

Recording Liturgical and Sacramental Rites of Passage in Pre-Reformation English Parishes

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The introduction of parochial registers in England in 1538 was a milestone in the recording of (some) liturgical and sacramental rites of passage. Limited evidence reveals an earlier and superficially similar system incorporating detailed recording of offerings and other receipts among parochial 'altarage' income in benefice accounts. The material is examined and contextualized, to establish its relationship with the system introduced in 1538 and its value for appreciating the experience of liturgical rites of passage in pre-Reformation England.

INTRODUCTION

In 1975, in Beijing, a Chinese student learning English and 'unaware of the sprinkling of French idioms in modern English ... translated *rite de passage* as "the ceremony of entering into traffic".¹ Parishioners in pre-Reformation England would probably have appreciated that rendering; certainly for baptism, which one Middle English text described as the 'firste passage of alle goode pilgrimage'.² Duly modified, it can be applied to the subsequent liturgical and sacramental checkpoints experienced by parishioners on 'The Pilgrimage of the [Christian] Lyfe'; primarily baptism, marriage, the 'purification' or 'churching' of mothers after childbirth, extreme unction conferred in anticipation of death, and the funeral which followed it. Those checkpoints provide the focus for this discussion, addressed through

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¹ Frances Wood, *Hand-Grenade Practice in Peking: My Part in the Cultural Revolution* (London, 2000), 45.

² Guillaume de Deguileville, *The Pilgrimage of the Lyfe of the Manhode, translated anonymously into Prose from the First Recension of Guillaume de Deguileville's Poem, Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, ed. Avril Henry, EETS o.s. 284, 292, 2 vols (Oxford, 1985–8), 1: 6.

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the evidence for their systematic recording (or absence) within surviving parochial records. The end-point is set by Thomas Cromwell's mandate requiring the nationwide introduction of parochial registration of baptisms, marriages and burials in England in 1538. The key sources date mainly from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, but the practices extend back into the thirteenth. Most of the affected parishioners were laypeople under the spiritual oversight and jurisdiction of their parochial incumbent; their experience unavoidably dominates the records. For the clergy, ordination created an alternative cycle culminating in priesthood, experienced within a different framework. While clergy were not totally abstracted from the parochial cycle (they would all eventually die and be buried), their ordination was not technically part of the standard series. Specific liturgical commemoration of promotion to the priesthood does, however, leave occasional traces within parochial records, and accordingly requires some discussion here.

Cromwell's injunction, issued as vicegerent in spirituals for King Henry VIII, laid the burden of compliance firmly on the parochial 'parson, vicar, or curate'. He was to supply the necessary book and weekly record (in the presence of the churchwardens) 'all the weddings, christenings, and buryings made the whole week before'. The wardens were required to provide a 'coffer with two locks and keys' for the book's safekeeping.³ Despite being issued within the broader context of the programme of church reform of the early Henrician Reformation, this was not intrinsically an ecclesiastical measure. Its introduction lacked a declared rationale, although plausible validations can be postulated.⁴ The requirement is not overtly based on previous practices, but it is unsurprising that one early twentieth-century scholar was provoked to seek precedents and analogues among earlier records (not all of them English).⁵ That hunt was misguided, tracing similarities but overlooking differences, and tinged by a desire to prove that the novelty was not merely following foreign fashions. Analysis and limited contextualization of one cache of parochial records within that framework generated the firm conclusion

³ Henry Gee and William J. Hardy, eds, *Documents Illustrative of English Church History, compiled from Original Sources* (London, 1921), 275–81, at 279.

⁴ As, e.g., in Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven, CT, 2021), 357–9.

⁵ Andrew Clark, ed., *Lincoln Diocese Documents*, EETS o.s. 149 (London, 1914), 29–30, 35.

that ‘[the] Injunctions of 1538, did no more than impose on all parish churches a registration-system which had long been (regularly, if somewhat laxly) in use in many’.⁶

That conclusion was faulty, although a few of the earliest surviving ‘Cromwellian’ registers do contain entries dated before 1538, suggesting some kind of precedent, although not necessarily a precise one.⁷ Reconsideration of the specific records from which the false equivalence was derived – from the parishes of All Saints and St Michael at the North Gate, Oxford – provides the springboard for this article. They are annual statements of receipts for liturgical activities within those churches compiled for submission to the Rector and Fellows of Lincoln College as the churches’ corporate rectors, and meshed into the college’s annual accounting process.⁸ Their most immediately relevant feature is their inclusion of key life-cycle spiritual events (purifications of women after childbirth, solemnizations of marriages and funeral celebrations) listed under precise dates in a calendrical order.⁹ The differences between these records and the parochial registration imposed in 1538 are fundamental, and critical. Baptism is completely absent (and purification no substitute for it), while a funeral does not place a corpse as precisely as a burial does. Most strikingly, and most importantly, these records do not routinely record names: the *dramatis personae* usually remain anonymous. At heart, these records do not reflect a concern or requirement to catalogue events as such. Their basic purpose is financial: they record receipts from events, not the events themselves; why income was generated, not who paid or the individuals at the centre of the rites. They cannot be addressed and interpreted in the same way as post-1538 parish registers.

The recording of life-cycle rites of passage in these and similar accounts challenges any expectations and preconceptions of pre-Reformation practices based on the Cromwellian registration

⁶ Ibid. 30.

⁷ See J. Charles Cox, *The Parish Registers of England* (London, 1910), 236–9.

⁸ Fuller discussion in R. N. Swanson, ‘Town and Gown, Nave and Chancel: Parochial Experience in Late Medieval Oxford’, in David Harry and Christian Steer, eds, *The Urban Church in Late Medieval England: Essays from the 2017 Harlaxton Symposium held in Honour of Clive Burgess*, Harlaxton Medieval Studies 29 (Donington, 2019), 301–31.

⁹ Representative entries extracted in Clark, ed., *Lincoln Diocese Documents*, 29–34. For an overview of the ecclesiastical ceremonial of life-cycle rites of passage, see Orme, *Going to Church*, 302–49; for a broader social assessment, see Katherine L. French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death* (Philadelphia, PA, 2008), 50–84.

requirements. It merits attention and comment as a distinctly different phenomenon. This first requires some discussion of the available sources and their basic utility as evidence for the rites. The approach can then be reversed to consider the rites themselves, as dealt with in the sources. Goals here are deliberately limited, with the focus very firmly on the parochial events and their records. This avoids the traps and diversions which threaten any attempt at broader contextualization within the administrative structures and records of royal and diocesan governance and oversight. The outcome is essentially descriptive, becoming argumentative only when necessary to explain the character and content of the sources.

