Wasted Money in a Diminishing Church:
A Report on the Church of England

Robin Gill and John Craven

The Centre for Anglican History and Theology
Universities of Kent and Christ Church Canterbury

Please feel free to quote from this text, but please cite quotations fully

The authors can be contacted at rgjc2026@gmail.com

Contents

Key Findings **4**

Introduction **5**
Governance 6
Dioceses 7
Evidence 7
Acknowledgements 8

PART 1 THE TIMELINE **9**

Chapter 1: Before 1700 ..... **9**
Before the Reformation 9
Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries 11

Chapter 2: The Eighteenth Century **13**
Rural parishes in the late eighteenth century 14

Chapter 3: The Nineteenth Century **19**
The 1851 Ecclesiastical Census 20
Parsonages 21
Tithes and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners 22
The 1880s 25
Overall assessment 26

Chapter 4: The Twentieth Century **28**
Between the World Wars 28
Governance and economy 32
The transfer of glebe 33
Clergy numbers and deployment 34
The Church Commissioners 35
The ordination of women 37
Overall assessment 37

Chapter 5: The Twenty-First Century **39**
Working as one Body 40
Diocesan mergers 41
Diocesan administration 42
Central institutions. 43
Church Commissioners' funding 44
Church Buildings 45
The first quarter century 46
Overall assessment 46

PART TWO: RECONFIGURING THE CHURCH **47**
Principles 47

Chapter 6: Six Challenges **48**
Safeguarding 48
Strategic investments 49
Benefactors and links to slavery 49
Same-sex relationships 50
Pastoral re-organisations 51
Net Zero 52

Chapter 7: The New Mission Context 53
Resonance 54

Chapter 8: Parishes and clergy 57
Clergy training 58
Clergy numbers 58

Chapter 9: Deaneries 60
Localism 61
The cost of a priest 61
Transition 62

Chapter 10: Dioceses 63

Chapter 11: Recommendations 66

Glossary: some economic terms. 67
Price and wage comparisons 68

Appendix 69

Endnotes 72

Index 77

Key Findings

- Since medieval times regular Sunday churchgoing, outside Christmas and Easter, has seldom been practised by anything approaching a majority of the English population.
- With extensive building of churches and chapels in new urban areas, and enlargements even in rural areas, churchgoing reached a high point in early Victorian England.
- Despite the creation of new dioceses, and the appointment of additional bishops and archdeacons, the Church of England was already experiencing a widespread decline in churchgoing in late Victorian England.
- By the beginning of the 20th century Nonconformist chapels were also experiencing widespread decline, followed by Catholic churches at the end of the century.
- In the 21st century dioceses in the Church of England almost doubled their number of administrators (including some 220 on safeguarding alone), while the number of parish clergy almost halved, and churchgoing continued to decline.
- There are significant economies of scale: twelve large dioceses include half the population, and have much lower overheads in the form of senior clergy and diocesan administrators, but even small dioceses are far removed from the concerns of parish clergy and their parishioners.
- The Church's General Synod has approved expensive projects, drawing money directly from its historic funds which were themselves depleted by risky investments in the late 20th century.
- The Church Commissioners allocate fifty million pounds each year to support bishops and archbishops, an average of nearly half a million pounds for each.
- Parishes are increasingly clustered together and served by a single paid priest, or left vacant when they fail to attract applicants.
- Vocations to the priesthood are in serious decline, so that the Church of England is now highly dependent upon the services of a diminishing number of retired clergy.
- Parish giving is now falling in real terms. Cathedrals, despite their popularity, are experiencing very serious financial challenges, many parishioners and their clergy are deeply dispirited, and the Church of England faces a financially and pastorally unsustainable future.

Overall, there is a serious **cycle of decline**, according to which, congregations become thinner – so parish giving diminishes – historic funds are spent more on projects and senior clergy than on parishes – fewer people feel called to full-time ministry – retired clergy become disillusioned by repeated demands from diocesan administrators – while these administrators, along with non-parochial clergy, bishops and archdeacons, flourish – until they can no longer be afforded.

The first Part of this Report details the evidence to support these findings, and places them in an historical context. The second Part makes twelve radical Recommendations that are based upon principles to promote greater localism, efficiency and transparency in decision-making.

Action based on these principles is urgently needed to address the long-term decline in clergy numbers and in attendances. **The Church of England must reduce the numbers of dioceses, bishops, archdeacons and diocesan administrators, improve the morale of parish priests and the many retired clergy whose input is ever more vital, and take action to enhance parish ministry.**

Introduction

John Craven: letter to *The Times* 2 February 2026:

> Why does the C of E need 100 bishops? Half a dozen for ceremonial occasions and a few theologians would seem sufficient. Worshippers would notice no difference.

Robin Gill: letter to *The Times* 3 February 2026:

> Further to John Craven's letter, the Church of England now has four times as many bishops as the Victorians had and less than a quarter of their churchgoers. Surely it is time to redirect the interest from the Church's investment funds into parishes.

There has been no episcopal response, although *The Times* would surely have published such a letter. Perhaps, as paragraph 1.24 of *Working as One Body*[1] (The *Turnbull Report*) reflects

> … the natural inclination of those with authority and power may be to protect themselves from criticism.

Silence might be thought to be the best protection when the evidence is overwhelming.

We want to break this silence because we are convinced that the Church of England is heading for financial disaster. More and more of its funds are being spent on administration in every diocese while churchgoing continues to decline, and less and less is spent on supporting parish clergy. As clergy are spread ever more thinly in urban and rural areas, services are less frequent, congregations are getting smaller and less money can be raised in church collections from people who wonder what they are getting for their money. The Victorians saw this threat, but we have ignored it. The Church of England is quite simply becoming unsustainable in terms of both its finances and attendances.

In the face of this crisis, there is an urgent need for informed discussion within the Church and, we believe, some radical changes. There is, of course, a lot of discussion that spills over into the press, or remains hidden as clergy feel unable to voice their concerns to the diocesan hierarchy. But most of the letters to the press (including ours) and clergy grumbles are about single issues. This report seeks to bring them together and add significant evidence to the momentum created by the Save the Parish Movement.

Part 1 provides an accessible Timeline that evidences how the Church of England has reached its current state: where did its wealth come from and where is it now? when did attendances start declining? how has the power of dioceses grown and that of parishes diminished, even though the work of the Church is still done at parish level? Part 2 makes some recommendations for radical change, for which the historical narrative provides evidence and illustrations.

We are both life-long active Anglicans: one a former Professor of Applied Theology, theological advisor to three Archbishops of Canterbury and parish priest and the other a former Professor of Economics, member of the Archbishops' Council and university Vice-Chancellor. We share the ambition of the Church to bring the gospel to all parts of the country, and in doing so, enable the ministry of the Church to help to transform lives. We believe that the Church can flourish only if its leaders rethink how they use its money. The Church of England is a wealthy institution in money, in the skills and commitment of its clergy and laity and in the heritage of buildings that are much loved well beyond those who regularly worship in them. But the Church is not flourishing.

We endorse the simple statement of the *Turnbull Report* that[2], 'the mission of the Church of England is most clearly and gloriously seen in the parishes.' Our diagnosis is that the overheads of the Church are draining creative resources away from the fulfilment of that mission. Important decisions are taken too far away from where that mission is 'clearly and gloriously' seen. There are too many bishops, non-parochial archdeacons, too much management, too many paid clerical and lay administrators, too many committees, too much talk, too little accountability. Dioceses are too big to reflect local concerns and priorities, and too many to enable the Church to be efficient and effective. The Church and its congregations do not need multiple diocesan replications or variations of policies and practice. On the other hand, most parishes are, we argue, too small to act as coherent centres of resource allocation and decision-making: there are over twelve thousand of them. So, we recommend in Part 2 that important decisions about the use of clergy and lay resources and about supporting poorer communities should be focused upon the six hundred rural and area deaneries. They are small enough to be truly responsive to local needs, and large enough to have discretion over how resources are used.

It should be emphasised strongly that even if the Church of England implemented all of the recommendations that follow in Part 2, it is unlikely that it will readily reverse some two centuries of churchgoing decline. **That is not our point**. What our Timeline reveals is that diocesan administration has expanded hugely and unnecessarily and centralised power at the expense of local parishes, which have been left with lengthy vacancies, the loss of many parsonages, deeply unpopular megabenefices and unaccountable, ever-increasing and, finally, unachievable parish shares. This is disastrous. If it continues unchecked, it can lead only to accelerated decline. Addressing this actively is a prerequisite of any viable plan to promote church growth. Our plan is not the only possible option. Doubtless, there are others. But any plan for growth that ignores our findings will, from now onwards, be revealed as totally unrealistic or condemned as simply defending the *status quo*.

The underlying structure of the Church of England has, in some respects, changed remarkably little since the Reformation. There are parishes, deaneries and dioceses, clergy, archdeacons and bishops, cathedrals and parish churches and parishioners who have supported the Church with their attendance and their money. But the world has changed fundamentally: in the 16th century the country was primarily agrarian, centered upon local communities; by the 19th century it was dominated by industry and manufacturing, and in recent years mass communication, digital media and the rise of service industries have changed the context again, making local communities once again more significant. It seems inevitable that remote, flexible working and Artificial Intelligence will make local communities less important for the national economy but even more important for providing the resonances that define human social interaction (see chapter 7). The Church can play a fundamental role meeting this challenge, but only if it releases its human and financial resources to allow them to play their full part.

