*, 145 (1994), pp. 61, 63; M. Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes in Early Modern England', in B. Reay (ed.), *Popular Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (London, 1998), p. 182; see also C. Marsh, *Music and Society in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2010), p. 284.

common form of ridicule directed at those in positions of authority and as such functioned as an important safety valve in a society defined by hierarchy and deference.¹¹¹ Clergymen could be the perpetrators as well as the subjects of rhymes, for both John Vaux, parson of St Helen's Auckland (County Durham), and John Swifte, a cleric from Havant (Hampshire), found themselves before the courts as authors of such verses.¹¹² By the beginning of the seventeenth century, however, as Fox has demonstrated, such libels had come to be perceived as potentially more serious, being defined as 'criminal'.¹¹³

In 1604, Henry Cunde, the vicar of Montford (Shropshire), brought a suit against Thomas and John Browne for devising a 'false and slaunderous libell' which they copied and distributed to friends and then published throughout the county and beyond.¹¹⁴ The verse itself (transcribed in Appendix 3) did not explicitly use the word 'whore', but it crudely accused Cunde's wife, Joan, of incontinency with five individuals: the keeper, the cobbler, a parson, one Thomas Adams while in Shrewsbury and 'a man I had almost forgote', whose identity remained obscure because 'it was so dark'. Mrs Cunde had allegedly indulged in behaviour associated with a whore, had aborted six children for fear that they would resemble their fathers and had made a cuckold of her husband.¹¹⁵ Henry Cunde's bill of complaint in defence of his wife unsurprisingly accentuated Joan's good character. They had, he insisted, 'lyved for diverse yeres together in great love and kyndnes without anye blemysh or reproch or infamye'. Indeed, Joan epitomized the perfect clergy wife for she was a 'woman of great modestie, good carriage and vertuous behaviour and soe noted, reputed, knowen and taken'. In fact, she:

dyd soe loyally and dutiffully behave herself towards ... [her husband] and soe
modestlye and howsewyfelike governe ... [his] howse and famylie that neither ...

¹¹¹ Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule', p. 72.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 53.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 55.

¹¹⁴ TNA, STAC 8/100/18.

¹¹⁵ TNA, STAC 8/100/18; Appendix 3.

[he] nor anye of her neighbours dyd or ever coulde charge, accuse or suspect her of anye sparke of light, lascivious or immodest behaviour, much less of anye dishonest vice or offence.

It is unsurprising that so much was made of Joan's apparent virtue given the detailed and intensely shaming accusations of the libel itself and the ruinous impact on her reputation. At this distance and without additional testimonies, Joan's true integrity cannot be attested. We cannot determine whether she was completely without blemish or whether she did have a discreditable reputation among the neighbours. However, for a woman to be talked about in this way was shaming and particularly so for a woman of standing.¹¹⁶

The comments about Joan's background are particularly revealing. Joan, a widow before her marriage to Henry Cunde, was a blacksmith's daughter by birth and the verse made clear that as such the authors considered her unsuitable for her new role:

but I think the silly vickar was a weary of his life
for of a blacksmithes daughter to make a priests wife.

It was also alleged that Henry Cunde should have known better for Joan (née Allyson) was already notorious and therefore doubly unsuitable as a potential wife:

what she was before I neede not to tell
for in naughtines shee did all maydes excell
thy wife weare meete a minstrells wyfe to bee
unmeete for a minister I doe tell thee.

We have evidence here, therefore, that not only should the behaviour of a minister's wife be beyond reproach, she should also come from a respectable social background.

¹¹⁶ L. Gowing, 'Women, Status and the Popular Culture of Dishonour', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5 (1995), p. 227-8; Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 121.

The attack may have arisen from malice perhaps as a result of jealousy, from Joan's inappropriate behaviour or she may have been the innocent victim of an attempt to undermine her husband's standing and authority. Henry Cunde was humiliated not only by the accusations against his wife but by the direct reference to himself as a cuckold and by the submission that he was profiting from his wife's immorality in having received ten pounds from Bradley for the use of his wife. His professional integrity was also threatened by the suggestion that Joan was the real author of his sermons. Fox concludes that libellous verses were often 'inspired by malicious and spiteful motives and had no justification other than petty personal jealousies', which may in part describe the situation here.¹¹⁷ The motives of the authors were attributed by its victims to 'secret and inward causeless malice' which aimed 'most unconscionably and uncharitably to put dissention, lite and debate' between man and wife.¹¹⁸ Exaggeration was a standard ploy in prosecuting cases of libel but the rhyme could only have served to increase marital tension regardless of whether the marriage was already on shaky ground. When documents speak of women's 'good and honest fame credit and reputacons' being 'traduced taxed sclaundred and brought in question', the seriousness and personal consequence behind the legal jargon should not be underestimated as Joan Cunde's subsequent fate in Montford testifies.¹¹⁹ Such was the impact of the besmirching of her good name and reputation, that she 'tooke such an inward grief and sorrowe that she presently fell sycke and pyned, wasted and consumed away and shortly afterward dyed'.¹²⁰

In the second case, *Coren v. Seede*, based in two parishes outside Bath in 1606, the impact of the libel, although less observably tragic, was still significant for the two

¹¹⁷ Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule', p. 76.

¹¹⁸ L. Gowing, 'Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London', *History Workshop Journal*, 35 (1993), p. 16.

¹¹⁹ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.28.

¹²⁰ TNA, STAC 8/100/18.

ministers' wives.¹²¹ Philippa Bewshin, wife of the vicar of Claverton (Somerset) became the subject of a libellous verse which implied that she had committed adultery with John Coren, vicar of Box, during his visits to the Claverton vicarage. Coren's wife was the recipient of an anonymous note alerting her to her husband's alleged behaviour (Appendix 4). Ingram cites this tale as an example of neighbours commenting on the behaviour of Philippa Bewshin but she may have become implicated in the antagonism occasioned by Coren's behaviour.¹²² At this distance, the truth of the matter cannot be unravelled from the insinuations and competing testimonies but a careful reading of the depositions indicates that Philippa's refusal to allow John Seede and his son Edward to stay for a second time at the parsonage because he was 'infamouslie spoken of for weomen by his owne famylie' may have contributed to the complex saga.¹²³ For a woman, the need to offer hospitality was fraught with danger and necessitated a fine balancing of etiquette. While 'too much friendliness would cause suspicion', Veronika Pohlig maintains that adultery could also be 'causally linked ... to a lack of hospitality and friendship'.¹²⁴ Philippa's refusal was not accepted by John Seede with good grace but provoked the riposte that:

it was no more discreditt to boord him ... then to entertaine Mr Coryne who tarryed there in her house two or three daies together ... and did use to staye so longe there he shold be Strayshorne (sic) ... alsoe that there were dyvers in the parishe who kept a Register of both how often he came thither and how longe he stayed there.¹²⁵

¹²¹ TNA, STAC 8/98/20.

¹²² M. Ingram, 'Ridings, Rough Music and Mocking Rhymes', p. 181; TNA, STAC 8/98/20.

¹²³ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.11, m.16. Philippa declared that she thought Edward Seede to be 'madd' and that his 'roguerye & villanie' would now be exposed.

¹²⁴ V. Pohlig, 'Adultery in Early Stuart England' (Unpublished Dissertation, Free University of Berlin 2009), pp. 119, 126.