SOURCES

Among parochial records, the basic split within parishes between 'chancel' and 'nave' is crucial. On the chancel side lies the clerical benefice centred on the cure of souls, sacramental authority and priest-directed liturgical performance under the jurisdictional authority of the local incumbent or rector. The nave side embraces the semi-autonomous community of parishioners – not exclusively lay – with their own financial administration geared primarily to funding maintenance of the parish church, and usually directed by churchwardens. Both regimes can be complicated by the existence of subsidiary units, with their own subject administrations and varying degrees of financial and fiscal autonomy. The division between the 'clerical' and 'communal' (or 'lay') versions of 'the parish' was physically symbolized by the chancel arch, but the performance of the rites, and the benefice accounts which reflect them, transcend this notional separation. That transcendence potentially integrates transients and short-term residents, rich or poor, into the records of both chancel and nave, falling under the incumbent's spiritual jurisdiction as parishioners, and mentioned in nave accounts in relation to costs or payment for rites.¹⁰

While the core evidence considered here derives from the chancel side, recording liturgical performance and its integration into the duties of pastoral care, and detailing elements of the associated

¹⁰ As with an unnamed 'man from London', whose funeral is mentioned in both the benefice and churchwardens' accounts for St Michael at the North Gate, Oxford, in 1475: Swanson, 'Town and Gown', 326.

miscellaneous and varying income gathered by the rector or his substitute under the broad heading of ‘altarage’, the nave cannot be ignored. The parishioners maintained their own financial records, in the varied forms and formats of surviving pre-Reformation churchwardens’ accounts. These significantly outnumber the detailed chancel accounts, but are still relatively rare. Like the chancel accounts, their purpose was essentially fiscal; but their recording is more haphazard. Nothing within them amounts to a formal registration of life-cycle rites of passage, regarding which their concern is not primarily the liturgical events themselves, but the use and consumption of parochial resources. What matters is the revenue generated by the burning of wax and torches, the ringing of bells and the hiring of other liturgical accessories, and finally burial fees (usually for intramural graves). Their listing is rarely explicitly calendrical; the amount of detail reflects the whims of their compilers and local accounting practices. For our immediate purposes, the nave material is supplementary to the chancel evidence, and generally of secondary value and utility. It has greater value in the extremely rare instances where surviving records allow complementary insights from both sides of the chancel arch, with St Michael at the North Gate in Oxford being possibly the best example.¹¹ Beyond the accounts, additional material survives incidentally in a wide range of contexts. Litigation records perhaps add the most, to the point that one batch of chancel accounts is known only by its survival among the file of court documents relating to a dispute over a vicar’s income.¹²

Surviving calendrical lists of liturgical events like those for the two Oxford parishes of All Saints and St Michael at the North Gate are extremely rare.¹³ That rarity in part reflects their place in the accounting cycle: the detail was relevant only for the accountant compiling a statement for transmission and incorporation into a higher layer

¹¹ Others, with less informative chancel accounts, are noted in Swanson, ‘Town and Gown’, 328–9 n. 122. More may await detection.

¹² The Hornsea accounts are discussed and edited in Peter Heath, *Medieval Clerical Accounts*, St Anthony’s Hall Publications 26 (York, 1964), 5–11, 25–59. These are now at York, BIA, CP.F.306.

¹³ The closest match to the Oxford accounts is Salisbury, Salisbury Cathedral Archives, FA/2/1–24 (others undated in FA/2/2), from St Thomas’s Church, Salisbury. Very similar are those for Scarborough, now at Kew, TNA, E101/314/31-2: see Heath, *Medieval Clerical Accounts*, 3–4; the calendrical statement of liturgical income for 1435–6 is translated in R. N. Swanson, ed., *Catholic England: Faith, Religion, and Observance before the Reformation* (Manchester, 2014), 151–7.

within an institutional financial administration. At that system's apex, the detail is usually reduced to a mere summary. The detailed statements for both Oxford parishes thus appear in the itemized booklets of income and expenditure prepared annually by the bursars of Lincoln College, but not in the final summary balance sheets.¹⁴ The production and survival of detailed records usually reflects a specific organizational context for the benefices, without automatically meaning that they were created only in that context. Survival is obviously essential. Many of the known examples relate to appropriated parishes, in which the cure of souls was delegated to chaplains who compiled the initial lists. These were then fed into the appropriators' accounting process (possibly with some editing, and sometimes via intermediary agents). The detailed lists had evidential value to validate the totals, but presumably soon became disposable ephemera.¹⁵ These fully calendrical accounts can be supplemented by others, such as those from Hornsea (Yorkshire) and Topsham (Devon), which give less detail, breaking the year into terms, or organizing the rites by category.¹⁶ (Events may still be noted in chronological order, but without dates.) At the highest accounting levels, summary annual balance sheets may still indicate annual income from the rites, but that is variable: within extended runs, practice can change over time.¹⁷

Even if normally retained by an appropriator, the post-Reformation survival of these sources usually requires that institution's own survival and archival continuity; Lincoln College, Oxford, for the two Oxford parishes; Salisbury's cathedral chapter

¹⁴ Oxford, Lincoln College Archives [hereafter: LCA], Bursary Papers, Miscellaneous Bundles, 1–3 and Charters 39.

¹⁵ Totals in some of the Durham proctors' accounts (see n. 17 below) have the validating comment: 'ut patet in papirum computantis' ('as is shown in the accountant's paper').

¹⁶ For Hornsea, see n. 12 above; for Topsham, see Exeter, Exeter Cathedral Archives, 4647.

¹⁷ For sample material from Great Yarmouth and Bishop's [now King's] Lynn (both Norfolk), see Swanson, *Catholic England*, 157–63; for discussions, see idem, 'Standards of Livings: Parochial Revenues in Pre-Reformation England', in Christopher Harper-Bill, ed., *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Late Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), 151–96, at 164, 168, 190; idem, 'Urban Rectories and Urban Fortunes in Late Medieval England: The Evidence from King's Lynn', in T. R. Slater and Gervase Rosser, eds, *The Church in the Medieval Town* (Aldershot, 1998), 100–30, at 108, 110, 122–3. Totalling at an intermediate point appears in the proctors' accounts for the churches at Norham (Northumberland) and St Oswald and St Margaret, Durham, all appropriated to Durham Cathedral Priory: Durham, Durham University Library, Archives and Special Collections, DCD-St Mar. acs; DCD-St Os. acs; DCD-Norh. acs.