The Church of England has always been rich in money and skills. It has been ruthless at times in redirecting that wealth towards the needs of a changing society. That ruthlessness will be needed again in the future.

Governance

The Church of England is Established, and plays a unique constitutional role – not least because of the presence of 26 bishops in the House of Lords. The governance of the Church of England is based on Acts of Parliament, now called Measures. We quote their titles but we do not reference them individually in endnotes because they are available online, even for earlier centuries, at legislation.gov.uk. For much of its history, some roles including Membership of Parliament and college fellowships, required an expression of allegiance to

the Church of England, which also had near monopoly rights to conduct marriages and funerals. Until they were abolished in the 20th century, parishes had the right to levy tithes to help to cover their costs. Its established status and the legacy of its buildings and endowments taken over from the Catholic Church in the Reformation means that the Church of England has a unique financial and legal history. But that status and financial privilege, as our comparisons with other denominations show, has not granted it significant protection from the general decline in churchgoing.

Dioceses

For consistency of comparison, in Part 1, the numbers of dioceses, bishops and archdeacons generally refer to dioceses in England together with the off-shore dioceses of Gibraltar/Europe and Sodor & Man, which remain a part of the Church of England. Most of our statistics and the analysis and recommendations in Part 2 cover only the (now 40) mainland dioceses. There were, at different times, four or five dioceses in Wales (now six). The Church there was disestablished in 1920 by the *Welsh Church Act* of 1914, and their bishops lost their seats in the Lords, but church- and chapel-going trends have sufficient in common that we occasionally quote Welsh examples.

Evidence

Much of our quantitative and qualitative evidence comes from published studies and these are recorded in endnotes. We apologise to fellow academics that we generally use 'round numbers', broad fractions and percentages to characterise attendances and church finances. We recognise that our own enjoyment of detailed numerical information is not widely shared and we want this report to be accessible and freely available to as many people as possible in the Church of England and beyond.

There is no single source of statistical evidence that covers the five centuries in our Timeline – and it is only from the second half of the 20th century that the Church of England has published systematic data either of its own[3] or because public accountability is required of companies and charities. Chapters 2 to 5 examine evidence from many sources for the 18th to 21st centuries in turn. Our Appendix shows diocesan figures over the first quarter of the 21st century and even these are not fully consistent, particularly in recording the sizes of diocesan administrations. Dioceses report their staffing levels in different ways as headcounts, averages or full-time equivalents and some who work for diocesan administrations are full-time or part-time, parochial or non-parochial clergy who are deemed legally to have 'vocational stipends' rather than 'employee salaries' and are excluded from our quoted numbers. Attendance figures are also unlikely to be fully accurate, because they depend on returns from thousands of parishes. In consequence, much of the evidence in the Appendix illustrates overall trends rather than detailed diocese-by-diocese comparisons. Almost every diocese is likely to claim that it has been misrepresented by us in one way or another, but it is much more difficult to deny the overall trend. We do not recommend using our data to comment on or compare individual dioceses.

We use a number of economic terms that will be familiar to some but perhaps not to all. We explain these in our Glossary, which also contains a warning about the major difficulty of making comparisons of money values over long periods of time. We do this sparingly, using the Bank of England price index[4], which conveniently runs from 1209 to the present day.

Acknowledgements

A number of friends and colleagues have given their time generously to encourage us in our work and to make much-needed corrections to our text, including: Professor Ken Medhurst, Professor Sir Jonathan Montgomery, Professor Jonathan Arnold, Professor Stephen Bullivant, Bishop Stephen Platten, Professor June Purvis, Dr Ralph Norman, Dr Clive Field, Dr Jeremy Morris, Dr Stephen Duckett, Dr Perry Butler, Dr Malcolm Brown, Alison Craven, Jim Findlay and Bill Howat. Of course, the faults that remain are ours, but their help has been invaluable, as has the loving support of Jenny and Laura, our long-suffering and fellow Anglican wives.

PART 1 THE TIMELINE

Chapter 1: Before 1700

Before the Reformation

The historian Nicholas Orme[5] offers an important snapshot, starting with the 6th century English Church of Augustine of Canterbury and finishing with the English Reformation. It offers an accessible overview of changing patterns of clergy, finance, church buildings, congregations and worship, across seasons, culled from local records from a wide selection of England's 9500 medieval churches. He has a particular interest in ordinary churchgoers and non-churchgoers, while realizing that evidence about them is often tangential and elusive. What emerges, however, is that the Middle Ages were not 'purely a time of faith'[6]. Early on he notes:

> And, lest we should assume that the people of medieval England were all good churchgoers, we shall have plenty of opportunity in the rest of this book to encounter people who held aloof from church activities, both men and women, preferring as far as they could to give their time to cares and opportunities of the outside world[7].

Using local prosecution records Orme, an honorary canon at Truro Cathedral, detects many of the social factors (other than intellectual skepticism or indifference) that then, as now, he suggests, diminish active churchgoing – including shopping, household chores, work, drinking and other leisure activities – despite strong social pressures and sometimes legal injunctions to attend church at least at key festivals:

> At Bowers Gifford, Essex, in 1512 a servant youth of sixteen was accosted by the rector on the vigil of Ascension Day and asked if he had been to the statutory evensong. When the youth gave a saucy reply, 'I was asleep', the rector hit him with a staff… Further attractions were to shop, eat, or enjoy yourself. Here the urge was much stronger than the authorities' exceptions would allow. Butchers selling meat were a continuous problem in Canterbury from 1474 to 1526… in 1518 three men were serving breakfast in Bedford{XE "Bedford" on Sundays, keeping people from their services, while at Sutton nearby a man and wife received servants and labourers to drink in their house, and a woman at Bicester opened her alehouse during matins[8].

Orme refrains from estimating the proportion of local populations that did attend church at any particular point, although he does think that there is some evidence that Easter in the 15th century was fairly well attended, albeit surrounded by a number of other folk activities, and that other festivals were more thinly attended.

Following the Norman Invasion in the 11th century, there is much physical evidence across England and Wales of a considerable amount of expensive church building and re-building. Norman arches still abound both in ancient cathedrals and in rural churches serving even relatively small local communities. It took the Victorians, seven centuries later, to match such an extensive program of parish church building.

The financial pattern of those 9500 parishes in England and Wales was established well before the Reformation. In summary, a local landowner, a great lord or the monarch owned the patronage – giving them centralising power with the right to appoint an incumbent of the living who was responsible for the cure of souls by holding services and more generally ministering within the parish. Often, but not always, the patron was also the rector of the parish who had provided a church building, a parsonage and some glebe land. In return, the rector took a share, often a large share, of the income of the parish. This income came from

rent or product from the glebe land and tithes in the form of agricultural products, as well as mandatory contributions from parishioners and fees for conducting weddings and funerals. Orme reports that tithes were usually the most important source of revenue for parishes, plausibly three-quarters of the total, although those who received tithes were, like those who paid them, subject to harvest fluctuations. The rights of patronage and to receive tithes could be sold, transferred or bequeathed to people who had no connection with the parish.

An incumbent was responsible for repairs to the church and the parsonage, and there were expectations of providing hospitality and of giving alms to the poor. Archdeacons, as bishops' enforcers, could make visitations (paid for by those inspected) to ensure that clergy were meeting their commitments, but difficulties of travel meant that these were infrequent. The incumbent might not minister in the parish himself, but instead could – and often did – pay a curate or chaplain while he lived elsewhere, was unwell or had other occupations. Sometimes there was no incumbent: the rector/patron paid a fixed stipend to a curate and took the rest of the parish income for himself or herself.

When monasteries, cathedrals, bishoprics and colleges in Oxford and Cambridge were founded, rights of patronage and the incomes of rectors were transferred to them as endowments and also giving them centralising power. The tithe income taken by these rectors helped to build what, in some cases, was the great wealth and power of these institutions, if not of individuals, that persisted at least to the 19th century, and in some cases remains.

Orme notes that by the 12th and 13th centuries a distinction is first made between incumbents who are themselves rectors and those who were vicars (from the Latin *vicarius* or deputy). He notes that 'many churches were run by neither rectors nor vicars but chaplains [curates] … paid modest wages'[9]. Income differences between incumbents are widespread. By 1535, for example, he finds that in the forty-five parishes in the rural deanery of Dorchester in Dorset:

> Two vicars were paid £8 per annum by the monasteries that had appropriated all their parish revenues, which were evidently regarded as the minimum acceptable stipend. Thirty-six of the incumbents in the deanery received more than this, mostly in the range of £10 to £20, with four of them enjoying more than £20 of whom the richest, the rector of Corfe Castle, had over £41 (£31,000 today, using price inflation alone). Nine incumbents got less than £8, the poorest… with just over £4[10].

Gregory Clark calculates that the average annual wage of an agricultural labourer in the 15th century was around £4 per year[11].