¹²⁵ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.11.

But it seems that it was John Seede rather than the neighbours who was taking note and that he was enticing them to provide gossip with which to discredit Mrs Bewshin.¹²⁶ He attempted to spread scandal in a rumour but its failure to take off may suggest that his allegations were unsupported and that Philippa's explanation for Coren's visits (which was that the two parsons were preparing John Bewshin's late brother's notes for publication) was plausible. After the failed rumour and attempts by the Bewshins to ignore the initial provocation, Seede escalated his claims. In front of others, he directly questioned Mr Coren about the 'qualytye and parentage' of his wife and whether 'shee were a kind quyet and a good wyfe'. Coren replied that 'shee was wyfe good enough, but that shee would chyde sometymes as other weomen doe'.¹²⁷ Subsequently this exchange became part of a letter sent by Seede to Mrs Coren advising her in detail of her husband's indiscretions with Mrs Bewshin and warning her that 'the country speakes of it already'.¹²⁸ Philippa Bewshin's fall from a horse some seventeen years earlier which had prompted a miscarriage and long illness became an accusation that she had contracted the French pox 'by her adulterous and incontynent lyffe'.¹²⁹ As the case made its way through the courts, Seede became increasingly aggressive threatening Mrs Bewshin that 'if thou dost ... oppose thyself against mee I will make this place too hott for thee & thy husband'.¹³⁰

Seede employed a range of familiar tactics including the claim that his letter to Mrs Coren was merely 'a freendlie admonision', thereby exploiting the fine line between malicious gossip and the informal policing of neighbourhood morals.¹³¹ Nowhere did he use the word 'whore' but the clear implication was that Mrs Bewshin's supposed actions

¹²⁶ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.10, m.16.

¹²⁷ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.9, m.13; www.boxpeopleandplaces/ashley-history.html, accessed 13 February 2015. John Coren married Edith, daughter of Anthony Long of Ashley in 1601.

¹²⁸ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.3.

¹²⁹ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.3. The rumour about Mrs Bewshin's health had resulted in parishioners being 'offended for brynginge the clothes then used aboute her to the comon well'.

¹³⁰ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.9.

¹³¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 119; Capp, *When Gossips Meet*, pp. 275-7; Sharpe, 'Defamation and Sexual Slander', pp. 19-20, 22; TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.3.

spoke for themselves: the references to disease and the provision of food by Coren were part of the readily understood symbolism. A further allusion was made by John Seede's son, for when asked for certain dues for his 'diett' still outstanding from his original stay, Edward denied that he owed anything for he had paid as if he 'had beene in a bawdie house an whore howse or stewes'. Edward Seede was the original source of the libel which Mrs Bewshin variously called 'odious and filthy', 'beastly and barberous' and 'foul and scurilous'.¹³² The verse, which purported to come from John Coren read:

Good Mistress Toord
 At one bare word
 Your best parte stinkethe
 Yf stink be the best
 What then doth the rest
 As each man thinketh
 A poxe in your arse
 You have burnte a good tarse
 A very filthie lott
 And that was all I gotte

J. Co.¹³³

According to McGee, ocular malice which reduced victims to a defining physical characteristic was a 'regular feature' of libellous poems and this verse did not disappoint.¹³⁴

Wolfe sees incidents such as the Cunde and Coren cases as 'hitting specifically at the minister's honour' and judges that 'the identity and honour under attack belonged

¹³² TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.17.

¹³³ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.28.

¹³⁴ C. E. McGee, 'Pocky Queans and Hornèd Knives: Gender Stereotypes in Libellous Poems', in M. E. Lamb and K. Bamford (eds), *Oral Traditions in Early Modern Literary Texts* (Aldershot, 2008), p. 139.

primarily to the minister' whose 'reputation ... was often injured most of all'.¹³⁵ Undoubtedly a wife's questionable behaviour harmed her husband's standing but the involvement of the Star Chamber encouraged plaintiffs to exaggerate the extent of the damage. Strategic assertions of this kind, along with references to actions being 'to a greate sedition, trouble and breache of your majesties peace' are, as Steve Hindle has indicated, 'rhetorical and narrative tactics used to embellish the action in the plaintiff's favour' and should not necessarily be taken at face value.¹³⁶ Much is made in the Cunde bill of complaint not only of the damage to the personal reputations of Henry and Joan Cunde but also of harm done to the ministry. In claiming that Joan wrote her husband's sermons, Henry Cunde insisted that there was an attempt to undermine his ministerial credentials. The libel is said to have been circulated 'to the scorne of the ministrie and preachinge of the worde of god', and sought to condemn 'the preachinge of the worde of god and the mynistrie' to 'the evyll example of others'. Although Coren claimed that the libel against him had brought the 'ministrie yt self into reproche', 'discredit' and 'disgrace', he was himself no model minister.¹³⁷ His parishioners accused him of being 'an unpreaching minister [who] could not rightly nor had no power to administer the Sacrement'.¹³⁸ He was accused of blasphemy and it was said that he had cursed his own parishioners from the church porch.¹³⁹ His personal life was even less exemplary. He was so deeply in debt and so afraid of being issued with writs that he was always accompanied by an armed guard. In 1615, his drunkenness resulted in an appearance before the church courts when he was described as having been 'thre sheepe skinnes the wronge side out'.¹⁴⁰ The libel was offensive and provocative, but Coren's reputation, already at a low, was

¹³⁵ Wolfe, 'The Tribe of Levi', pp. 195, 197.

¹³⁶ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.28; S. Hindle, *The State and Social Change in Early Modern England, c.1550-1640* (Basingstoke and London, 2000), p. 79.

¹³⁷ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.28.

¹³⁸ B. H. Cunningham, *Records of the County of Wiltshire* (Devizes, 1932), p. 5.

¹³⁹ M. Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 110-11.

¹⁴⁰ S. Hobbs, 'Record Office News', *Wiltshire Family History Society* (October, 2004), p. 36.

probably less damaged than that of Philippa Bewshin's husband. His wife's alleged adultery was wounding and humiliating but his embarrassment would have been heightened by the suggestion that it took place in his own home and while he was performing his spiritual duties in the parish church on Sunday mornings.

The personal impact of such public humiliation was immense although rarely specified.¹⁴¹ There can be little doubt that, ridiculed among people they knew, the effect was, as Fox has argued, 'devastating' and perhaps more damaging than a physical assault.¹⁴² For women in particular the damage to their reputation was especially shaming, and for Joan Cunde, it cost her her life. It is unsurprising that allegation of infidelity provoked 'great variance discord debate and dissention' and 'disquietnes and discencon' in the Cunde and Coren households.¹⁴³ Philippa Bewshin said that the letter had 'bredd much discord & strife' between Coren and his wife.¹⁴⁴ Indeed, Mrs Coren's anger was such that her husband was 'sundrie tymes enforced (for quietnes sake) to departe out of his owne howse and to lodge in the house of [the parson of Bathampton] ... being about a myle distant from his owne house'. Philippa Bewshin's sister maintained that John Seede's stated intent was that the libel should cause Philippa's husband to 'forsake and putt her away ... whereby she shoulde be undone'.¹⁴⁵ It is recorded that Philippa 'did weepe and crye and was much greived', which probably belies the true extent of her distress.¹⁴⁶ In the face of such a sustained campaign, protracted legal action offered little immediate redress; slanderous comments were not without consequence and could not easily be dismissed.