for similar calendrical material from St Thomas, Salisbury; Exeter Cathedral chapter for the Topsham records. Comparable accounts may have been much more common, even in unappropriated parishes, possibly within the ‘Easter books’ (alternatively identified as Easter or Lenten rolls) often mentioned in medieval sources. Their precise character and content are elusive, but they appear in several entries in the *Valor ecclesiasticus* of 1535, implicitly associated with altarge income.¹⁸ They may have been compiled by vicars in appropriated parishes and rectors in unappropriated ones, but a more likely background is their creation by the stipendiary parochial chaplains who undertook the basic donkey work of pastoral and liturgical care (especially for absentee incumbents), and presumably had to account to their employers for the revenues they received (and, possibly, failed to receive) on their behalf. Two detailed accounts from Blunham (Bedfordshire) were probably prepared for the rectory’s lay farmer, indicating the privatization of such ecclesiastical revenues when rectorial resources were leased out (to clerical or lay holders); but no accountant is named.¹⁹ The surviving Hornsea accounts were compiled for the vicar by the parochial chaplain.²⁰ Some chaplains officiating in dependent chapels which enjoyed some autonomy compiled their own Easter books to account to the parochial incumbent; similar arrangements are also conceivable in some of the ‘extra-parochial’ areas associated with monastic houses.²¹

However speculative imagination and enthusiasm may shape attitudes and readings of the initial stages of the receiving process, the end results, even if seemingly detailed, are not always useful for

¹⁸ For example, [John Caley and Joseph Hunter], eds, *Valor ecclesiasticus*, 6 vols (London, 1810–34), 3: 180–1, 268–9; 5: 57–61, 213–15; 6: xlii–xliii.

¹⁹ John S. Thompson, ed., *Hundreds, Manors, Parishes and the Church: A Selection of Early Documents for Bedfordshire*, Publications of the Bedfordshire Historical Record Society 69 (Bedford, 1990), 125, 145–69 (esp. 145–6, 161–3; also mention of ‘th’Eyster book’ at 144).

²⁰ Heath, *Medieval Clerical Accounts*, 27–8. Several of the accounts name no accountant, so could have been compiled by the vicar.

²¹ For example, BIA, CP.G.247 (from 1536), discussed in R. N. Swanson, ‘Fissures in the Bedrock: Parishes, Chapels, Parishioners and Chaplains in Pre-Reformation England’, in Nadine Lewycky and Adam Morton, eds, *Getting Along? Religious Identities and Confessional Relations in Early Modern England: Essays in Honour of Professor W. J. Sheils* (Farnham, 2012), 77–95, at 90–1. See also [Caley and Hunter], eds, *Valor ecclesiasticus*, 3: 269. Distribution may be suggested by references to chapels ‘used as a parish church’ in the Yorkshire chantry surveys of the 1540s: Swanson, ‘Fissures’, 83, 87; see also 84, 90. St Margaret, Durham, was an autonomous chapelry of St Oswald (see n. 17 above).

present purposes. A brief run of accounts from [Santon] Downham (Suffolk) includes itemized purifications, marriages and burials scattered among the disorderly entries, with other notes seemingly as annual totals. The paucity of precise entries suggests that they cannot record all such occurrences (perhaps confirmed by a mortuary entered with no sign of an associated funeral); but it is impossible to be sure.²²

CHECKPOINTS AND TOLL STATIONS

The fiscal imperative behind the creation of the pre-Reformation chancel material establishes the basic functional distinction between such sources and the Cromwellian registers. The rites noted in the pre-Reformation records were ones which generated income for the relevant cleric; what mattered was the money generated by liturgical performance, not the performance itself. That affects how the records were constructed and how they can be interpreted. The life-cycle rites of passage can be imagined as checkpoints in the pilgrimage of life; the character of the benefice accounts almost makes negotiating some of them equivalent to negotiating going through a tollbooth.

Entering Traffic: Births, Baptism and Purification

Perhaps surprisingly, baptism does not usually appear as the first tollbooth, despite its critical role on the road to salvation. None of the examined accounts itemize baptisms, presenting a stark contrast with the stipulations of Cromwell's injunctions. One explanation may be that payment would reek of simony, the illicit purchase of a sacrament, although ways could have been found around that obstacle. A financial statement from Kirkby Malhamdale (Yorkshire) in 1454–5 does mention a fee charged there ($\frac{1}{4}d.$), but this stands alone.²³ Lack of accounting need not mean lack of recording, potentially among the information collected in Easter books. Recurrent statements by witnesses in secular legal proceedings to prove the

²² TNA, E101/517/27, fols 1^r, 2^r, 3^{r-v}, 4^v–5^r, 6^r.

²³ London, BL, Add. Roll 32957. The totals entered in this account cannot be converted into separate events. Income from *baptisteria* appears in the proctors' accounts for the churches of St Oswald and St Margaret at Durham, and at Norham (see n. 17 above); what they mean is uncertain, but they may indicate payments for chrisom cloths used at baptism. (See also below, p. 151 [at notes 30–1].)

ages of minors seeking to enter inheritances on attaining their majority declare that a baptism had been entered in a mass book or other liturgical volume; although this cannot have been normal for all baptisms (even if it had happened in the stated instances).²⁴ The urgency of baptism and the likelihood of neonatal death may lie behind the absence: baptism had, in these cases, to be performed speedily. In really urgent instances, that might be by a midwife, lest a priest did not arrive in time; but with subsequent priestly ratification by conditional rebaptism if he did. The frequency of such midwife-baptisms cannot be assessed, for lack of evidence. They may lie behind some of the complaints against clergy who had allegedly allowed newborns to die unbaptized, if a Devonshire case from the mid-1530s is representative. That baby died before the priest arrived, ‘unchristened except that [which] the midwife did to it’.²⁵

The first recorded rite which suggests a new life-cycle centres, however, on the mothers, not the babies: their purification (or ‘churching’), performed around forty days after the birth (but not always that long after) to reintegrate the mother into the parochial community after surviving the ordeal of childbirth.²⁶ It seems a reasonably safe assumption that any purification which produced income would be recorded where accounts were kept; but the rite was sometimes celebrated illicitly or clandestinely, and some women may have evaded it or been denied access.²⁷

²⁴ The credibility of proofs is debated. Despite doubts about their detailed reliability, they are plausible guides to contemporary practice at a general level. For varying assessments, see Sue Sheridan Walker, ‘Proof of Age of Feudal Heirs in Medieval England’, *Mediaeval Studies* 35 (1973), 306–23; Joel T. Rosenthal, *Telling Tales: Sources and Narration in Late Medieval England* (University Park, PA, 2003), 1–62; Matthew Holford, ‘“Testimony (to Some Extent Fictitious)”: Proofs of Age in the First Half of the Fifteenth Century’, *HR* 82 (2009), 635–59.