Much later evidence shows that very significant variations remained for centuries in the amount of tithe revenue received by an incumbent – with the rest going to the rector, the patron or to others because they or their ancestors had also contributed to parish assets in the past, or had been given or bought tithe rights. In ten parishes that form part of the Abbeydore Deanery in the Diocese of Hereford[12], there was a large variation in the proportions of the tithes received by the clergy (ranging from one-tenth to all), and the main local landowner, Sir Velters Cornewall, 4th Baronet Amyand (from zero to three-quarters). A guiding principle – but by no means a detailed explanation – is that the greater tithes on corn and other major crops went to the rector, while the lesser tithes, including animals, went to the incumbent. It is probably difficult to ascribe major differences in the neighbouring Herefordshire parishes to this principle and it is perhaps better to conclude that the inequalities of parish incomes, which remain marked through to the twentieth century, have largely untraceable historic origins.

Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries

When Tudor and Stuart monarchs broke the link with Rome and, in effect, established the Church of England, people continued to use the same church buildings. The main structural change was that monasteries were mostly dissolved and their assets and centralising power – including their rights of patronage and income from parishes – were taken by the Crown which kept them, used them as rewards, or sold them. The other parts of the structure, including parishes, bishops, rural deans, cathedrals, glebe and tithes largely remained. Of course, as historians and historical novelists relate, many who held offices within the structure did not survive because they refused to accept a Monarch's authority or otherwise fell out of favour. John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, and Thomas More, the Lord Chancellor, were executed in 1535 because they refused to accept King Henry VIII as the Supreme Head of the Church, but there is still today a Bishop of Rochester and a Lord Chancellor. Most monasteries, however, have disappeared or are at most witnessed by a few ruins.

John Evelyn's celebrated *Diaries*[13] have occasional references to his pious worship at churches and at home during both the Commonwealth from 1649 and after the Restoration in 1660. During the Commonwealth, he records:

> 3d December, 1654. 'Advent Sunday. There being no Office at the church but extemporary prayers after the Presbyterian way, for now all forms were prohibited, and most of the preachers were usurpers, I seldom went to church upon solemn feasts; but, either went to London, where some of the orthodox sequestered divines did privately use the Common Prayer, administer sacraments etc., or else I procured one to officiate in my house; wherefore, on the 10th, Dr. Richard Owen, the sequestered minister of Eltham, preached to my family in my library, and gave us the Holy Communion.
>
> 25th December, 1654. Christmas day. No public offices in churches, but penalties on observers, so as I was constrained to celebrate it at home'.[14]

In contrast, during the Restoration, he records:

> 25th December, 1660. 'Preached at the Abbey, Dr. Earle, Clerk of his Majesty's Closet, and my dear friend, now Dean of Westminster, on Luke ii. 13, 14, condoling the breach made in the public joy by the lamented death of the Princess.' (Evelyn, p.339). [The 'lamented death' was of Mary, daughter of Charles I and mother of William III].
>
> 17th August, 1662. 'Being the Sunday when the Common Prayer Book, reformed and ordered to be used for the future, was appointed to be read, and the solemn League and Covenant to be abjured by all the incumbents of England under penalty of losing their livings; our vicar read it this morning.' (Evelyn p.361). [The use of the 'Common Prayer Book' in services was required by the *Act of Uniformity* of 1662, and clergy, along with teachers and fellows of colleges, were required to take an oath that they accepted the use of the Book].

Unfortunately, he makes no note of overall attendances at these services. Nor do the even more celebrated Restoration *Diaries* of the younger and less pious Samuel Pepys[15]. He too regularly attends his parish church (St Olave in the City of London) and, on occasions, receives the Sacrament there. Like Evelyn, he attends other churches as well, but, sometimes, apparently, to ogle the young women churchgoers. Unlike Evelyn, he also tends to rate the many sermons that he hears – sometimes as 'poor' and occasionally as not.

It is difficult to establish whether or not the frequent churchgoing of either Evelyn or Pepys represents the behaviour of others. The ecclesiastical turmoil of the Commonwealth is reflected in the lists of changing incumbents still at the back of many ancient parish churches

and in the records of bishops who were 'stood down' until the Restoration in 1660. It is at least possible that these rapid changes promoted comparatively higher (rival) attendances, just as they did in early Victorian times. Or perhaps, to the contrary, this turmoil simply disillusioned many in the general population. Hard data are simply lacking.

People continued to give money to the Church of England, or more specifically to projects rather than to the Church-in-general. Following the Great Fire of London sufficient finance was raised to rebuild St Paul's Cathedral and several City churches. Most of this came from benefactions and a public subscription, although some came from the privileged position of the Corporation of London who were able following the *Rebuilding of London Acts* (or 'Coal Acts') of 1667 and 1670 to impose a tariff on coal brought into the city. Yet even fifty years later, Wren churches in the City of London were already beginning to feel the effects of early city-centre depopulation. This continued uninterrupted until the 20th century. Rapid city-centre depopulation mostly occurred elsewhere in historic cities in the 19th century.

Before the Reformation there were 18 English dioceses and this had increased to 23 (including Sodor & Man) by the beginning of the 17th century. Each had a diocesan bishop, but there were no other bishops (assistants or suffragans) in 1700. There were just a few suffragans before that: the last died in 1608. Bishops were an important part of the 'London establishment', with seats in the House of Lords, and they delegated many of their diocesan responsibilities to Archdeacons and Rural Deans, to their Vicar General or to their Diocesan Chancellor. The number of archdeacons remained at 53, as it was before the Reformation. Sometimes senior clergy held several positions simultaneously, often in several dioceses. For example, in September 1660, John Pearson[16] was made rector of St Christopher-le-Stocks in London, a royal chaplain and Archdeacon of Surrey. He became Bishop of Chester in 1672 (without relinquishing his archdeaconry) and was also Professor of Divinity and Master of Jesus College, Cambridge. That busy life yielded him a substantial income.

Incomes within the Church continued to come from glebe land, from tithes and from required parish contributions. As it was before the Reformation, a significant part of that income was taken by people who had no direct responsibility for ministry within parishes, and who could use it for other purposes to benefit themselves or their institutions. As will be seen in later chapters, the redistribution of the income available to the Church forms a major part of its, and our, agenda. Controversies about it continue to the present day.

The chapters that follow look at the next four centuries in turn, especially where contemporary reports and data about finance and church and chapel attendances are available. Each chapter concludes with our overall assessment of how the Church of England had fared, both positively and negatively. This century-by-century Timeline frames our recommendations in Part 2 for the changes that are now needed for the Church of England to have a sustainable and better attended future.

Chapter 2: The Eighteenth Century

The income that derived from livings across the country varied enormously, leaving many incumbents and curates at risk of serious poverty. There were some largely unsuccessful attempts by the Puritan Parliament in the 1640s and 1650s to augment the incomes of clergy[17], and *Queen Anne's Bounty* was established by Act of Parliament in 1704 to provide support for the poorest of these. Its initial survey revealed nearly 1200 parish livings[18] with an annual income below £20, which was roughly the wage of an agricultural worker[19]. The concern expressed within the text of the Act of 1704 was that:

> Preachers in many places … depending for necessary maintenance upon the good will and liking of their hearers have been … under temptation of too much complying and suiting their doctrines and teaching to the humours rather than the good of their hearers…

There was no explicit mention in the Act of any desire to reduce poverty amongst the clergy or to the likelihood that clergy in the poorest livings would be diverted from their pastoral ministry by a need to earn money elsewhere, perhaps by farming the glebe themselves rather than renting it out. The emphasis was upon preventing populism from replacing approved doctrine.

The main source of income to Queen Anne's Bounty was the grant by Parliament of the revenue from First Fruits and Tenths, which had been, since medieval times, taxes paid by newly appointed incumbents from their first year's income, and ten-percent annually thereafter. This tax, which yielded around £13,000 per year (about two million pounds today), had once been paid to Rome but became a part of the revenue of the Crown at the Reformation. Queen Anne's Bounty Act redirected this to augment poor livings – something that was slowly achieved by purchasing additional glebe land from which a parish could derive rental income. At much the same time, poorer parishes were exempted from paying the First Fruits and Tenths tax.

Queen Anne's Bounty began its work by augmenting the assets of parishes where annual incomes were below £10. Parishes were chosen at random from those known to be eligible and by purchasing glebe land to the value of £200 (around £40k at today's prices, but the land could today be worth much more, depending on its location). By renting out this additional glebe land, a poor incumbent might at least double his income. In addition, Queen Anne's Bounty encouraged benefactions by providing matched funding of £200 when a benefactor (quite frequently the patron) gave at least the same amount to support a parish with an annual income below £35. As time went on, the £10 and £35 limits were raised – and parishes could benefit more than once if an earlier augmentation failed to raise income above a later limit.

From returns made to the House of Commons[20], 3,306 livings had been augmented by contributions from Queen Anne's Bounty up to 1815, and in 1836, 297 livings had incomes below £50 compared with 3826 in its first survey. By that time, the annual wage of an agricultural worker was around £30. The desired redistribution was happening, but low clergy incomes were not entirely eliminated for several centuries.