¹⁴¹ Gowing, *Domestic Dangers*, p. 131; Marsh, *Music and Society*, p. 276.

¹⁴² Fox, 'Ballads, Libels and Popular Ridicule', pp. 74, 77.

¹⁴³ TNA, STAC 8/100/18; TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.7.

¹⁴⁴ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.17.

¹⁴⁵ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.13.

¹⁴⁶ TNA, STAC 8/98/20 m.17.

In defamation cases, witnesses frequently testified to the reputational damage ensuing from the alleged slander. In 1568, Alice Gilpin, wife of Cuthbert Gilpin, curate of Street (Somerset), gave evidence in a defamation case and declared that Margaret Herby's good name was 'the worst for that the wordes are spredd amongst all the parish'.¹⁴⁷ Four years later in the same county, two of the witnesses were invited to give their understanding of the meaning of 'slanderous wordes'. John Younge was clear in his definition that 'in his conscience and iudgement a slaunderous worde is suche a one as bringethe a man or woman into an evile name and fame or that anie way empayreth and diminishethe a mans honestie and goode conversatione'. Peter Williams was equally clear that malicious words took away a man's good name and as such were both ungodly and worthy of punishment. Furthermore, he declared, 'malice is a burning envie dwelling in the hart of man delighting in the hurt of his neighbour'.¹⁴⁸

In this particular case, it was the reputation of Lucy Hopporne, wife of the curate of Loxton, that was at stake. In the course of a 1572 journey undertaken by several men, including Williams, vicar of Christon (Somerset), Lucy's moral integrity had come under scrutiny. John Phyppin made the initial accusation that Lucy was a 'mislivinge woman with Henrie Bailie'. In a subsequent conversation in the parish church between Andrew Hopporne and his parishioners, mention of Hopporne's wife caused Phyppin to return to his theme and he announced that it was a 'pittie that suche a whore shoulde be suffred'. As in the above cases, Phyppin was challenging by implication both the curate's masculinity and his spiritual authority and, to heighten the impact, he had chosen to do so in front of his own parishioners and in the parish church, Hopporne's own domain. In court, Williams expressed the view that the initial comment was made 'maliciouslie and as yt appeared angrelie and of purpose to deffame' and that Phyppin had succeeded for

¹⁴⁷ SHC, Deposition Book, D\D/cd/12.

¹⁴⁸ SHC, Deposition Book, D\D/cd/25.

Lucy was ‘the worse thought of by reasone of the said slaunderous wordes’. Perhaps Phyppin’s slander arose from his personal antagonism but it was compounded by the ribald talk of a group of male travellers.¹⁴⁹ A group of men journeying between Oxford and Nettlebed in 1583 also engaged in slanderous gossip about a minister’s wife. Giles Turvild and William Chadwicke, rector of Checkendon, were present when Robert Porse called Agnes Wright, wife of the vicar of Lewknor, a whore. Porse elaborated, declaring that he could have lain with her as often as he liked, that she was common to every shepherdly knave, and a fencing master had taken her to Thame for a night, returning her next day to her husband saying he had done with her.¹⁵⁰ Were conversations of this type simply considered entertaining gossip with which to while away a journey? It is impossible to know, but it appears that the abuse focussed on the reputation of the individual rather than the concept of the clergy wife.

Perhaps conversations of this nature encompassed other local women and action was taken in these cases primarily because the gossip concerned the wives of ministers and because it was overheard by members of the clergy. All women were anxious to defend their honour and to maintain their good name and reputation but for the wife of a clergyman the need was even more pressing. Not only was there the fear that the taint of whoredom lingered in the minds of some parishioners but the whole clerical family was supposed to set an example of model behaviour. Any scandal attached to a minister’s wife or children damaged not only the impression of familial rectitude but, as was apparent in the above libels, the standing of the minister within his parish. Elizabeth, wife of the seventeenth-century minister Anthony Walker of Fyfield (Essex), would later warn that modesty was ‘a woman’s ornament and guard of chastity, which would seldom or never be attempted, did not some lightness, or unwary carriage embolden those who did

¹⁴⁹ SHC, Deposition Book, D\D/cd/25.

¹⁵⁰ *Oxford Church Courts, Depositions 1581-86*, ed. J. Howard-Drake (Oxford, 1994), p. 34, no.72; Collinson, ‘Shepherds’, p. 215.

assault it'.¹⁵¹ How protective Lucy and Agnes had been of their reputations is unclear but the behaviour of some ministers' wives did provoke communal censure. In Upminster (Essex) in 1569, for example, the wife of the rector, William Washer, had perhaps failed to demonstrate the requisite discretion, for Margery White alleged that she was having an affair with Humphrey, 'Mr Latham's man'. In front of the court, Margery stood by her accusation and was adamant saying, 'I did indeed say those words and I will never deny them' before adding, in an attempt to give her allegation even further credence, that Adria Ture had said the same 'about St Peter's tide last'.¹⁵²

The easiest and probably the most cutting epithet to hurl at the wife of a minister was absent from these cases of personal abuse: there was no reference to the priest's whore. When in 1600, Jeremy Whittam told Elizabeth Wilkinson, wife of the minister of Nevendon (Essex), 'thou art an arrant whore and I will prove thee an arrant whore', he used the time-honoured and most common insult directed at women.¹⁵³ In addressing such words to a minister's wife, Whittam was demonstrating a marked lack of respect, but although deeply insulting, his words make no reference to her husband's vocation. The attack was personal but by omitting the obvious prefix, he had neglected the simplest means of heightening the offence. As indicated in the opening vignette, it seems that language which had been commonplace in the middle of the century had ceased to be the vocabulary of choice when seeking to affront the wife of a clergyman. Haigh observed that among the clergy the 'volume of personal abuse apparently did not decline, and the vocabulary did not much change'.¹⁵⁴ The amount of abuse directed personally at clergy

¹⁵¹ Anthony Walker, *The Holy Life of Mrs. Elizabeth Walker, Late Wife of A. W., D.D., Rector of Fyfield in Essex....With Some Usefull Papers and Letters Writ by Her on Several Occasions* (London, 1690), p. 91.

¹⁵² Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 214; Mistresses Ewbank and Palmer were also said to have committed adultery. See above, p. 150.

¹⁵³ Emmison, *Elizabethan Life*, vol. 2, p. 214; NthRO, PDR, Correction Book, X607/14, f.40r. The behaviour of the wife of Anthony Palmer, clerk of Brampton Ash (Northamptonshire), is not in doubt for in 1577 she confessed to adultery with Simon Norwich, a member of the local gentry.

¹⁵⁴ Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and Clericalism', pp. 26-8. Mrs Avery had called one parishioner a 'rogue and rascal' when he went to receive communion.

wives remained steady but given that the number of married clergy increased throughout Elizabeth's reign, this would seem to represent an actual decline. Ministers' wives might still be disparaged as whores but they were far less likely to be called priests' whores, a semantic change which reflected the extent to which the parson's wife had become an accepted figure within the community.