²⁵ French, *Good Women*, 57–8; Joyce Youngs, ed., *The Dissolution of the Monasteries* (London, 1971), 139–40, at 140.

²⁶ French, *Good Women*, 61–3. For evidence from proof of age proceedings, see L. R. Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex, 1350–1525* (Cambridge, 1991), 122 and n. 28.

²⁷ See BIA, CP.G.222 (duplicated at CP.G.240), for an illicit purification celebrated at a chapel. Purifications are among those actions specifically banned at one chapel in Philippa M. Hoskin, ed., *Robert Grosseteste as Bishop of Lincoln: The Episcopal Rolls, 1235–1253* (Woodbridge, 2015), no. 1871, ‘nisi in articulis necessariis’ (‘other than at the points of urgent need’), but allowed at another (no. 2062), with licence from the parochial rector and vicar.

While a purification was often a positive celebration, its character was frequently tempered by the reality of a stillbirth or neonatal death (the latter sometimes evident – or strongly suggested – from funeral entries).²⁸ As a ‘rite of passage’, purification was not necessarily a unique lifetime event. Repetition and normality may explain why the income it generated was rarely significant: in the Oxford parishes, it was usually only a few pence. This could also be a sign of maternal or familial poverty, or an indication that most celebrations produced only a customary fee. At Kirkby Malhamdale, the expected payment was 2*d.* (halved if the purification occurred in conjunction with a marriage).²⁹ It is likely that at least 1*d.* of that was a ‘mass penny’. The payment for the chrisom cloth used at baptism was also handed over at the purification, in effect a deferred baptismal fee. Purifications are rarely mentioned in nave records, but several appear in fifteenth-century churchwardens’ accounts from Saffron Walden (Essex).³⁰ Their analysis is challenging, and few are itemized. Sums received were minimal and, where indicated, varied between ½*d.* and 2*d.*; at least two women paid nothing as paupers. What the payment was actually for is not revealed; it may have been for hire of a special purification pew.³¹

The manner of recording purifications varies. At Scarborough, they are listed simply as impersonal events. At Hornsea, itemized purifications are all of wives (identified only as appendages to their husbands), but others, unspecified, are combined in collective totals

²⁸ Stillbirths cannot be detected because such children could not receive baptism and full funeral rites. The collocation of a child’s funeral and the mother’s purification (linked by shared surname) allows for the assumption of a neonatal death, without actually establishing it. For example, among the accounts for the two Oxford parishes, we have: 1495 – funeral of Asley’s child (February) and his wife’s purification (March) (LCA, Computus 1, Calc. 7, p. 1); 1509 – purification of Hugh Hynd’s wife and child’s burial (February) (ibid., Computus 1, Calc. 9, p. 1). The proximity of funerals for a child and wife also suggests the deaths of a newborn and its mother, for e.g., in 1507, the funerals of Schappe’s child and wife (April) and Collyn’s child and wife (June) (ibid., Computus 2 Calc. 4, pp. 4, 5). For a firmly neonatal funeral, see n. 47 below.

²⁹ See n. 40 below. The reduction may reflect the fact that the mass penny was ‘saved’ by celebrating a single mass for the two rites.

³⁰ Poos, *Rural Society*, 123–4. No mention appears in Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: the Rise and Reformation of the English Parish, c.1400–1560* (Aldershot, 1996).

³¹ French, *Good Women*, 63.

‘from others’ (*de diversis*).³² Whether, or how, the distinction between itemized and collective entries matters is unclear. It may be mirrored in the Oxford records, which likewise identify some of the women as wives, but leave others with no indication of marital status. In context, the differences may simply reflect status, with the wives of parochial leaders being indicated, while the impersonal labels suggest women of lower status and poverty. Some of the latter are identified merely as *muliercula* or *paupercula*,³³ for which the formal translations as respectively ‘little woman’ and ‘poor little woman’ may be inadequate. Inherited linguistic overtones of immorality in the designations of *muliercula* and *paupercula* could indicate a prostitute, not simply a poor woman of low status, but this cannot be tested.³⁴ Innumerable babies must have been born to prostitutes or unmarried mothers, or to pregnant vagrants whose marital status and child’s legitimacy were unknown. However, explicit indications of bastardy are strikingly absent, the only obvious instance in consulted material being the purification at Topsham of a woman identified as John Mayner’s concubine.³⁵ Interpretation of the purifications which occurred on the same day as the (presumed) parents’ marriage complicates the picture, but they probably reflected delayed solemnizations of a preceding marital contract. That the threat of denial was used against some women, as moral blackmail or policing, is occasionally reported in other sources. The raft of accusations against one Yorkshire vicar in the early fifteenth century included the charge that he had refused to baptize the children of single mothers unless they publicly named the fathers. He denied the charge as framed, but admitted that he had demanded denunciation

³² Swanson, *Catholic England*, 151–6; Heath, *Medieval Clerical Accounts*, 28–30, 35–6, 42–3.

³³ For example, LCA, Computus 1, Calc. 8, pp. 8–9; Computus 2, Calc. 4, p. 6.

³⁴ *Muliercula* carried such associations in classical Latin: J. N. Adams, ‘Words for “Prostitute” in Latin’, *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie* n.f. 126 (1983), 321–58, at 354. The few citations in the *Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources* (online at: <<http://clt.brepolis.net/dmlbs/>>, last accessed 19 January 2022) do not extend the meaning that far. One associates the word with *paupercula*, but without clear sexual imputation. *Paupercula* appears as the feminine form *s.v. pauperculus*, likewise without the negative sexual connotations. *Pauperculus* is applied to some men in LCA, Computus 2, Calc. 4, pp. 5, 7.

³⁵ Exeter Cathedral Archives, 4647, fol. 1^r. A servant’s purification, with no husband named, may be another: *ibid.*

when the mothers sought purification.³⁶ This makes his action a disciplinary act against the mother, rather than a punishment against the child and a threat to its soul. From one standpoint, the charge could indicate that the vicar was being unduly harsh in his treatment of these women. Alternatively, his demand for public revelation may have been feared as socially disruptive. The women had clearly concealed their babies' paternity throughout their pregnancies; the fathers' naming may have been the real threat, potentially undermining reputations and status within the parish.