There was no move to change the fundamental model of parish finance, and grants from Queen Anne's Bounty needed to have a permanent effect to avoid a reversion to their previous income if it became overcommitted. Queen Anne's Bounty rejected making annual grants because its own income could not be guaranteed: what Parliament granted, it could later remove. Annual grants would have implied that it had a perpetual liability but an uncertain future income. Using capital augmentations made good sense, and is in line with modern principles of risk management and accounting conventions. Queen Anne's Bounty invested its income from First Fruits in government bonds while it was waiting to purchase

glebe land and it paid some of the resulting interest to parishes as an interim augmentation. The wait was often quite long, although incumbents were encouraged to search for suitable additional glebe by the device of paying little interest to them in the interim. So, the prudent Queen Anne's Bounty accumulated bonds, which form the basis of some of the assets today held by its successor body, the – at times less than prudent – Church Commissioners.

The incomes of bishops and of clergy in cathedrals also varied greatly according to the assets with which they were endowed, including their patronage or rectorships of parishes. The incomes of these dignitaries generally far exceeded those of even the best endowed parish incumbent, and the most lucrative positions were keenly sought. Under the authority of bishops, enforced by archdeacons and other diocesan officials, the Church of England conducted occasional offices and Sunday services for the vast majority of the population – having a monopoly over marriages and most burials. Only a very few people were dissenting Quakers (who were tolerated, unlike Catholics). Anthony Russell[21] points to the difficulties of timing services to accommodate working patterns and the fact that some poorer people were excluded (or felt they were) by pew rents which reserved at least the 'best seats' for the wealthier parishioners.

Rural parishes in the late eighteenth century

Patronage remained valuable for many centuries. Traditional agrarian country parishes were prized particularly if they yielded a substantial income. Geoffrey Best[22] examines the Church of England between 1789 and 1832, highlighting the deep love that English clergymen held for rural life, traditional parish routines, and the social status of a gentleman. Two important diaries add commentary and detail on these archetypal parish arrangements.

At a time in the 18th century of widespread clerical absenteeism, multiple benefices held by non-resident incumbents (termed 'pluralism') employing poorly paid curates or chaplains, and badly maintained churches, James Woodforde was appointed in 1774 to the well-endowed Weston Longville Parish in Norfolk, with a substantial flint, brick and stone church. In 1797, John Longe was appointed to the even better endowed benefice of Coddenham-with-Crowfield in Suffolk, also with a substantial stone church at Coddenham, along with a smaller half-timbered church at Crowfield.

Woodforde took up residence in the parish parsonage and remained there until his death aged 62 in 1803 and Longe remained in his enormous parsonage at Coddenham until his death in 1834 aged 68. As long-term resident and comparatively well-paid incumbents of a small benefice during the reign of George III, they were unusual as 18th century clerics, but would have been more typical had they lived in Victorian times. Woodforde's income from fluctuating farming tithes serving a population of some 350 people, was £236 in 1776, but had risen (possibly as a result of a better harvest) to £286 by 1783. He also had income from his glebe and Easter church collections. The tithe income alone was around ten times the wage of an agricultural worker at the time.[23] Price inflation alone gives a current equivalent of £40,000, and ten times the current minimum wage is around one quarter of a million pounds.

Longe's combined income from tithes and glebe for 1826, from two parishes and almost three times the population, was a remarkable £936. Together with a matching income from his family's property, Longe was able to maintain a considerable household with up to eleven servants and he personally owned a landaulet – a substantial four-seat carriage driven by a livered coachman – costing £180. In contrast, by that time Queen Anne's Bounty was focused on augmenting incomes below £30.[24]

Woodforde's *Diaries*[25] are much better known, but have often been ridiculed for his obsession with indulgent meat-based dinners and obsequious attention to the local squire

John Custance (1749-1822) and Custance's family – regularly noting whether or not they were in church on a Sunday. Yet these diaries also provide much evidence of his piety and pastoral care of the local population. Up until his death he shared Christmas Day dinner every year with some half-a-dozen elderly parishioners, gave regular charitable contributions and distributed medicine to the poor and encouraged them to be inoculated against smallpox. Until the final decade of his life and ministry he took most of the Sunday services, funerals, marriages (objecting strongly to an enforced marriage) and baptisms.

Longe's much shorter *Diary*[26] provides important parallels. Their careers overlapped and Woodforde, before he became too ill, even visited Coddenham parsonage several years ahead of Longe's appointment. Longe, too, felt an obligation to the poor, albeit from a position of considerable economic privilege. Even his curate was paid £100 pa (in contrast to his butler who received £37 pa, while his female cook got just £9 pa). Once his curate resigned in 1827, Longe promptly appointed his son as curate at £150 pa.

Both incumbents found ways to keep happy the farmers who were paying tithes. Early in December each year, until his death, on the day that they paid their tithes, Woodforde hosted a lavish dinner in his parsonage with an abundance of alcohol:

> I gave them for Dinner a Leg of Mutton boiled, and Capers, some Salt Fish, plenty of plum Puddings and a couple of boiled Rabbitts, with a large Surloin of Beef roasted. Plenty of wine, Punch and Strong Beer after Dinner till 10 o'clock. We had this Year a very agreeable meeting here – no grumbling whatever[27].

On another occasion with some 20 farmers, 'there was drank, about half a Dozen Bottles of Port Wine, 8 Bottles of Rum, besides as much strong Beer, as they wished to have[28]' and two years later they drank 'six Bottles of Rum which made three Bowls of Punch, four Bottles of Port Wine, besides strong-Beer.'[29]

Longe could also be generous, but less imaginative and far more litigious. He simply took his tithe-paying farmers to the local Crown Inn every year at his expense, while on occasions threatening them, as a Justice of the Peace in nearby Ipswich, if they defaulted.

Neither of these diaries provides detailed numbers of people attending their churches of a Sunday. Nor, of course, should either diarist be read as a typical example of other much more poorly paid 18th century incumbents and curates, as Jon Stobart's wide-ranging analysis of other contemporary records and diaries demonstrates[30]. Yet, significantly, Woodforde did record when he had 'a large', 'pretty full', or 'very full' congregation, as seemed to happen every few months until 1796. He noted this, for example, soon after he took up residence, recording significantly that 'very few did not come'.[31] A large congregation was noted especially near Christmas[32] and on or near Easter [33]. Easter communicants, though, 'did not exceed thirty' or slightly less than one-in-ten people. Times of national crisis also attracted 'large congregations' as in the wake of the French Revolution[34] or when King George III was reported to be seriously ill[35]. Conversely, bad weather worked in the opposite direction. For once he gave a number here, recording that not 'above 20 people in all at Church – The weather being exceeding cold'[36]. Twenty people in a rural church on an average Sunday (with a similar-sized surrounding population) today, however, might be considered quite reasonable.

Longe did make occasional references to 'good congregations' at both of his churches on Ash Wednesday and then on Good Friday in 1827, as well as on the government prescribed 'Thanksgiving Day' of November 1798 (following Nelson's victory over the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile). His quarterly Communion Services also recorded actual numbers of communicants, suggesting that they regularly amounted to just over a tenth of the population of the two parishes. Stobart concludes that, despite Longe's conspicuous wealth and

consumption, 'there is no indication that it brought widespread opprobrium, and he was always conscientious in serving his parishes, either directly or through employing curates'.[37]

What emerges here is a pattern of churchgoing in these pre-Victorian rural parishes that were relatively well served by their resident incumbent, and which remained until the mid-20th century, when there were still resident incumbents of many rural parishes in England. Fairly full occasional congregations – particularly at Christmas Services (Carol or Christingle Services today), Easter Services and Royal or Military Anniversaries – with thinner attendances at other times and with only a small minority of people being active communicants.

Yet the position, even of well-endowed rural parishes, could be precarious. In the autumn of 1792 Woodforde experienced a double crisis. First the Custance family left the parish and moved to Bath, which 'made us quite low. It is a great, very great loss to us indeed'[38]. Then, following the French Revolution, there was, 'Much talking about Mobs rising in many parts of the Kingdom especially in Norfolk and in Norwich'[39]. Once Woodforde passed fifty, he increasingly complained about his deteriorating health and employed various temporary curates (paid just £30 a year) to take the services from which he was often absent. In effect he became an absentee incumbent, albeit still receiving substantial tithes and still with an early December dinner party for the farmers paying tithes, and recording enormous meals including Christmas lunch with the elderly until his death. Retirement was not an option because clergy then, having no pensions, could retain their tithes and glebe until they died, even if they were too ill to take any services.

Significantly, in his absentee decade Woodforde very seldom reported 'large congregations' in Weston Longville[40]. Instead, there was 'a small congregation' for no reason given,[41] because of snow[42], or no service at all because 'the Church not being fit'[43] and because the curate 'had three Churches to serve this day'[44]. On other occasions no reason was given for there being 'no service'[45]. Curates might simply have been unavailable or just unreliable. Longe, too, became too ill (mainly with gout) to take many services as he grew older, but he was more fortunate than Woodforde, being able by now to rely upon his clerical sons to take services in his place. Longe was an absent pluralist elsewhere, but his sons' presence effectively meant that he was not one in Coddenham.

Having a resident incumbent appeared to be very effective for the first eighteen years of Woodforde's incumbency but he also provides first-hand evidence about the effects of absenteeism/pluralism. So, despite the claims of some early modern revisionist historians[46], it could be argued (discounting other more positive things about the 18th century) that, at parish level at least, large congregations are unlikely to have been the norm in a century when many pluralist vicars and rectors were simply absent. By the mid-19th century, the Church of England had almost (but not quite) achieved the aim of having a resident, active incumbent in every parish and of abolishing clerical pluralism, reaching a final high-point of churchgoing, alongside still rising chapelgoing.