The New Normal

Examining the detail of cases before the church courts, rather than merely listing instances of abuse, has allowed for a more nuanced appreciation of the origins and nature of antagonism towards ministers' wives. Admittedly, 'the sense of confrontation looms large' within these documents but on occasions, it is possible in the midst of a heated dispute to find a clergy wife unremarked upon in her role as bystander or witness.¹⁵⁵ In Worcester in 1569, for example, the wife of Roger Massy, vicar of Claines, was listed among the guests at a wedding dinner and gave evidence in the couple's subsequent marriage dispute.¹⁵⁶ This counts as a 'neutral' reference, the paucity of which led Marshall to question the extent to which clerical marriage was accepted within the wider community.¹⁵⁷ Yet, while Mrs Massy's presence was taken for granted, it adds little to our appreciation of the reception accorded to clergy wives.¹⁵⁸ Accommodation and acceptance, and indeed the day-to-day lives of most women, go largely unnoticed and unrecorded, but the lives of the first clergy wives are not entirely lost and can be accessed from surviving fragments drawn from a wider range of material.¹⁵⁹

Little consideration in previous accounts has been given to the significance of the geographical origins of the women whom ministers chose to marry. The absence of

¹⁵⁵ Sheils, *Puritans of the Diocese of Peterborough*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁶ WRO, Consistory Court Deposition Books, 794.052/2102/1, ff. 206v, 213r.

¹⁵⁷ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 172.

¹⁵⁸ Marshall, 'Discord and Stability', p. 196; Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 172.

¹⁵⁹ S. E. James, *Women's Voices in Tudor Wills, 1485-1603; Authority, Influence and Material Culture* (Farnham, 2015), p. 98.

supplementary detail in many parish registers complicates research but it does appear that a minister often chose his wife from among his parishioners or from a neighbouring parish. This is indicated when his bride's surname is that of a family whose name occurs repeatedly in the lists of christenings, marriages and burials contained in the register over long periods of time. For example, in 1561, Thomas Cattell, minister of Great Leighs (Essex), married Elizabeth Yeardley, a member of a local family.¹⁶⁰ In 1569, also in Essex, William Inman, clerk of Great Canfield, married Margaret Pavot and the Pavot or Pavet family features throughout the register.¹⁶¹ The same can be said of the families of Katherine Farrant, wife of David Lufkine, curate of Hadstock (1571), Joane Forde, wife of Ralphe Wharton, chaplain of Little Saling (1586), Elizabeth Permenter, wife of John Story, parson of Little Yeldham (1587), Mary Cowell, wife of John Helye, vicar of Littlebury (1571).¹⁶² In Oxfordshire, in Upper Heyford, the minister Thomas Stockley married Catherine Hore 'of this parish' in 1573 and in 1586, Philippa Dalby, also 'of this parish', married Simon Meme, clerk of Lower Heyford.¹⁶³ Although Elizabeth Damie who married Thomas Owen, vicar of Taynton, in 1580 resided in the parish of Burford (Oxfordshire), this was only 1.6 miles distant from her own.¹⁶⁴ Proximity is relevant in that brides who came from their husband's or a contiguous parish, and whose families had roots in the area, would already be known to the local inhabitants. A case from Norfolk in 1566 illustrates the pre-existing involvement in parish life of one clergy wife. Margery, as a 41 year old widow from Heigham itself, had married the rector, William Askew, six years before she testified to the good character of Margaret Grene whom she

¹⁶⁰ SEAX, Parish Register of Great Leighs.

¹⁶¹ SEAX, Parish Register of Great Canfield.

¹⁶² SEAX, Parish Registers of Hadstock, Little Saling, Little Yeldham, Littlebury.

¹⁶³ *Parish Register of Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire Parish Register Society, Marriages*, pp. 1-2; other examples include Jane Dallow of Kynlett who married John Symmes, the curate of Kynlet, in 1591, *The Parish Register of Neenton, Shropshire Parish Register Society*, vol., p. 2; Margaret Massie of Chigwell married the rector of Chigwell, Humfrey Haughton, in 1588, SEAX, *The Parish Register of Broomfield*.

¹⁶⁴ *Parish Register of Taynton, Oxfordshire Parish Register Society*, p. 4.

had known for twenty years.¹⁶⁵ If such women were known locally and recognized to be of good fame, they were less likely to have become targets of derision or abuse simply because they had married the parson. Indeed, the fact that the woman now residing in the parsonage was the actual spouse of the minister may have been sufficient to raise her standing above and to differentiate her from the unofficial ‘wife’ of the concubinary priest.

The readiness of parishioners to judge character for themselves has been absent from the historical debate. For Parish, the need for the letter testimonial demonstrates the impact of earlier rhetoric which had ‘struck a chord’ and created the perception that clergy wives were ‘women of low standing and dubious moral character’ and that church and state ‘still feared’ the implications of ending its insistence on clerical celibacy.¹⁶⁶ This interpretation denies the ability of parishioners to form their own opinion of a woman’s character, reputation and worth. Although these certificates may have counted for less as the reign progressed, initially they offered an official endorsement of good character, the significance of which should not be underestimated.

Ministers’ wives as individuals were not without agency; working alongside their husbands’ parishioners in economic and domestic activities, they could achieve more than is immediately evident in creating an aura of familiarity and acceptability. The immersion of clergy wives in their husbands’ pastoral ministry as a form of public housekeeping, as explored in chapter four, also encouraged closer ties with parishioners. Indeed, Tyler judged that marriage itself had ‘caused the full integration of the clerical profession into rural society’.¹⁶⁷ A similar conclusion was reached by O’Day who saw marriage as a

¹⁶⁵ NRO, Deposition Book, DN/DEP10/11a, 1565-7, f. 189v.

¹⁶⁶ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 231.

¹⁶⁷ Tyler, ‘The Status of the Elizabethan Parochial Clergy’, pp. 87-8.

mechanism through which the clergy became closer ‘both physically and psychologically’ to their parishioners.¹⁶⁸

The speed at which individuals and communities reconciled themselves to change, or not in some cases, was dependent on numerous personal and local considerations. Parish stresses the ‘importance of habit in inculcating acceptance of a married priesthood’ and indeed, familiarity was probably the most important factor.¹⁶⁹ Initial opposition to a married ministry could be overcome when parishioners decided to attend church precisely because, as one Catholic propagandist lamented, ‘the local minister and his wife were gentle and honest people’.¹⁷⁰ Just as a minister who was ill-attuned to the needs of his parishioners could drive a wedge between himself and his flock, a clerical couple could confound the sceptics by their personality and demeanour. When looking back to a period from which we are separated by several centuries, there is a tendency to compress time and to forget the day by day existence of those who actually lived through the years. It is also easy to forget how quickly people become accustomed to change and how difficult it is to maintain a theoretical opposition, unless particularly strongly held, in the face of innovations which prove easier to accommodate in reality than in anticipation.

The willingness of parishioners to assist a distressed minister’s wife, for example, challenges the opinion that these women were routinely shunned. As early as 1567, when William Lockyer, clerk of Shoreditch, London, abused his wife, a neighbour came to her rescue. While living in each of the parishes of St Leonard’s and St Dunstan’s, her neighbours had shown her considerable kindness during childbirth as Lockyer was ‘in great penury and his wife lacked that that apperteyned unto her’; a kindness which he

¹⁶⁸ R. O’Day, *The English Parish Clergy: The Emergence and Consolidation of a Profession, 1558-1642* (Leicester, 1979), p. 165; see also, B. A. Holderness, ‘The Clergy as Money-lenders in England, 1550-1700’, in R. O’Day and F. Heal (eds), *Princes and Paupers in the English Church 1500-1800* (Leicester, 1981), p. 205.