Marriage

Marriages appear less often in the accounts than purifications, for the fairly obvious reasons that not all mothers were married, and wives often produced several children. Although not always unique life-cycle events, their repetition was limited, but is sometimes detectable in benefice accounts when mentioned after a deceased spouse's funeral.³⁷

Formally, the liturgical rites noted in the chancel records were not the actual marriage – the exchange of vows – but its solemnization at a nuptial mass. The two often – probably usually – coincided, but that was not a technical or legal requirement. Unless performed clandestinely (implying secrecy, and perhaps payments which did not go through the parochial books), solemnization would normally succeed a public exchange (or restatement) of vows at the church door; an event intended to be noticed and remembered, and usually preceded by advance notices in church (banns) to give objectors opportunities to allege impediments.³⁸ In some circumstances, the solemnization

³⁶ J. S. Purvis, *A Mediaeval Act Book, with Some Account of Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction at York* (York, [1943]), 38. Priests were expected to ask about paternity when baptizing the child of an unmarried mother: David Wilkins, ed., *Concilia Magna Britanniae et Hiberniae*, 4 vols (London, 1737), 2: 132.

³⁷ For example, at All Saints, Oxford, 1477, Philip Glover's burial (February) and his widow's remarriage (September): LCA, Computus 1, Calc. 3, pp. 1, 3.

³⁸ R. H. Helmholz, *The Oxford History of the Laws of England*, 1: *The Canon Law and Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction from 597 to the 1640s* (Oxford, 2004), 523–4, 531. For clandestine celebrations, see, e.g., Ian Forrest and Christopher Whittick, eds, *The Visitation of Hereford Diocese in 1397*, CYS 111 (Woodbridge, 2021), nos 252–3, 306. A secular link between church marriage and conferral or confirmation of rights of dower reinforced its public significance: Sir John Baker, *Collected Papers on English Legal History*, 3 vols (Cambridge, 2013), 3: 1371–5.

was understood as the formal public completion and ecclesiastical ratification of a pre-existing union; sometimes mistakenly so, if procured in an attempt to validate one which was potentially illicit and void under canon law.³⁹

The legal and practical complexities surrounding pre-Reformation marriages are ignored in the accounts. As financial records, their prime concern is with the offerings made and payments for wax used during the ceremony, with a mass penny presumably incorporated into the total. As elsewhere, the Kirkby Malhamdale statement provides firmer guidance, but not a template, and indicates that a marriage there was expensive. The fee for the church door ceremony (the exchange of vows) was 8*d.* (of which 2*d.* went to the parish clerk); altar candles cost another 2*d.* If the woman was purified at the same time (instances are suggested in the Topsham accounts), the sum was reduced to 1*d.*⁴⁰ Standardization of fees and offerings – both probably customary rather than formally regulated – is occasionally suggested elsewhere, but not always detectable.⁴¹

Unlike the Cromwellian registers, the benefice accounts do not normally identify the marital partners. The parish's social hierarchy may be exposed here, in the distinction between those named and those left anonymous, but that does not always apply. Brides are often left nameless, identified only as their fathers' daughters. Any movement across parochial boundaries by either party (or both) was irrelevant in the accounting process, and is invisible within it.

Exiting Traffic: Death, Burial and Beyond

The final sacramental life-cycle rite of passage was extreme unction, the last communion and absolution before death and burial. Like baptism, but for different reasons (it was not conferred in church; the anticipated death might not occur; and no mass was celebrated),

³⁹ For 'completion', see Stafford, Staffordshire Record Office, LD30/3/3/1, fol. 7^r. For attempted validation, see Forrest and Whittick, eds, *Visitation*, nos 306, 1014, 1071, 1076. See also Helmholz, *Oxford History*, 531.

⁴⁰ BL, Add. Roll 32957. A couple of entries in the Topsham accounts record receipts for purification and marriage (in that order) *in eadem die* ('on the same day'): Exeter Cathedral Archives, 4647, fol. 3^v; similar entries without that precision at *ibid.*, fol. 1^r, and purification after or at the wedding (*post nupcias* or *in nupciis*) at *ibid.*, fols 3^v, 8^v.

⁴¹ Swanson, 'Town and Gown', 311.

extreme unction is absent from the records.⁴² Socially, what mattered was the funeral; spiritually (and within that), what mattered was the requiem mass which signalled the soul's transit into the afterlife.

The entries for funerals are perhaps the most problematic element in parochial recording of rites of passage, enmeshed in jurisdictional complexities amidst which the concept of 'parishioner' itself became blurred. While parishioners might be expected to be buried in their home parish, they retained the right to choose burial elsewhere. The mortuary due at death was payable to the incumbent of the parish where the death occurred, even if the deceased was only a transient; the incumbent could legitimately claim that the funeral be held there also. Numerous variables created conflicting rights and expectations, further complicated by uncertainties about geographical boundaries and local customs. Contested claims concerning funerals and burials generated innumerable court cases centred on corpses and their resting places.⁴³

Parochial recording would be affected by these uncertainties and conflicts, but demonstrating this from the available benefice accounts becomes an argument from silence, pierced only by insights obtained from other sources with little direct overlap and of uncertain applicability. The occasional indications of formal local tariff arrangements have questionable general validity, and clearly are not universal templates. At Kirkby Malhamdale, everyone dying above the (unstated) age at which they would receive sacramentals paid 7*d.* as 'nythewax'; maybe implying that there were no charges for infants and young children. A flat rate of 1*d.* was charged for each candle burning around the bier (*feretrum*).⁴⁴ Meanwhile, in 1525 at Bodmin (Cornwall), the parishioners asserted that their vicar received 6*d.* 'for every direge and masse, for ev[er]y man, woman, and chylde,

⁴² Canonically, any priest could confer extreme unction on anyone qualified to receive it who appeared to be at the point of death (*in articulo mortis*), although it was normally expected to be conferred by the incumbent or his stand-in as a component of the spiritual jurisdiction of the parochial cure of souls. Alleged breaches of that prerogative sometimes feature in cases in the ecclesiastical courts, with chaplains accused of acting without authorization, or of usurping occupation of a subsidiary chapel. For examples of court cases, see BIA, CP.G.222 (duplicated at CP.G.240); Margaret Bowker, ed., *An Episcopal Court Book for the Diocese of Lincoln, 1514–1520*, Lincoln Record Society 61 (Lincoln, 1967), 4–6: in both, the accused chaplain claimed that he acted *in articulo mortis*.

⁴³ For cases illustrating some of the tensions and critical points, see n. 50 above.