The historian Penelope Corfield[47] concludes, despite her revisionist colleagues, that, while much statistical evidence is absent, 'no eighteenth century witnesses have been found who named their age as an "age of faith" or an "age of piety"… all the known commentators indicated their anxious fears of the corrosive or even outright loss of the Christian faith'. Similar 'anxious fears' seem to lie behind the Government's action in instituting Queen Anne's Bounty at the beginning of the century.

In the 1780s Sunday Schools were popularized and better established by the Anglican publisher Robert Raikes in order to counter this 'loss of Chrisian faith' among children by promoting literacy and religious education. The government was generally in favour of the Church's role in education and in preaching morality and countering revolutionary

tendencies, particularly at times when other countries were experiencing violent regime change. The ambition was particularly to influence the poor, and the attitude might be summed up by the now rarely performed verse of Mrs Alexander's early Victorian hymn for children, *All things Bright and Beautiful*:

> The rich man in his castle,
> The poor man at his gate,
> God made them high and lowly,
> And ordered their estate.

To complement the evidence from Woodforde and Longe, we can learn much about the lives and reputations of clergy from Jane Austen (1775-1817), who was the granddaughter, daughter and sister of clergymen. Aspirant or actual clergy appear in every one of her completed novels and she wrote about their position in Georgian society as an insider. Her observations on their status, activities, values and economic pressures are based on experience and through them Austen demonstrates their central role in the rural society of Georgian England.

Sir Thomas Bertram in *Mansfield Park* sold livings and James Morland in *Northanger Abbey*, is promised "a living, of which [his father] was himself patron…, of about 400 pounds yearly value". In *Sense and Sensibility* Edward Ferrars is able to marry his love, Elinor, because Colonel Brandon, offers him a living which "did not make more than £200 per annum." This seems to have been approximately the income of Jane Austen's own father as incumbent at Steventon in Oxfordshire, and helps to explain why he ran a small boys' school in the parsonage to supplement his income towards the level considered necessary for his status.

Mansfield Park introduces hostility to absentee incumbents, when Henry Crawford, an independently wealthy young man, can see the attractions of the handsome rectory attached to Edmund Bertram's new parish, and proposes himself as a tenant, thinking that Edmund will live elsewhere. Sir Thomas refuses the request, saying "…a parish has wants and claims which can be known only by a clergyman constantly resident,… and which no proxy can be capable of satisfying to the same extent." He argues strongly that Edmund will (or should) not be satisfied to "ride over every Sunday, …, and go through divine service" adding that "he might be the clergyman of Thornton Lacey every seventh day for three or four hours, if that would content him. But it will not."

The diaries and Austen's life and novels confirm the central position of educated clergymen in rural society even among those who are considerably richer. But not everyone admired those who became incumbents. In *The Wealth of Nations,* Adam Smith (who commented on a huge variety of topics) reflected that the clergy:

> may either depend altogether for their subsistence upon the voluntary contributions of their hearers; or they may derive it from some other fund to which the law of their country may entitle them; such as a landed estate, a tythe or land tax, an established salary or stipend. Their exertion, their zeal and industry, are likely to be much greater in the former situation than in the latter.[48]

In a similar spirit forty years later, but with more literary flair, Mary Crawford in *Mansfield Park* cannot reconcile herself to the prospect of being a country incumbent's wife. She criticises Reverend Dr Grant (who later died through "apoplexy…by three great institutionary dinners in one week") as being:

> very sincere in preferring an income ready made to the trouble of working for one, and has the best intentions of doing nothing all the rest of his days but eat, drink and grow fat. It is … a want of all laudable ambition, … which make men clergymen. A Clergyman has nothing to do but be slovenly and selfish—read the newspaper, watch the weather, and

quarrel with his wife. His curate does all the work, and the business of his own life is to dine.

During the 18th century, little else changed in the basic structure of the Church. No new dioceses were created, no additional bishops were appointed, and archdeacon numbers remained the same. Bishops, at least for the most part, had huge incomes by the standards of the time, and many cathedrals were well endowed, and these were a major topic in the following century. Benefactions remained important, particularly through the matched-funding provided by Queen Anne's Bounty. The Church economy continued to reflect the agrarian nature of society, and the growing reliance on international trade and slavery that allowed some people to accumulate substantial wealth. The priorities of the Church leaders, and those expected of it by the establishment, remained the maintenance of the status quo and the dominance of the land-owning classes.

The seeds of the industrial revolution were sown, but they had yet to have much impact on the Church.

Overall assessment

Positively: *Queen Anne's Bounty was a key central intervention in the church economy at parish level, and throughout the century the poorest livings were slowly augmented using revenue from taxes paid by richer parishes that had previously been used by the Pope, the Crown or Parliament for other purposes. It enabled some parishes with otherwise inadequate tithes, glebes or parsonage to employ a resident incumbent priest, rather than having to rely upon sometimes unreliable curates or chaplains. It also encouraged wealthy individuals to match its grants with private endowments to support their local church. For most of the century parishes were either rural or based in pre-industrial towns, and the experiences of the early part of the incumbencies of Woodforde and Longe indicate the sort of model to which the Church aspired. Sunday schools grew in importance towards the end of the century, strongly supported as a way of socializing children into the norms expected in society.*

Negatively: *Queen's Anne Bounty arguably was tainted (in modern terms) by its direct, or more often indirect, links to slavery (see Chapter 6). Its limited resources implied that not all poorly endowed churches received grants. There are widespread reports in the 18th century of pluralism, and hence of absenteeism and of poorly maintained parish churches and parsonages. Many parishes were sustained only by temporary, part-time curates or chaplains. The last decade of Parson Woodforde's Diaries clearly reflects this negative side of the 18th century Church of England: congregations declined, assistant clergy were poorly paid and often unreliable or unavailable and weekly services could not always be held. For the most part, this did not seem to be a century of widespread, active faith. A challenge from Nonconformist Christians remained waiting in the wings.*

Chapter 3: The Nineteenth Century

The 1801 Census showed that the population of England remained predominantly rural. Parson Woodforde died in 1803 having been ill and absent from his church for a decade. The world that he described did not die with him, but the Church of England faced the challenge that industrialisation was leading to the growth of new conurbations which overwhelmed the traditional parishes where they were located. The population in the City of London also halved over the course of the 18th century, significantly affecting the viability of Wren churches built after the Great Fire[49]. On the other hand, government investment of £1.5 million (£150 million in today's prices) between 1818 and 1824 led to significant church building (so-called Waterloo churches) in newly settled urban areas where the population had vastly outgrown the capacity of the local churches. As well as these investments in growing settlements, many parish churches were restored in this period, including Weston Longville Church after Parson Woodforde's death. In addition, the Church of England built small chapels in rural areas even though industrialisation led to the decline of many rural populations.

The Sunday School movement grew rapidly, from some quarter of a million young people in the 1780s, to half a million in 1818, to 1.5 million in 1833 and then to 2.5 million in 1851[50]. From the 1820s onwards there was also a significant increase in chapels built by Congregationalists/Independents, Methodists and Baptists in both rural and urban areas, breaking the near monopoly of the Church of England[51]. A Methodist chapel was built in Weston Longville in 1836 (and closed in 1981).

Whether or not this resulted in an overall increase in adult attendances is disputed. Hard census data are very limited, but not wholly absent[52], for the first half of the 19th century, in contrast to the more plentiful data of the second half of the 19th century. Some have argued that the data suggest that 1851 represents a high-point of Victorian churchgoing[53], but Clive Field is more sceptical[54]. Whoever is right probably matters very little. 1851 remains a key point for subsequent comparisons of attendances and it was a time of enormous energy and change among British churchgoers and chapelgoers alike.

There was energetic fundraising and church building in the newly industrialised areas. In his 1841 *Bishop's Charges* to the Chester clergy, John Bird Sumner (1780-1862) exemplifies the passion that underpinned this programme:

> Our own diocese, Reverend Brethren, may well be cited to encourage our hopes, if encouragement were needed - to disperse our doubts, if doubts were entertained. It did present, some years ago, a specimen of religious destitution, which might well be deemed in every point of view appalling... Since our first meeting, now twelve years since, the measures which had been already commenced for increasing the efficiency of the Church have come into fuller operation, and spread in new directions. The exertions used to provide for the wants of an overgrown and daily-increasing population, have prospered beyond our hopes. One hundred and seventy additional churches have opened their doors to receive a people, of whom the greater part were practically excluded from the benefits of the Establishment... Numerous are the places, where, a few years ago hundreds, if not thousands, of families were congregated without any regular provision for their spiritual culture. The visitor of these districts now, will not only find the house set apart for the worship of God; but the minister, whose charge it is, permanently settled in his parsonage; the children collected in schools; the people systematically instructed; the general aspect of a christian community, where recently all was barren.[55]

Sumner's enthusiasm for what would now be called church-planting was backed by significant fundraising. In 1841, for example[56], £64,000 (around £6 million today) was raised

for church building and endowments to pay clergy stipends, of which some three-quarters came from individual subscriptions. Most of the rest came from trusts and societies established for the purpose. Sumner was Bishop of Chester for 20 years and Chester diocese then covered all of the growing industrial areas of Lancashire (Manchester diocese was formed in 1847, Liverpool in 1880 and Blackburn in 1927). We estimate that, in modern terms, Sumner's diocese raised £100 million over two decades to try to meet the Church of England's commitments in the face of massive urban population growth.