¹⁶⁹ Parish, *Clerical Marriage*, p. 234.

¹⁷⁰ C. Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-century England* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 90.

then repaid by sexual assaults on various women and servants. According to Elizabeth Butler of the parish of St Leonard's, her husband having heard that Lockyer 'hade muche misused his wiffe & beaten her verye soure' took it upon himself to reprimand him. When Lockyer next dined with them, her husband 'rebuked hym verye sore for evill handlinge of his wiff sayenge unto him that he shulde be a lanterne and a spectacle to others to do good and well'.¹⁷¹ Although Lockyer's behaviour would appear to support Parish's assertion that a married ministry did 'not seem to have encouraged a perception that married clergy provided a model for family life', Elizabeth Butler's husband certainly expected that it should.¹⁷² In 1581, in a similar situation, local women intervened when the wife of a preacher, Davye Wood, fled into the street 'for savegard of hir selfe'. The two neighbours entered Wood's house in response to his 'misuse' of his wife and when Wood exposed himself to them, they simply emptied a chamber pot over him.¹⁷³

Further evidence of amity is to be found in wills. It is hardly surprising that ministers themselves left bequests to the wives of fellow clergymen. For example, in 1570, Thomas Thorpe left 'an angel that I have which is cracked a little' to the wife of John Okeley, vicar of Great Burstead (Essex) and five shillings to the wife of Thomas Hawkins, curate of Ramsden Crays.¹⁷⁴ In Worcestershire, the apparently unmarried parson of Ripple, left ten shillings to each of four clergy wives.¹⁷⁵ More significantly, there are examples of lay testators making similar bequests. In 1559, the will of Robert Robinson, servant, gave 'to the vicar's wife a French crown' while in 1576, Thomas May of Hornchurch (Essex) left half an angel to the wife of the vicar, William Lambert.¹⁷⁶ In 1570, Joan Dybney of St Nicholas, Colchester bequeathed 'two yards of holland of 3s a

¹⁷¹ LMA, Deposition Book, DL/C/210, ff. 60-1, 64v, 65r.

¹⁷² Parish, 'It Was Never', p. 67.

¹⁷³ State Papers, Domestic, Elizabeth, 1581, SP 12/147 f.75.

¹⁷⁴ F. G. Emmison, *Wills of the County of Essex (England)*, vol. 2, 1565-1571 (Washington, 1983), p. 92.

¹⁷⁵ WRO, Probate Registry, 1568, Leonard Lyngham, 18.

¹⁷⁶ F. G. Emmison, *Wills of the County of Essex (England)*, vol. 1, 1558-1565 (Washington, 1982), pp. 59-60; F. G. Emmison, *Wills of the County of Essex (England)*, vol. 3, 1571-77 (Washington, 1986), p. 195.

yard' to the wife of Mr Betts, minister of Wivenhoe.¹⁷⁷ The bequest made by Arthur Breame of Halstead (Essex) went further. He left property and lands to his daughter Jane Garner from which she was to pay 26 shillings 8d yearly to the widow of the vicar of William Cliberye for life. This instruction preceded an annual grant of 40 shillings 'to the poor and most needy people of Gosfield' which suggests that Breame was acknowledging the financial difficulties in which Mrs Cliberye found herself subsequent to her husband's demise and was seeking to alleviate them.¹⁷⁸ In a more conservative part of the country, Anthony Grosvenor of Dodleston (Cheshire) left 'to the parsons wief xs'.¹⁷⁹ Grosvenor's will shows evidence of traditional beliefs, in that he asked for prayers from both his sister and the poor present at his burial, but even if he had only accepted Mrs Cowlaye as an individual, her role as the parson's wife had not prevented the establishment of a social connection between them. The confused synthesis of attitudes and identities can easily be obscured in accounts which emphasize conflict at the expense of the apparent willingness of contemporaries to privilege social interaction, neighbourhood and communal harmony over disparity in outlook.

Parishioners demonstrated their acceptance of ministers' wives within the local community by asking them to assume the role of godparent to local infants, a role which was seen as a social honour but which also conveyed religious obligations and expectations. Godparents were answerable for the child's spiritual well-being but had the additional responsibility of providing friendship and goodwill often in the form of patronage, a function often fulfilled by ministers.¹⁸⁰ As the clergy occupied an intermediate position between their flock and the local gentry, they represented 'socially

¹⁷⁷ Emmison, *Wills*, vol. 3, p. 217.

¹⁷⁸ F. G. Emmison, *Elizabethan Life: Wills of Essex Gentry and Yeomen* (Chelmsford, 1980), pp. 26-7.

¹⁷⁹ T. Hughes, 'Anthony Grosvenor of Dodleston', *Cheshire Sheaf*, 1st series, 1 (1879), pp. 294-5.

¹⁸⁰ L. E. Pearson, *Elizabethans at Home* (Stanford, 1957), p. 83; W. Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship in Early Modern England* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 158; A. Fletcher, *A County Community in Peace and War, Sussex 1600-1660* (London, 1975), p. 52.

significant superior figures' who could act as patrons for the children of their parishioners.¹⁸¹ The choice of a minister's wife as sponsor, therefore, signalled her acceptance as an individual and acknowledged her standing within the community in her own right and in relation to her husband's calling.

Predictably, clergy wives acted as godmothers to the offspring of other members of the profession. In 1582, at St Michael-le-Belfry, York, for example, the wives of the Dean and Subdean and the daughter of the Archbishop assumed this role.¹⁸² Parishioners too were happy for minister's wives to act as sponsors for their children. In 1562, Margaret, second wife of Richard Kyffin, vicar of Horsham (Sussex), stood as godmother to Margaret, the daughter of one John Fist.¹⁸³ Later examples are to be found in Yorkshire. In 1580 Jayne, wife of Robert Browne, clerk, was godmother to John, the son of John Fewtie.¹⁸⁴ Jane, the wife of Brian Crosedayle, clerk of Ledsham, sponsored four children from the parish in the early 1590s.¹⁸⁵ Between 1590 and 1614, Elizabeth, wife of George Thompson, rector of St Margaret's, York, stood as godmother on thirteen occasions.¹⁸⁶ In the parish of Almondbury, five clergy wives acted as godmothers over a thirty year period. Anna Taylyer, who married William Rawe early in 1559, stood as godmother in 1565.¹⁸⁷ Isabel, wife of Robert Cryer, curate of Honley, assumed the role on three occasions and Elizabeth, wife of John Beardsell, curate of Kirkheaton, was a sponsor on five occasions. Elizabeth, wife of the clerk Arthur Kaye, appears three times in this role

¹⁸¹ Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship*, pp. 152, 158, 174; Fletcher, *A County Community*, p. 52.

¹⁸² *The Registers of St Michael-le-Belfry, York*, ed. F. A. Collins, *Yorkshire Parish Register Society*, 1 (1899), pp. 17, 39-40; SEAX, D/P 80/1/1, Little Clacton Parish Register, in 1592, Anne, the wife of Richard Forth, parson of Much Holland (1592) and Elinor, the wife of William Robinson, parson of Little Bentley (1601) stood as godmothers to the daughters of Richard Scofield, vicar of Little Clacton.