⁴⁴ BL, Add. Roll 32957. The 'nythewax' payment may include a mass penny, without actually saying so.

dedde', although this may refer to post-funeral commemorations.⁴⁵ The possibility that funerals of children below a certain age occurred without payments may explain the apparent paucity of child burials in some accounts.⁴⁶ It is, however, immediately challenged by the obvious child and infant funerals noted at Oxford, most strikingly those following the neonatal deaths of a set of triplets.⁴⁷ A more worrying possibility is that accounts are misleading in not revealing all of the funerary rites performed within the parish. Going to law, incumbents sought recompense for revenue lost at allegedly adulterine funerals and burials outside their parish, or (within it) at chapels which lacked authorized burial rights.⁴⁸ Burials at friaries were particularly problematic. Canon law stipulations sought to protect incumbents' and parochial rights by requiring a funeral-like 'last farewell' (*ultima vale*) at the parish church and guaranteeing the incumbent a 'canonical quarter' of the offerings and legacies at the burial church, whatever its status.⁴⁹ Other battles were fought between incumbents of rival parishes (sometimes because the deceased lived in an enclave of one within the other), or when incumbents or their parishioners, or chaplains and their chapelry's inhabitants, resisted the monopolies of burial rights claimed by some cathedrals (in the first scenario) or their parish church (in the second).⁵⁰ If such crises erupted in any of the

⁴⁵ [John Wallis], ed., *The Bodmin Register* (Bodmin, [1838]), 37 (in the context of a dispute with the vicar over his financial claims on the parishioners). The quotation is followed by the words quoted below, n. 69, which do relate to post-funeral commemorations. Reference to 'dirige' with the mass prompts association with the funeral (Orme, *Going to Church*, 341), but may not be conclusive.

⁴⁶ None are obviously visible at Hornsea; only a few at Topsham (Exeter Cathedral Archives, 4647, fols 1^v, 4^{f-v}), most of them in a distinct cluster.

⁴⁷ LCA, Computus 2, Calc. 7, p. 8.

⁴⁸ For cases, see n. 50 below.

⁴⁹ Thomas M. Izbicki, 'The Problem of Canonical Portion in the Later Middle Ages: The Application of "Super cathedram"', in Peter Linehan, ed., *Proceedings of the Seventh International Congress of Medieval Canon Law, Cambridge 23–27 July 1984*, Monumenta iuris canonici, Series C: Subsidia 8 (Vatican City, 1988), 459–73. For receipts from the canonical quarter at Bishop's Lynn, see Swanson, 'Urban Rectories', 120–1. The friars aggressively defended their own claims to perform funerals and burials, resisting the claims of parochial clergy in the courts of their own papal conservators: R. N. Swanson, 'The "Mendicant Problem" in the Later Middle Ages', in Peter Biller and Barrie Dobson, eds, *The Medieval Church: Universities, Heresy, and the Religious Life*, SCH Sub 11 (Woodbridge, 1999), 217–38, at 221–4, 238; BL, Add. MS 32089, fols 108^v–110^v.

⁵⁰ For relevant disputes, see Forrest and Whittick, eds, *Visitation*, no. 179; R. N. Swanson, 'Parochialism and Particularism: The Disputed Status of Ditchford

parishes for which benefice accounts survive, they are undetectable in them. Only one *ultima vale* is mentioned in the Oxford accounts; its singularity is as noteworthy as its appearance. Where the corpse actually ended up is not indicated.⁵¹

If there were standardized payments for funerals, their standardization is also undetectable in the surviving parochial statements. These only record the total received, normally amalgamating the receipts from offerings and / or dues with payments for wax provided by the incumbent. Wax purchases were not necessarily compulsory, or charged at the Kirkby Malhamdale rate: more likely wax was sold by weight. Purchases, or payments for the hire or waste of torches, also appear in churchwardens' accounts, as do payments for bell-ringing and the hire of the hearse.⁵² At Scarborough, the wax income is noted separately, sometimes exceeding the offerings. There, also, some families are noted as using their own wax, producing no receipts.⁵³ (The church may then have received the leftover wax, as is noted for one Oxford funeral.⁵⁴)

Looking beyond the benefice accounts, funerals are the most likely of all the life-cycle rites of passage to leave traces within churchwardens' accounts and related sources, either by explicit mention of receipts associated with the ceremony, or indirectly by payment of burial fees. In both categories, the recording is usually incomplete or uninformative, but for differing reasons. The direct references, and the gaps, obviously reflect wealth and relative concerns for social status, as well as, in some cases (imaginable, but not overtly detectable

Frary, Warwickshire, in the Early Fifteenth Century', in M. J. Franklin and Christopher Harper-Bill, eds, *Medieval Ecclesiastical Studies in Honour of Dorothy M. Owen* (Woodbridge, 1995), 241–57; idem, "'Liber de practica advocatorum, non utilior in Anglia': A Canonist's Compilation from the Fourteenth-Century Court of Arches", forthcoming in Travis Baker, ed., *Christian Culture and Society in Later Catholic England* (Leiden, 2023); Ian Forrest, 'The Politics of Burial in Late Medieval Hereford', *EHR* 125 (2010), 1110–38.

⁵¹ LCA, Computus 3, fol. 53^r. The *ultima vale* of a fellow of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge, appears in the Peterhouse accounts of 1464–5 'because he died within our parish' (St Peter without Trumpington Gate): Cambridge, Peterhouse Archives, Computus Roll 25.

⁵² For example, David Dymond, ed., *The Churchwardens' Book of Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire, 1496–c.1540*, Cambridgeshire Record Society 17 (Cambridge, 2004), xlvi, xlix–lvii, 292 *s.v.* 'burials'; Reginald C. Dudding, ed., *The First Churchwardens' Book of Louth, 1500–1524* (Oxford, 1941), 3–6, 45–6, 48–51, 60–3.

⁵³ Swanson, *Catholic England*, 152, 155.

⁵⁴ Swanson, 'Town and Gown', 311 and n. 49.

in accounts), a desire to reduce ostentation for spiritual reasons.⁵⁵ Pauper funerals, almost by definition, would be very different from elite ones. If recorded, burial fees might provide a fuller census, but equivalence to a Cromwellian burial register is unlikely. The Westminster churchwardens' accounts of 1460 to 1510 – with some gaps in their series – have been described as amounting to 'a mortuary register ... as the name of the person interred is always entered [regardless of] whether [the burial occurred] in the spacious churchyard or within the church'; but that assessment may be overconfident.⁵⁶ Unless funded by charitable collections or grants, pauper funerals might produce no income;⁵⁷ delayed receipts could be hidden unitemized in the next year's (or years') arrears; even an 'elite' funeral might not be recorded, its dues wiped out to cancel an earlier debt.⁵⁸ As already noted, the life-cycle events recorded in benefice accounts are chiefly those of lay parishioners. Recording for the clergy is much sparser and more elusive. In the mainstream sequence, they would only appear at their funerals: the distinctively clerical adult rites of passage marked the progression through the successive stages of ordination (as acolyte, subdeacon and deacon) to its completion in admission to priesthood. Ordinations were not inherently parochial events, even if they were sometimes celebrated in parish churches.⁵⁹ (The same argument applies to ordinations to first tonsure, which marked initiation into clerical status, usually conferred in childhood or adolescence.⁶⁰)

⁵⁵ See general discussion of funerals and burials in Sally Badham, *Seeking Salvation: Commemorating the Dead in the Late-Medieval English Parish* (Donington, 2015), 187–97, 209–14, 241–3.