The 1851 Ecclesiastical Census

In 1851, alongside its ten-yearly Population Census begun in 1801, the Government uniquely also conducted a 'Census of Places of Worship' (now known as the *1851 Ecclesiastical Census*), attempting to record the seating capacity and (sometimes) endowments of every church and chapel in England, Wales and Scotland and attendances at each of their services on a somewhat wet and windy Mothering Sunday, March 30. The individual returns of this Ecclesiastical Census for England and Wales (but not for Scotland, because they were destroyed) can now be accessed on-line[57].

The 1851 population census shows that people in England were, for the first time, slightly more urban than rural, adding urgency to the need to fund churches and clergy in the newly populated areas and to move away from the agrarian model of parish finance. When this Population Census was being planned there was a debate in the House of Lords about whether it should include religious affiliation among its questions, but this proposal was opposed by the Bishops of Oxford and Salisbury and then rejected. In his introduction to the published amalgamated results of the *1851 Ecclesiastical Census*, the barrister and assistant commissioner for the census, Horace Mann, justified this decision:

> partly because it had a less inquisitorial aspect, - but especially because it was considered that the outward conduct of persons furnishes a better guide to their religious state than can be gained by merely vague professions. In proportion, it was thought, as people truly are connected with particular sects or churches, will be their activity in raising buildings in which to worship and their diligence in afterwards frequenting them; but where there is an absence of such practical regard for a religious creed, but little weight can be attached to any purely formal acquiescence.[58]

Arguably, Mann's logic here remains plausible. 'Religious affiliation' is a very loose depiction with little personal commitment. 'Membership' works better for Nonconformist denominations than for either the Church of England or the Catholic Church. 'Regular attendance' at a place of worship typically indicates an active engagement, even though its significance may vary over time and from one denomination to another.

Following this publication, there were bishops who again were not happy, this time because of the data showing that attendances at Church of England churches were poorer than expected. They insisted that such a Government census should never be repeated. In 1848 Sumner had been appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He was a scholarly, reforming evangelical much influenced while at Cambridge by the evangelical priest Charles Simeon. His mother was a first cousin of William Wilberforce and, as a diocesan bishop within the House of Lords, he was a supporter of Catholic emancipation, the Great Reform Bill of 1832, the Poor Law Bill of 1834 and, in the next decade, of divorce reform – although, sadly, not of removing disabilities from Jews[59]. So, perhaps as Archbishop he was less threatened by Horace Mann's findings than some of his Tractarian colleagues. In addition, in 1851 he preached at the opening ceremony of the Great Exhibition – an exhibition designed by Prince Albert to celebrate the achievements of Britain's new industrial culture and attended by

Queen Victoria. In short, he was a very proactive, urban bishop in a Church whose focus remained overwhelmingly rural.

In broad terms, the *1851 Ecclesiastical Census* shows that, apparently, attendances at churches and chapels in England and Wales amounted to six-tenths of the total population. Just less than half attended Church of England churches (the statistic that probably caused episcopal offence), under a fifth at Nonconformist chapels and only a small fraction at Catholic Masses. It should be noted, though, that 'attendances' at morning, afternoon and evening could include the same people either going to the same church two or even three times or dividing their loyalties between, say, a church in the morning and a chapel in the afternoon or evening. Some three-tenths of the population attended a church or chapel at the same time of day (so this gives a minimum proportion for individual churchgoers), or four-tenths at all services (according to some contemporary estimates).

This basically fits Weston Longville, where the Church of England church in 1851 had what is stated in the census return to be 'an average Sunday congregation' in the morning of 60 and evening of 100. The local population had risen to just over 400 (returning to the 300s at the end of the century, where it remains today) and the restored Church had 300 seats by 1851. The Methodist Wesleyan Chapel there – built in 1836 and closed in 1981 – had 15 attendances in the afternoon (perhaps a Sunday School) and 35 in the evening.

Coddenham and Crowfield in 1851, however, exceeded these church and chapel attendances, with a remarkable six-out-of-ten attending a church or chapel on the afternoon of Mothering Sunday, albeit with Church of England Easter communicants remaining at about one-in-ten of the population. Shortly after Longe's death, with a local rural population, unusually, still rising (perhaps because it was close to Ipswich), an Independent chapel became more active at Coddenham, as did a new Baptist chapel at Crowfield. By 1851 their combined Nonconformist attendances had reached slightly more than half of the combined attendances at Longe's former churches. Today, though, while the latter remain open for worship, they now have only fortnightly Sunday services in a multi-parish benefice of eight Anglican churches, and the two Nonconformist chapels have been sold and converted (like the chapel in Weston Longville) into houses for monied urbanites. This Victorian flourishing of rural, East Anglian churchgoing and chapelgoing is now radically diminished (chapter 6 returns to the topic of parishes that have been merged into megabenefices).

The *1851 Ecclesiastical Census* also shows that lay-financed and generally well-attended chapels were continuing to be built in both urban areas (to accommodate a rising urban population) and rural areas (despite widespread population decline). Church of England churches had been restored and expanded in many areas, as in Weston Longville, with some publicly funded churches built in fast growing urban areas – dramatically so in Barrow-in-Furness[60].

Parsonages

Late in the 18th century, Queen Anne's Bounty was authorised to make loans to parishes for the improvement of clergy homes: previously the incumbent had been responsible for maintenance, and would have relied on benefactions – or on his own income – for funds. Thomas Gilbert was an MP for over thirty years, and his name is particularly attached to the *Clergy Residences Repair Act* 1776 which authorised Queen Anne's Bounty to lend money to parishes principally for building or buying a parsonage house and offices. This facility was little used until the early 19th century[61] but was used frequently thereafter. Loans were for a maximum of thirty-one years – a time span that was likely to mean that successor incumbents had to make repayments on loans. This was not always popular: Le Fanu reports that there was one complaint about meeting a loan for the construction of a 'billiard room' by an earlier

incumbent. The interest rate was fixed at four percent, and Queen Anne's Bounty was criticised by some for being usurious, and by others for lending money at too low a rate when interest rates in the wider economy were higher.

Incumbents were expected to maintain their parsonage and to pay for dilapidations when their successor took over. This led, of course, to problems because the absence of clergy pensions meant that many successions only occurred on the death of the previous incumbent, and it was not always straightforward to make a claim on his estate. This was even more problematic if the Church did not want to be seen to leave widows and children in penury. The *Ecclesiastical Dilapidations Act* of 1871 tried to impose some order with regular inspections by agents of the diocese and the loans available from Queen Anne's Bounty helped to contain the problem.

The *Parsonages Act* of 1838 permitted incumbents to sell the parsonage, with the proceeds going to Queen Anne's Bounty which was in turn charged with paying for a replacement. This and the *Parsonages Act* of 1865 also amended the terms on which Queen Anne's Bounty could make loans and allowed that parsonages which were not fit residencies for incumbents could be converted to dwellings for those who worked on glebe land. Many clergy houses were sold and Le Fanu refers to 'a large aggregate sum'[62] that was credited back to the parishes as additions to their endowments. So, an incumbent whose house was inconveniently large could sell it, rebuild on a smaller scale, and increase his and his successors' income with the interest on the balance. But, of course, an unmarried incumbent who was succeeded by a man with a large family might leave the successor with the need to borrow to extend the building.

Tithes and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners

Despite the growing pressures of industrialisation, the model of traditional rural parishes illustrated earlier by Woodforde and Longe spread. By mid-century, most rural parishes had a resident incumbent financed by tithes, glebe and Easter collections. Even the isolated parishes of Alnham and Branxton in North Northumberland, with populations of less than 300 had their own incumbents, living in substantial parsonages that were built in the 1830s (and both sold in the 1960s).

Tithes were unpopular, difficult to collect and less suited to an industrialising country. *The Tithe Act* of 1836 commuted all tithes-in-kind into monetary payments. These were established by the Tithe Commissioners and this change greatly simplified the collection of this tax, even if it did not improve its popularity, particularly among those chapelgoers who disliked the privileges of the established Church. The Tithe Commissioners were also charged with extracting compensation for lost income when railways were built across agricultural land.

The *Pluralities Acts* of 1838 and 1850 restricted the extent to which clergy could serve more than one parish or might combine a parish appointment with a role in a cathedral. These restrictions and continuing improvements in clergy incomes were designed to ensure – or at least increase the likelihood – that full-time ministry would be universally available. The legislation on pluralities typically restricted clergy to serving in a maximum of two parishes in close proximity of which one was relatively small, and these restrictions remained until various Measures from the late 20th century allowed pastoral reorganisations that involve combining many more parishes, covering greater geographical areas. In rural areas today, there are many megabenefices that would not have been permitted even a century ago.

1836 also saw the formation of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners through the *Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act* (also known as the *Established Church Act*). This was a parallel body to Queen Anne's Bounty, with some overlapping responsibilities. Several proposals for their

merger came to nothing until both were subsumed into the Church Commissioners in 1948. In the middle third of the 19th century, the Commissioners enforced major changes in the incomes of cathedral clergy and of bishops by diverting resources from them to enable the continuing augmentation of poor livings, and, in particular to fund the new parishes and dioceses (Ripon in 1836, Manchester 1847, and seven more before 1900) as a response to demographic movements. Without this very significant redistribution, the ambition of providing for the cure of souls in every place would have been frustrated by a lack of funding for priests in the new parishes.