¹⁸³ *Horsham Parish Register*, ed. G. Rice, *Sussex Record Society*, 21 (1915), pp. 15, 112.

¹⁸⁴ *The Registers of Burton Fleming otherwise North Burton, York*, eds G. E. Park and G. D. Lumb, *Yorkshire Parish Register Society*, 2 (1899), p. 13.

¹⁸⁵ *The Parish Registers of Ledsham in the County of York, 1539-1812*, ed. J. W. Clay, *Yorkshire Parish Register Society*, 26 (1906), pp. 33, 35, 41.

¹⁸⁶ Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship*, p. 154.

¹⁸⁷ *The Parish Register of Almondbury vol.1 (Part 1) 1557-1598*, eds Taylor and Harry, *Yorkshire Archaeological Society Parish Register Section* (1974), pp. 8, 40.

and Grace, wife of John Hanley, sponsored two children including the daughter of Thomas Shaye who was given the name Grace. When, as here, the child was given the sponsor's name, this strengthened the relationship between sponsor and child and may have implied the awarding of greater responsibility to that particular godparent.¹⁸⁸ Eight of these baptisms occurred before 1580 suggesting an early acceptance of these ministers' wives in a conservative part of the country.¹⁸⁹

Many more instances of the minister's wife performing this role must have gone unrecorded as the injunctions of Elizabeth's reign concerning parish registers no longer required the listing of godparents.¹⁹⁰ As Coster observed, godparenthood although not a 'Catholic' institution, was 'more likely to be emphasized by conservative clergy' in areas which adopted the Reformation more slowly.¹⁹¹ The practice survived, therefore, in the very areas where clergy were slower to marry and where clergy wives could have expected a more cautious reception. The discovery of so many parsons' wives acting as godmothers among the few surviving registers which did perpetuate the tradition, heightens the significance of this phenomenon.

Clergy wives who were godmothers can also be traced through references in wills. Again evidence is limited as few women made wills, unless they were widows, and identifying the wills of clergy widows is fraught with difficulty. In 1584, Elizabeth, widow of Thomas Smyth, vicar of Sidmouth (Devon), left 40 shillings to her godson, James Smithe, presumably a relative.¹⁹² Avise, widow of Henry Helme, vicar of Sturminster Marshall (Dorset), gave 12d to each of her godchildren. She also bequeathed a 'frise gowne' to another goddaughter, Joan Ploughman, and a 'russett gowne' and a 'working

¹⁸⁸ Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship*, p. 174.

¹⁸⁹ *The Parish Register of Almondbury*, pp. 63, 66, 86, 90, 95, 108, 127, 132, 163, 196, 233, 235, 238.

¹⁹⁰ W. Coster, 'Popular Religion and the Parish Register 1538-1603', in K. L. French, G. G. Gibbs, B. A. Kumin (eds), *The Parish in English Life, 1400-1600* (Manchester, 1997), p. 97.

¹⁹¹ Coster, *Baptism and Spiritual Kinship*, pp. 23, 34.

¹⁹² TNA, PROB 11/67, Elizabeth Smyth, 1584.

daies peticote' to her two goddaughters named Avice.¹⁹³ Katherine Woode, widow of Richard Greenham, made bequests to her five godchildren, only one of whom appears to have been the child of a minister.¹⁹⁴ In 1568, Richard Poore, vicar choral of Salisbury Cathedral, whose wife predeceased him, bequeathed 20 shillings to 'Dorathie my wyfes goddaughter', his wife having been called Dorothy, and 40 shillings and a black gown to her other goddaughter, Margaret Oke.¹⁹⁵

The support offered in times of distress, bequests in parishioner's wills, their selection as godparent, all demonstrate the integration of minister's wives into the local community. By supplying some of the missing 'positive' references, this evidence offers an alternative to the usual narrative of hostility and opposition. Moreover, when viewed in conjunction with the involvement of wives in their husbands' pastoral ministry, as explored in chapter four, a picture of accommodation and acceptance begins to emerge.

Conclusion

At the beginning of the reign, as Haigh rightly observes, the 'abuse of married clergy ... occasions no surprise'.¹⁹⁶ Clergy wives were the embodiment of religious change and as such were easy targets for those who were averse to the reforms imposed upon them. The invective aimed at the female associates of incontinent priests drew on an oral tradition and an expedient lexicon of abuse. 'Priest's whore' and its variations had become both an established literary trope and the most obvious epithet for those who sought to inflict the utmost hurt on a minister's wife. Over time the prefix fell into disuse and became an indication of confessional identity among those who were not reconciled to the Protestant faith. The historiography, derived predominantly from defamation cases pursued in the church courts, distorts the view of the reception afforded to clergy wives

¹⁹³ TNA, PROB 11/68, Avice Helme, 1585.

¹⁹⁴ TNA, PROB 11/119, Katherine Woode, 1612.

¹⁹⁵ TNA, PROB 11/50, Richard Poore, 1568.

¹⁹⁶ Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', p. 251.

by overplaying not only the extent of the opposition but also its duration. The presence of the parson's wife was a major social change but not one that inevitably produced conflict. Even though acceptance may have amounted initially to little more than indifference or begrudging acknowledgement, neither the number of complaints nor their geographical distribution supports the level of hostility often portrayed. Rather than, as Haigh suggests, being struck by 'how widespread' the abuse remained, we should follow Carlson's lead and focus on how readily parishioners accepted ministers' wives.¹⁹⁷ Women who were already familiar and whose behaviour could not justify sustained animosity could win acceptance through their own agency. Involvement in parish life, being in receipt of bequests, assuming the role of godparent, all attest to a positive recognition of clergy wives. Although the first generation of Elizabethan clergy wives brought discontinuity into the lives of parishioners and individuals who appeared before the church courts for insulting clergy wives, increasingly outbursts arose from personal quarrels, the inability to separate wives from their husband's calling and the unsettling of local sensibilities by their intrusion into the parish hierarchy rather than from opposition to clerical marriage itself. The innovation that was clerical marriage quickly became a change concerned primarily with the personal and the parochial rather than the theological and theoretical.

¹⁹⁷ Haigh, 'The Church of England, the Catholics and the People', p. 251; Carlson, 'Clerical Marriage', p. 27.

Conclusion

The diary of Richard Rogers concludes with an entry for 26 August 1590. Contemplating the possible loss of his liberty, Rogers expresses his desire and intention that he and his wife:

may live with more christian frut and comfort in mar[riage], acquainting our selves to all dut[ies], and taking all helpe, one by an other, both for mutual comfort now and for hereafter, and, because abiding together is short, thus to take that good in it that might be, without straungn[ess] and contr[ariness], with amiablnes.¹

Rogers' aspiration is a reminder that clerical marriage was not merely an institution that accompanied and epitomized the religious changes of the sixteenth century; it constituted a partnership between individual men and women who experienced the joys and confronted the challenges inherent in all matrimonial relationships. 'Ba', the archivally silent partner in the Rogers' marriage, resembles almost all the wives of the Elizabethan clergy in having no recoverable voice of her own. Her presence and influence, however, are discernible in her husband's thoughts and actions, just as the lives of many clergy wives can be glimpsed through their husband's wills and in documents which seemingly allocate to them only a peripheral role.