⁵⁶ J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London, 1913), 27. It has not been possible to consult the original accounts, now London, City of Westminster Archives Centre, SMW/E/1/1.

⁵⁷ Dymond, ed., *Bassingbourn*, 94; William Hale, *A Series of Precedents and Proceedings in Criminal Causes, extending from the Year 1475 to 1640; Extracted from the Act-Books of Ecclesiastical Courts in the Diocese of London, Illustrative of the Discipline of the Church of England*, ed. R. W. Dunning (Edinburgh, 1974), 95.

⁵⁸ As in Dudding, ed., *Louth*, 39, 45.

⁵⁹ For ceremonies in parish churches, see, e.g., Warwick P. Marett, ed., *A Calendar of the Register of Henry Wakefield, Bishop of Worcester, 1375–95*, Worcestershire Historical Society n.s. 7 (1972), nos 874–983 (intermittently); John C. Bates, ed., *The Register of William Bothe, Bishop of Coventry and Lichfield, 1447–1452*, CYS 98 (Woodbridge, 2008), nos 317, 320, 336–9, 342.

⁶⁰ For such ordinations in parish churches, see, e.g., R. C. Fowler and C. Jenkins, eds, *Registrum Simonis de Sudburia, diocesis Londoniensis, A.D. 1362–1375*, CYS 34, 38, 2 vols

A different ambiguity affects an associated rite, the celebration of a priest's first mass. If it was indeed his first exercise of his newly received power to transubstantiate wafers and wine into the body and blood of Christ, its identification as a rite of passage does seem justified. In some cases, it was a 'parochial' event, at least to the extent that it generated income entered in a benefice account. However, firm evidence that a first mass was considered special is elusive; its seeming appearance as such in a benefice account may be deceptive. Among the consulted accounts, relevant entries appear only in those from Oxford, suggesting that its highlighting indicates deliberate choice.⁶¹ The sums recorded are comparatively high (12*d.* or 20*d.*). Described as 'compositions', what they represent is unclear. They possibly covered payment to the rector (in this case, Lincoln College) for the wafer(s) and wine used at the new priest's first consecration. Such payments, made by visiting or subsidiary priests, are occasionally noted elsewhere.⁶²

More significantly absent from available benefice accounts are references to an incumbent's funeral. In general, that is only to be expected: if the records derive from appropriated parishes served by chaplains, there was no individual incumbent.⁶³ Elsewhere, the situation was more complicated. Formally, at an incumbent's death the benefice income during the subsequent vacancy would normally lapse to the parish's jurisdictional superior. Information about the funeral receipts for the deceased incumbent should then appear in the vacancy accounts later submitted to that superior by the caretaker

(Oxford, 1927–38), 2: 10, 27, 63; G. R. Dunstan, ed., *The Register of Edmund Lacy, Bishop of Exeter, 1420–1455: Registrum Commune*, CYS 60–3, 66, 5 vols (Torquay, 1971), 4: 80–229, for numerous examples. For discussion of these minor orders, conferred before the major, holy, orders and known as 'first tonsure' (by this period usually conflated into a single ordination rite), which infused a potentially lifelong clerical 'character' without requiring celibacy, see R. N. Swanson, *Church and Society in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, 1989), 40–3; David Robinson, 'First Tonsures in England in the First Half of the Fourteenth Century', *JEH* 73 (2022), 505–24, esp. 505, 507, 510, 520, 523–4.

⁶¹ LCA, Computus 2, Calc. 3, p. 7; Computus 4, pp. 48–9.

⁶² LCA, Computus 3, fols 94^v–95^r (and elsewhere in the full run); cf. Peterhouse Archives, Computus Rolls 24, 25.

⁶³ The situation with 'collective incumbencies', exercised by colleges of secular priests, nuances this statement. Funerals of individuals within the undying collectivity might then appear in the benefice accounts, as they do for the Fellows of Lincoln College, Oxford.

administrators appointed for the interval. Relevant entries appear in early sixteenth-century archidiaconal accounts from Lincoln diocese, although not for all parochial vacancies caused by an incumbent's death.⁶⁴

Thus far, the notion of 'rites of passage' has been confined to the terrestrial life cycle, as the Christian *viator* – whether a mere 'traveller' or consciously a 'pilgrim' – journeys from birth to death, paying the required dues to the parochial toll collector en route. But if funeral offerings represent toll payments, the journey remained unfinished: death was itself but a staging post in the soul's continuing pilgrimage into and through the afterlife. 'Rites of passage' there would be very different in quality and function from those of the earthly life, and applying the label 'post-mortem' may be open to challenge. Yet, if the living who made the funding arrangements for the rites thought they were paying part of the fare for a soul's journey to salvation (often their own), and those attending and participating in them believed that they were assisting it towards that destination, the label does seem valid.

Its application must, however, be strictly limited, and exclude many aspects of the arrangements for post-mortem liturgical commemorations, designed to assist souls through purgatory.⁶⁵ Many such commemorations were organized as autonomous foundations, frequently beyond a parochial context and beyond the pale of parochial records, even when the stipulated rites occurred within a parish church. They accordingly fall beyond the remit of the present discussion, or only uncertainly within it. The daily masses of salaried or beneficed chaplains with short- or long-term chantry obligations are too routine to count as 'rites of passage', although the specific celebration of an annual obit or anniversary which signalled another year off a soul's journey through the afterlife would. Perpetual chantries established as autonomous benefices in parish churches fall between the stools; but endowed anniversaries celebrated by paid priests probably should count, especially if the endowment was administered by parochial wardens or created a subsidiary parochial entity. The

⁶⁴ Lincoln, Lincolnshire Archives, Bp. Accts/6; Add.Reg.7, fols 135^r–136^r, 139^v, 140^v, 142^r, 143^r. The incomplete recording has numerous possible explanations, which need not be detailed here.