The *Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act* of 1840 reduced the number of canons allowed in most (but not all) English cathedrals to four. Additional canonries, including many sinecures, were suspended when their current post-holders left. The wit, satirist and clergyman Sydney Smith was a canon of St Pauls' Cathedral (and incumbent of Combe Florey in Somerset). In letters of 1837 he vehemently and famously opposed this redistribution from cathedrals, arguing (in vain) that:

> it would interfere with vested rights, and though it might tend to equalize the income of the clergy, the majority would remain very small—the individual gain would be trifling, while the great pecuniary and social rewards of the Church would be destroyed'.[63]

Instead, he argued in a letter to Archdeacon Singleton that money should be found by reducing the incomes of bishops, revealing as he did so the extent of the wealth available:

> The Bishops and Commissioners wanted a fund to endow small livings; they did not touch a farthing of their own incomes, … and proceeded lustily at once to confiscate Cathedral property. But why was it necessary, if the fund for small Livings was such a paramount consideration, that the future Archbishops of Canterbury should be left with two palaces, and £15,000 [equivalent to around £1 million today] per annum? Why is every future Bishop of London to have a palace in Fulham, a house in St. James's Square, and £10,000. a year? Could not all the Episcopal functions be carried on well and effectually with the half of these incomes? Is it necessary that the Archbishop of Canterbury should give feasts to Aristocratic London[64].

In a parliamentary debate in March 1836[65], it was revealed that the estimated annual income of the Archbishop of Canterbury was £17,000 (about £1.7 million in today's prices) – rather more than alleged by Sydney Smith, though, of course the incomes of clergy and bishops fluctuated with the fruitfulness of the harvest. This was marginally exceeded by Durham at £17,800 while the incomes of other bishops in England and Wales ranged from £2300 to £11,500. This can be compared with the incomes of the most fashionable (and possibly successful) doctors of around £2000 per year[66], and of Sydney Smith himself who already had an income from his very lucrative incumbency of £800. The bishops' incomes were enormous even taking into account that many had to maintain two homes and two households to enable them to participate in political life in London, and then needed to employ archdeacons as managers, regulators and enforcers in their dioceses to ensure that clergy were holding appropriate services and keeping their church buildings in reasonable repair.

Soon after Bishop Sumner moved from Chester to Canterbury, he received and responded to a respectful letter[67] from William Wyndham Malet, vicar of Ardeley in Hertfordshire, which expressed disquiet that income from parishes was paid to bishops from 385 parishes, when the bishops themselves had incomes much greater than the clergy in the places whence the tithes were derived. He expressed similar unhappiness about 702 parishes whose incomes went to the deans of cathedrals. He quoted examples including:

> Ash, in Kent, population 2,077 – income of incumbent £147 – of which no part is from tithes the whole of which £3,333 per annum are alienated to the Archbishop of Canterbury.
>
> Churchill, in Somerset, population 970 – income of incumbent £98 – of which no part is tithe; the whole of the tithes £585 per annum, and even the rent of the glebe, being alienated to the Dean and Chapter of Bristol.

Malet requested that these tithes should be received instead by the parishes. The reply remarked that bishops made benefactions to 'their' parishes so that the differences were not quite as great as Malet alleged, though these responses scarcely dented Malet's criticism.

By 1885, when Malet died at Ardeley, changes in bishops' incomes had been made particularly through the *Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act* of 1860 whose first two substantive sections were clear and blunt in their redistributive effect:

> Upon the first Avoidance [vacancy] of the See of any Archbishop or Bishop in *England* …, all the Lands, Hereditaments, and Emoluments of or belonging to such See (except all Rights of Patronage or Presentation and the Residences of the Archbishop or Bishop, …) shall become vested absolutely in the Ecclesiastical Commissioners ….
>
> After the Lands of a See have become vested in the Commissioners as aforesaid, an Arrangement shall be made … for assigning to the Archbishop or Bishop of such See and his Successors, as an Endowment for the See, such of the Lands … as in the Judgment of the Estates Committee of the said Ecclesiastical Commissioners, … will secure as nearly as may be, after deducting Costs of Management, a net annual Income equal to that named for the Archbishop or Bishop of the See by any Act of Parliament or Order in Council then in force, and no more…"

The only concessions in this sweeping redistribution by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was that it would apply only when current bishops resigned, retired or, most likely, died in office, and that their successors kept their palaces. Though most of the discussions about the proposed Act would have been held in private, we might surmise (and hope) that continued parliamentary support for the Church, and its continued establishment, was contingent on the more effective use of its own historic resources.

Over the next few years, various proposals were made to reduce these inequalities using the powers of the 1860 Act, and to release funds for new dioceses. Today, there is much greater clarity between personal incomes and the other costs incurred by bishops and their staff. The stipends of the Archbishop and diocesan bishops are £102,540 and £55,660 respectively[68]. They are no longer responsible for the upkeep of their palaces or substantial houses and their expenses are paid by the Church Commissioners for costs that they would have previously had to fund themselves. When all of their stipends and expenses are added together, each bishop now costs the Church of England on average some half-a-million pounds a year – that is, more than fifty million pounds overall (see chapter 5). The key point, though, is that the Church of England is capable of re-purposing its historic assets in radical ways.

These and subsequent redistributions of Church assets away from cathedrals and bishops were the source of much of the capital of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners – and so of the capital inherited by the Church Commissioners in 1948. It shows in a fundamental way that Parliament recognised a difference between the property 'rights' within the church – which were not owned by anyone but were attached to positions – from those of other patrons and rectors. There was no suggestion that lay rectors, Oxford or Cambridge Colleges or the Crown should lose their rights to income from their parishes or their centralising power in making clerical appointments.

The 1880s

Local Newspaper Censuses in many urban areas (covering half of the urban population of England)[69] show that Church of England attendances were now declining as a fraction of the population, whereas Nonconformist chapel attendances continued to flourish, often competing with, and sometimes replacing, each other. The Catholic Church demonstrated resilience, especially within cities in Western England and Scotland. Rural attendances struggled against a population that was rapidly moving away to industrial cities. Although the population was increasingly urban, the Church of England still deployed a majority of its clergy in rural parishes and remained a predominantly rural denomination, despite ten mainly urban dioceses being formed between 1848 and 1901. The Education Acts of 1870 and 1880 also encouraged many incumbents to build Church of England primary schools to meet the government demand that all children between five and ten, even in remote rural areas, should be educated.

The City of Liverpool illustrates these urban trends with exceptional clarity thanks to the diligence of *The Liverpool Daily Post.* This newspaper uniquely conducted censuses of Sunday attendances across denominations, all at the same time of year and using the same independent monitoring methods in 1881, 1891, 1902 and 1912, which can then be compared with the results of the 1851 *Ecclesiastical Census.* Similar patterns can be found comparing 1851 with *The Newcastle Daily Chronicle's* 1881 census, *The British Weekly's* 1886 census of London churches and chapels and Richard Mudie-Smith's very detailed report in *The Religious Life of London* (1904), and *The Birmingham Daily Times'* census conducted over three Sundays in 1892. Longitudinal evidence from *The Liverpool Daily Post*, however, surpasses them all.[70]

What emerges from Liverpool[71] is that, while the city-wide population grew from a-third-of-a-million in 1851 to half-a-million in 1881, Church of England attendances dropped from fifteen percent of that population to ten percent. By 2012, with a population of three-quarters-of-a-million, they had dropped to less than eight percent. In contrast, Nonconformist chapel attendances 1851-1881 increased from eleven to thirteen percent, albeit dropping to nine percent by 1912.

Independents/Congregationalists declined throughout this period, whereas Baptists, Presbyterians and rival Methodists increased between 1851 and 1881, but all began to decline in relation to the rapidly growing population by 1891 and had declined still further by 1912. Catholic attendances at Mass showed general resilience at around one-in-ten of the population, but doubt was expressed at the time about whether the independent numerators had counted every act of worship (as today in many Catholic churches, several Masses were typically held at various different times over the weekend).

Each of these Liverpool censuses recorded the seating capacity of its churches and chapels. Comparing this capacity with attendances, Church of England churches were slightly more than half full in 1851 reducing to one-third full by 1881. With declining attendances and a central urban population relocating to the suburbs, four out of the fourteen oldest Church of England churches in Liverpool (the largest with a seating capacity of three thousand and even the smallest capable of seating a thousand people) had closed by 1902. Nonconformist chapels were already, on average, slightly less than half full in 1851 and closely matched Church of England churches by 1881, despite their increase in attendances (both symptoms of over-building). By 1912 Independent/Congregationalist, Baptist and Primitive Methodist chapels were only one quarter full. It has sometimes been claimed that the urban poor could not attend churches or chapels because of a lack of available seating for them[72]. This evidence suggests otherwise.