Although the absence of diaries and letters leaves us straining to catch echoes of their voices, there is sufficient evidence scattered throughout the archive to dispel the belief that the lives and experiences of sixteenth-century clergy wives are completely beyond retrieval. Broadening the evidence base, assembling the fragmentary references and placing incidents within their true context, allows individual ministers' wives to emerge and challenge the sweeping generalizations and preconceptions which have

¹ *Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries by Richard Rogers and Samuel Ward*, ed. M. M. Knappen (London, 1933), pp. 101-2.

dominated the historiography. During the first decade of Elizabeth's reign, documentary resources are particularly sparse and it remains impossible to establish just how many ministers married their former hearthmates. Yet, from the beginning of the reign, respectable women were certainly prepared to enter the parsonage as a minister's wife and there are indications that clergy may have applied stricter criteria, particularly with regard to social status, when seeking a wife rather than a mistress. The lives of the earliest clergy wives are likely to remain difficult to access but perhaps the drive towards digitization and the increased availability of material online will help make all ministers' wives a little less elusive.

From the outset, the requirements of Injunction 29 signalled the distinctive nature of marriage to a clergyman. Throughout the reign, local officials, often guided by the local populace, continued to provide letters testimonial attesting to the suitability of prospective clergy wives. The qualities of honesty and sobriety should not be dismissed as minimal and insignificant for, in sixteenth-century parlance, they were the epitome of good character and respectability. As an appraisal of inherent worth, certificates of good character formed the basic prescription for a role which, despite initially lacking definition, possessed an intrinsic singularity. Just as a minister was to set an example to his flock, his wife, by association, should be above reproach and should help to fashion an exemplary household for the emulation of others. This identification of the clergy wife with her husband's calling was quickly assimilated by parishioners who scrutinized behaviour and censured those who fell short of expectations. In the absence of practical guidance from the ecclesiastical hierarchy, ministers' spouses were able to exercise their own agency in framing an informal code of standards and practice. The uxorial ideal, shaped by scripture and apparent in contemporary attitudes, provided the basic framework on which they could construct the persona of the clergy wife. This was further developed by involvement in their husbands' pastoral ministry where wives could

demonstrate their charitable concern and exploit the informal authority and status afforded to them by their matrimonial affiliation. In their wills, it is evident that ministers placed reliance on their wives' integrity and parochial awareness and acknowledged their piety and desire for spiritual sustenance. The same sources reveal the workings of the clerical household and the character of the conjugal partnership, often loving and supportive but occasionally unhappy and distrustful.

In some aspects of the study, it has been possible to move beyond the anecdotal and qualitative and to undertake statistical analysis. Anxiety over the future of a married ministry and suspicions that celibacy remained superior to the married state, may have troubled some consciences but neither failed to prevent clergy from embracing marriage. Although there were regional variations and some hesitation among older members of the profession, by the middle of the reign married ministers predominated. Detailed scrutiny of the monetary bequests made by clerical testators has confirmed the suspicions of contemporaries and the intuitive belief of historians, that marriage appears to have encouraged ministers to prioritize the financial needs of family over parochial philanthropy. A combination of factors including concern for the fate of wives and children, financial means and position in the lifecycle was instrumental in determining testamentary behaviour. Yet, as in so many aspects of this study, personal inclination and character were crucial in determining actions and outcomes and it would be an exaggeration to accuse married clergy as a whole of turning their backs on the needs of their parishioners.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of data analysis concerns the social background and marital status of clergy brides. Narratives which suggest that the initial morally and socially inadequate wives were supplanted by paragons of piety once decent women were prepared to marry ministers, present an over-simplification of the complex reality. It has been possible to overturn the presumption that the ignominy associated

with marrying a clergyman was so great that only the desperate would deign to do so. The number of widows marrying ministers was no higher than in the general population and women from all social groups were listed among prospective brides. Likewise, evidence that the daughters of clergymen married men involved in a variety of trades and professions, discredits the assertion that clerical endogamy arose chiefly from the inability of ministers' daughters to find husbands outside the ranks of the clergy. Instead, when attempting to explain this phenomenon, we should look to the religious and educational upbringing of women from clerical backgrounds and place greater emphasis on the personal choices exercised by both parties to the marriage.

Clergy wives were as diverse in social status, ability and character as their husbands which, given the importance of parity in early modern marriage, should occasion no surprise. The readiness of women from all backgrounds to become clergy wives helps to throw into doubt the whole premise that women who married ministers were subject to widespread, serious and lasting hostility from parishioners reluctant to accept their presence. The introduction of a married ministry represented both doctrinal and social innovation, but, largely as a result of over-reliance on church court records, the extent and longevity of the opposition has been widely overstated. Clergy wives could be and were subject to antagonism but with careful reading of the evidence, it is possible to distinguish a shift towards animosities that were personally rather than ideologically motivated. While archival silence hints at a mixture of indifference, accommodation and acceptance, documentary examples of involvement in parish life dictate the need for a more nuanced appreciation of the reception afforded to ministers' wives.

Each minister's wife negotiated her role and position within the constraints of personality and circumstance. Wives did so with varying degrees of success but throughout the Elizabethan period, there was an inherent expectation that a clergy wife

should prove herself ‘a woman fitte & meete for that callinge’.² Restoring the social, economic, spiritual and emotional dimensions of that expectation enhances our understanding of the English Reformation as an arena of lived experience for both men and women.

² WRO, Probate Registry, 1589, Floriti Child & Anne Aston, 81b.

Appendix 1

Injunction 29 of the Royal Proclamations of 1559¹

Item, although there be no prohibition by the word of God, nor any example of the primitive church but that the priests and ministers of the church may lawfully, for the avoiding of fornication, have an honest and sober wife, and that for the same purpose the same was by act of parliament in the time of our dear brother, King Edward VI, made lawful, whereupon a great number of the clergy of this realm were then married and so yet continue: yet, because there hath grown offence and some slander to the church by lack of discreet and sober behaviour in many ministers of the church, both in choosing of their wives and in indiscreet living with then, the remedy whereof is necessary to be sought: it is thought therefore very necessary that no manner of priest or deacon shall hereafter take to his wife any manner of woman without the advice and allowance first had upon good examination by the bishop of the same diocese and two justices of the peace of the same shire dwelling next to the place where the same woman hath made her most abode before her marriage, nor without the good will of the parents of the said woman if she have any living, or two of the next of her kinfolds, or for lack of knowledge of such, of her master or mistress where she serveth. And before he shall be contracted in any place he shall make a good and certain proof thereof to the minister, or to the congregation assembled for that purpose, which shall be upon some holy day where divers may be present. And if any shall do otherwise, that then they shall not be permitted to minister either the word or the sacraments of the church, nor shall be capable of any ecclesiastical benefice. And for the manner of marriages of any bishops, the same shall

¹ *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. 2, The Later Tudors, 1553-1587*, ed. P. L. Hughes and J. F. Larkin (Newhaven and London, 1969) p. 125.

be allowed and approved by the metropolitan of the province, and also by such commissioners as the Queen's majesty shall thereunto appoint. And if any master, or dean, or any head of any college shall purpose to marry, the same shall not be allowed but by such to whom the visitation of the same doth properly belong, who shall in any wise provide that the same tend not to the hindrance of their house.