⁶⁵ There is no comprehensive general survey of the practices of post-mortem liturgical commemoration of the dead in pre-Reformation England. Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, 135–62, offers a useful indicative summary.

uncertain status of similar foundations in chapels within the parish is more problematic.

Some of those challenges emerge in the records relating to the two Oxford parishes of All Saints and St Michael at the North Gate. Several endowed obits were celebrated within the chapel of Lincoln College, the corporate rector of both churches. However, no record of their celebration appears in the benefice accounts, although they are noted elsewhere within the bursar's accounts. Until taken over by the college in 1475, the chantry of St Anne was an independent (and sometimes disruptive) benefice situated within All Saints Church, its incumbent administering his own endowments and accounts. He functioned within the parochial framework, yet without meriting mention in the benefice accounts. Even after 1475, the chantry's administration remained distinct within the bursar's accounts.⁶⁶

Within benefice accounts, the key stages in the presumed journey into the afterlife are marked by the specific commemorations of the month's mind and the anniversary, usually held at those intervals after the death or funeral. While a week's mind is sometimes noted as a first waymarker on the journey, it appears rarely in benefice accounts.⁶⁷ The month's mind, the 'thirtieth day', appears more often, with the obvious caveat that its celebration presupposes the ability to pay for it, and so limits the number of souls which could benefit. The same limitation applies to the annual commemorations of obits and anniversaries, whose perdurance depended on the scale of their endowment, or the willingness of heirs to fund them voluntarily.⁶⁸

That rectorial rights did not include a monopoly of post-mortem commemorations restricts evaluation of their significance and impact as parochial rites of passage, as might the freedom for individuals to establish anniversaries in several parishes. Only commemorations which contributed to the altarage would be recorded in benefice

⁶⁶ Such ambiguity is evident in Lincoln College's Oxford parishes: Swanson, 'Town and Gown', 318–20.

⁶⁷ Some appear in BL, MS Add. 34786 (not consulted in person): references in Orme, *Going to Church*, 457 n. 234). Orme, *ibid.* 347, seems to treat the week's and month's minds as alternatives. Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, 150, adds the 'sennight (15th day)', without references. I am not aware of having encountered it.

⁶⁸ Clive Burgess, 'A Service for the Dead: The Form and Function of the Anniversary in Late Medieval Bristol', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society* 105 (1987), 183–211; Badham, *Seeking Salvation*, 150–4.

accounts.⁶⁹ Others were financially independent, and parishioners could attend and participate wherever the rites were celebrated. The entries in benefice accounts merge into a broader regime of masses for souls within that 'cult of the living in support of the dead' which was a central feature of late medieval Catholicism.⁷⁰ The personalized and emphasized commemorations of month's minds and anniversaries punctuated that broad current; but where they became merely part of an annual round, or acquired other associations from links to annual hand-outs and charitable distributions, or to fraternity loyalties, their significance specifically as rites of passage may have been reduced.

CONCLUSION

The recording of spiritual rites of passage in pre-Reformation English chancel accounts precedes the innovations of 1538, but is not a precedent for them. As records of liturgical celebrations of life-cycle rites of passage (and their afterlife analogues), they have only accidental similarities to the Cromwellian registers. Even the calendrical character of some of the pre-Reformation sources must be treated carefully. They record events in date order by choice, not to satisfy official requirements; their formal standing is no greater than that of accounts which list events without dates, or arranged by categories. Moreover, the dates relate not to the events themselves, but to the handing over of the money. Event and payment may well have coincided (it is certainly convenient to assume so), but sometimes they clearly did not.⁷¹ Some liabilities may not have been entered in the account for the year they fell due, with payment delayed for years, or permanently evaded.⁷² Delayed handovers were perhaps accounted for among 'arrears', outside the detailed annual record and beyond comment.

⁶⁹ At Bodmin, in 1525, it was said that the vicar claimed *6d.* 'for ev[er]ly monyth mynde and twelfe monyth mynde': [Wallis], ed., *Bodmin Register*, 37.

⁷⁰ A. N. Galpern, 'The Legacy of Late Medieval Religion in Sixteenth-Century Champagne', in Charles Trinkaus and Heiko A. Oberman, eds, *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion: Papers from the University of Michigan Conference*, Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Thought 10 (Leiden, 1974), 141–76, at 149.

⁷¹ Swanson, 'Town and Gown', 56.

⁷² A composition at Oxford for wedding dues from 1507 was still owed in 1517: LCA, Computus 3, fol. 69^v.

Neither, similarly, can the real scale of compliance with these fiscal regimes, nor the level of resistance to charges which obviously caused some resentment, be realistically assessed. There was a long history of lay criticism of, and resistance to, the payments expected at purifications, marriages and funerals, and hostile clerical reaction to it. The rites were desired; the costs were not, other than a basic *1d.* at each event. This suggests a willingness to pay the mass penny, but no more.⁷³

The Cromwellian registers introduced in 1538 marked a break in the documentary culture of English parishes; but did not automatically make the earlier arrangements obsolete, or inherently obsolescent. They were a state-mandated addition to existing practices, not a replacement for them. The old rites survived, and mutated, within the new liturgical regime of the Book of Common Prayer. They still generated altarage, its scale changing in the new context of devotional and doctrinal transformation, and changing institutional structures set against a backdrop of increasingly complex and fragmented confessional identities and allegiances.⁷⁴

The character and limited survival rate of the pre-Reformation evidence for the parochial recording of liturgical and sacramental rites of passage limits broad interpretation and analysis, and precludes extrapolation into countrywide generalizations regarding practice. Even with those limitations, the sources offer valuable insights into the daily reality of parochial experience in late medieval England. They make a real contribution to the reconstruction of the broader sociology of parochial devotional regimes and personal religiosity. Those collective regimes and individual engagements were each shaped and punctuated by the unending succession of liturgical rites of passage celebrated by and for the constant flow of human traffic through this world and into the next.

⁷³ Charles Drew, *Early Parochial Organisation in England: The Origins of the Office of Churchwarden*, St Anthony's Hall Publications 7 (York, 1954), 15–18; for a later case (from 1399), see R. N. Swanson, ed., *Calendar of the Register of Richard Scrope, Archbishop of York (1398–1405): Part 1*, Borthwick Texts and Calendars: Records of the Northern Province 8 (York, 1981), no. 669. See also Arthur Brandeis, ed., *Jacob's Well: An English Treatise on the Cleansing of Man's Conscience, Part 1*, EETS o.s. 115 (London, 1900), 19.

⁷⁴ For survival, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997), 210–12, 348–9, 459–60; John H. Pruett, *The Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts: The Leicestershire Experience* (Urbana, IL, 1978), 82, 90, 94, 100.