Appendix 2

Lett of Ed to mystrys Locke

The grace of our lorde Jesus Christe

be with you ever²

Thoughe I atempte nothing but that which ys verye lafull and becomethe any Christian in place and condition agreeable to every mane's estate, yet our nature is so full of nedeles shamfastnes that bothe nowe it makythe me almoste afearde to write unto you, and synce my last letteres it hathe made me carefull to shune your good companye. I have a good wyttne & one I thynke whome you wylbeleve, she lovythe you in the lorde & wylnot speake dyceitfullye, mysterys martin I meane, to whome I have proffessed often that thys was no lytell grefe of my fyrst letteres because they had taken a waye fro me your aquayntance. Not that I had don any thyng sinfullye of which I shold be ashamed but suche was the foolyshenes of my fleshe that I cold not over com yt with any wisdom most assuredlye warranted in a good surtie. This cause made me sumwhat unwillinge to adventure thes letteres which yet I write most gladlye & so farre as I may lafullye in the feare of god so to move you a gaine as I did before. Yf god shall worke all that I desyre, it is nether the first nor the greatest benefit that I have receavid. Yf he shall worke other wise, I trust his grace shall gide me that I shall accompte best of myne owne will when it is framed unto his. In this mynde, good mysterys Locke, I write unto you as as [sic] before, sekinge you a lone whome the grace of God, in myne opinion, hathe made a good possession, and my mind is so settled (and yet in the fear of god) that nether as I am I wolde remove it unto any, nether yet if I wer as highe as in the world I

² Kent Library and History Centre, U350/C1/2 ff.28v-29r.

colde rise, I wold chainge it from you; and you shall do as the lorde shall move you. Yf your affecion shalbe enclyned as I doo wyshe it to be bent, godes name be praised. Yf you shall better like other where, I pray god blesse you. I wyll endure my losse under thys hope: when we shall have better eies that shalbe able to se god, our faythe shall lead us bothe in to a happye societie. In the meane season, yf nowe you shall denye that which I desire, yf you will beleve me as as [sic] you have none other cause I maye tell you boldlye which I tell you trulye, *diligentibus deum omnia coopantur in bonum*.³ I trust I shall love the lorde god the better, but for the worlde I am at a pointe and when soever I shall thinke of you, I wyll think of you with the lorde wher your body shalbe better and I beseche you recompence me with the like love that my faythe maybe strengthened by your prayers, and this farre of my minde. For worldlye estate in which I hope to lyve, I will signifye somwhate that you shall not thynk that I meane thorough me to make your estate or your childrenes the worse, for my uncle brente etc.

yours in the lorde

ED

³ *Diligentibus Deum omnia cooperantur in bonum* (Romans 8:28): all things work together for the good of those who love God.

Appendix 3

Libellous verse against Henry and Joan Cunde¹

Commendations I will send now at a woord
unto the priest of Monford
wishing him not to break his tedder
for hearing of this simple letter
now to the matter I will goe
and shew the vickar that as I know
vickar I know thou canst preach verye well
but thou fechest thy text of thy wife as I hear tell
sir priest all though thou art wise enough
I will give thee some counsell but yet I most laugh
thou hast a fine wife as I heare tell
but before I would bee a couckould I would drive her to hell
bee ruled by mee man and heare what I say
for thy wife shee will have a trick of false play
with many a one which comes to and fro
shee will cast a rowling eye on them before they goe
sir vickar when you are from home
the parson is readye to supplye your roome
the keeper also will not bee behind
If shee say him nay shee is unkind
vickar I tell thee it is not long a gone

¹ TNA STAC 8/100/8.

since the keeper had thy wife to shew her a fone
downe in the bush they weare as I did heare
but one took them tardye as it did appeare
but that villayne cobler is far a mise
for hee will not stick thy wife to kiss
this cobler is a knave with out regard
for hee had his fatherlawes wife downe in the yard
then comes the keeper anon after night
and hee most have a shoulder of venison dight
then cobarts and broch most be had out of hand
and Lilly to turne as I understand
then mistris Cund shee goes in the dark
then Bradley most follow to play his part
when Lilly had called them so oft
quoeth her mistris turne softly or Ile give thee a buffet
the vickar doeth heare wee are undon
therefore Bradley away in all hast most rune
the mrs and her mayd are in parly great
what they shall doe with their bankate
then Bradley doeth come agayne runinge for life
which doeth much reioyce the vickars wiffe
the keeper with the mrs the cobler with the mayd
there is good sport for they are not afrayd
the keeper hath hornes for thee in store
which for thy wifes sake thou most weare
vickar it was a good mach for thee I can tell

to have ten poundes for Bradley to use thy Jill
and as for the parson hee payes well enough
for using of the vickars plough
and when that in Shrewesburie Thomas Adams doeth her spy
shee will come to him with a beck of his eye
then strait to a chamber they will goe
and there Mr Adams most give her a blow
I think sir priest you are worse then mad
to keepe a wife that is so bad
for with these fower I tell thee playne
shee will not stick to sport and game
There is a man, I had allmost forgote
who thrust thy wife up to a roote
I did not know him it was so dark
therefore good vickar ease thy smarte
now priest I most counte thee a wise man
to kill those easinge droppers if thou can
to keepe thy gonne charged it is a wise parte
but take heed of thy neighbors for thy wifes sake
but of thy neighbors I will say no more
not till I meete thee and then thou shalt heare
I heare say vickar thou keepst a good house
A nunrye it may bee for a mayd and a mistris
but I think the silly vickar was a weary of his life
for of a blacksmithes daughter to make a priests wife
what she was before I neede not to tell

for in naughtines shee did all maydes excell
thy wife weare meete a minstrells wyfe to bee
unmeete for a minister I doe tell thee
thou knowest vickar six children thy wife hath had
and never a one to light
for feare they should bee like there fathers
was not that a cruell spight
and thy mayd Lilly I would not to keepe her long
for when thy wife is wearye shee most serve the turne
I will tell thee vickar what is very true
thy wife most bee a gillian and thy mayd too
my counsell nowe I end and if thou like it well
let mee heare from thee agayne
and thou shalt heare some more
what I can say to thee
So sir priest in hast I most end
commendinge mee to mistris light heelles your wife
committing her to the good will of her neighbors
Thy very good frend
Jack Straw

Appendix 4

**Letter to Mrs Coren, wife of John Coren, vicar of Box (Wiltshire), advising her of
the supposed liaison between her husband and Philippa Bewshin, wife of the
vicar of Claverton (Somerset)**

Mrs Coryn, if you respect your husbandes credit and your wealth you must keepe him from the parson of Clavertons howse. He ys so beloved and so kyndly enterteyned of the gentlewoman of the howse, that his desire is satisfyed in what he will, the consideracon ys left to yourselfe to judge of. He never commeth thether, but he stayeth two or three nights at the leaste as it will appeare now. Before he commeth home, yf you suffer him to use it, his purse wilbe leane and his mare poore. He sayeth you do often chide him and that is the cause he goeth thether for comfort. Now you know yt use your own discreation, the country speakes of it already.¹

¹ TNA STAC 8/98/20 m.28.

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