In 1858 a Church of England Liverpool incumbent made a shrewd (but, sadly, rare) observation of an economic problem that was emerging for all denominations[73]:

> Now, since almost all our places of religious worship are supported on the voluntary principle, two facts are of constant occurrence. *First*, the Chapels of Protestant Dissenters, which have not necessarily any fixed position, are removed from time to time towards the outer margin of the town; thus keeping within the range of the paying population. *Second*, the churches of the town, which are consecrated to meet the wants of the people in a given area, retain their local position, many of them serving in succession for every grade of the population. Their resources are thus diminished, not only from generation to generation, but from year to year, until the congregations in some instances are scarcely able to support the expenses incidental to public worship…
>
> Not infrequently the error in church building is multiplied. For example, a church is wanted to accommodate 800, and in such a neighbourhood that it should not cost more than £3 per sitting; and a church is built, to accommodate 1600, at a cost of £6 per sitting. It thus costs *four* times as much as was necessary. The additional seats which were not needed, and are not available there, are reckoned among the church accommodation of the town; and expense is entailed upon the congregation for keeping this larger and more costly fabric in repair.

Overall assessment

Positively: *The Church of England in the 19th century eventually did respond energetically to the radical shift of population away from the countryside and into industrial cities. So did Nonconformist denominations. Together they readily matched the church/chapel building of the Normans. Church schools and Sunday schools were also widely established. The 1851 Ecclesiastical Census demonstrates that the Government remained anxious to promote religious worship, perhaps to sustain civic values. If 1851 represents a high-point of Church of England church attendance, the 1880s represent a high-point of chapel attendance for Nonconformist denominations, except for Independents. Even most small, remote rural parishes now had a resident Church of England incumbent, and many had a Nonconformist chapel as well to challenge him. The Sunday School Movement was still growing even in urban areas inhabited by industrial workers.*

The work of Queen Anne's Bounty continued, and some government grants in the early decades enabled them to augment the incomes of additional poorer parishes and to build parsonages. The commutation of tithes from in-kind to money made the administration simpler, but did not itself do much to alter the considerable inequalities in parish incomes. The most radical changes in the Church economy came from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners when they removed much of the income of sees and of cathedrals and used the assets instead to fund new churches, parishes and dioceses in response to the major demographic impact of industrialisation. This reallocation of the assets of the Church was indeed radical – though accompanied by less bloodshed than the earlier dissolution of the monasteries – and showed that the Church (and the government that approved the actions) did not regard the assets that backed the incomes of senior clergy as their own property. On the other hand, the rights of lay rectors, colleges and the Crown to receive part of tithe income were left untouched.

Negatively: *By the final two decades of the 19th century there were widespread signs that church/chapel-going, but not Sunday School attendance, was declining. Self-supporting rural Nonconformist chapels were facing serious financial problems in a context of rural depopulation, yet some denominations continued to build in the countryside. Endowed Church of England rural churches still had resident incumbents, but congregations in many*

of their newly enlarged churches were getting thinner, even in urban areas. Tithes supporting rural incumbents were increasingly resented by farmers, some of whom were already in debt to their local chapel. 1851 optimism, exemplified in the Great Exhibition, was waning. In 1867 Matthew Arnold, the son of the 'muscular Christian' headmaster of Rugby School, published his poem Dover Beach *with its bleak vision of the Sea of Faith's 'melancholy, long, withdrawing roar'. Yet the central bureaucracy of the Church of England was expanding, the number of dioceses and diocesan bishops increased from 22 to 31, and by 1900 there were 15 suffragans. Archdeacon numbers also grew during the century from 53 to 78.*

Chapter 4: The Twentieth Century

The 1901 Population Census of England shows that the population was now overwhelmingly urban. The London suburbs grew rapidly with office-workers commuting into central London by train during the week. Churches in the City of London struggled on a Sunday as those in the suburbs flourished. Rural churches and chapels in many parts of England also struggled. In the isolated countryside of north Northumberland, the last Nonconformist corrugated-iron chapel was built in 1898 and the first (very substantial) chapel was closed in 1903[74].

Local Newspaper Censuses show considerable decline in both Church of England *and* Nonconformist attendances, when compared with the 1851 *Ecclesiastical Census*, albeit with pockets of resilience in wealthy suburbs and in parts of rural Wales. Bromley, in Kent, now in Greater London, provides a good example of this suburban resilience. In both 1851 and 1903 a census there was conducted on a wet day so it is perhaps not surprising that the 1851 count showed that slightly less than four out of ten people were in church or chapel. The local population grew from four thousand to twenty-seven thousand by 1903, and combined church/chapel-going rates as a percentage of these populations remained very similar, albeit stronger in the evening than they were. The Church of England now had eight churches in the area, with attendances spread more thinly, and the Nonconformist denominations had a wealth of new chapels. By 1993, with a population of forty-four thousand, combined church/chapel-going rates have declined to one-in-ten of the population. Methodists and Congregationalist/Presbyterian declines are particularly sharp. Only Baptists and Catholics in Bromley show comparative resilience[75].

By 1900 the Sunday School Movement in England was within a decade of its peak across denominations – with national enrolments across denominations reaching over half of those under fifteen – albeit in a context of widespread adult non-attendance at church or chapel. Most urban adults, as distinct from their children, were now irregular churchgoers or chapelgoers.

The finances of Church of England and Nonconformist rural churches/chapels were affected in different ways. Church of England parishes continued to derive income from glebe and from the monetary payments that replaced tithes following the 1836 *Tithe Act.* An increasing proportion of clergy incomes were augmented by Queen Anne's Bounty or the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Apart perhaps from a decline in Easter collections, Church of England parishes were protected by these historic resources from the economic effects of rural depopulation. In contrast, rural Nonconformist chapels were largely dependent financially upon local congregational giving for their construction, maintenance and ministry. As congregations dwindled, because people moved to urban areas to seek work, so did their finances. They were soon forced to close because they had over-built in a context of rapid depopulation – although remarkably few at the time seemed to notice this obvious link[76].

The difference between urban and rural parishes became more marked although, to some extent, rural incumbents began to serve more than one benefice as the plurality restrictions were relaxed. Some urban incumbents, often with curates and daughter churches, served sizeable populations that were well beyond their capacity to visit, especially since occasional offices for marriages and funerals remained largely church or chapel based.

Between the World Wars

In 1919 a unique report, *The Army and Religion*, was published, based upon some three hundred memoranda received from army chaplains who had served in the First World War. It calculated that only slightly more than one-in-ten of the English troops were still 'seriously connected' with a church compared with one-in-five of Scottish troops, even though most of

them had probably attended Sunday School as children and still had some residual belief in prayer:

> The men of the British armies, however dim their faith may be, do in the hour of danger, at least, believe in God, 'the great and terrible God'. Most men we are told pray before they go over the parapet, or advance in the face of machine guns, and they thank God when they have come through the battle... in the presence of the most terrific display of material force that human history has ever seen men believe that there is an Unseen Power, inaccessible to the senses, which is yet mightier than high explosives, which knows all and which hears prayer[77].

Adult attendances at urban and rural churches and chapels continued to decline, despite a short-term rise in the overall number of Church of England attendances in 1914 as war started[78]. Methodist 19th century schisms in England and Presbyterian schisms in Scotland re-united and subsequently closed many unneeded neighbouring, and formerly rival, chapels in both urban and rural areas. The Church of England, in contrast, retained most of its rural and urban churches, but struggled to fill and finance them and continued to amalgamate benefices in sparsely populated areas such as Romney Marsh in Kent. The Sunday School Movement was still strong but past its peak. Inner urban churches and chapels struggled to survive as urban populations moved out to the suburbs.

The city of York provides some of the fullest evidence of 20th and 21st century urban church- or chapel-going decline, thanks to Seebohm Rowntree's three remarkable surveys between 1901 and 1948, supplemented in 1989 and 2010[79]. York's population doubled, but adult attendances dropped from seventeen thousand to below eight thousand over the period of eighty-eight years. This was despite York having a well-attended Cathedral/Minster and a much-celebrated evangelical Anglican church and a Catholic church with multiple Sunday Masses, both in the shadow of the Minster. In Rowntree's time Church of England and Nonconformist adult attendances both halved, whereas Catholic attendances steadily grew. He predicted:

> The Roman Catholics have an excellent chance of maintaining a vigorous and expanding congregation for some decades, because the proportion of younger adults attending their churches is substantially higher than the proportion in the nation as a whole. No particular change in attendances is to be expected in the Anglican Church and Salvation Army arising solely from the distribution in age groups of their attendances, but the long term prospect for the Nonconformists in York appears to be distinctly bleak, for these figures indicate that they are not attracting sufficient of the younger age groups[80]

Rowntree's mid-century prediction proved very accurate for the traditional Nonconformist chapels in York (but not for more recent Pentecostal congregations), but it was over-optimistic about Anglicans and Salvationists and he might have been surprised to find that Catholics too declined there in the 21st century. His observation about churches and chapels 'not attracting sufficient of the younger age groups' was astute. Even the city-centre evangelical Anglican church failed to do that.

Trefor M. Owen was another invaluable recorder[81] of mid-century chapelgoing, albeit in north Wales rather than England, in this instance of a small enclave of rural resilience in Glan-llyn. By 1851 there were two Church of England churches in Glan-llyn and ten Calvinist Methodist and Independent chapels (all but one of the latter built, despite rural depopulation, in the first half of the 19th Century). The total seating capacity of the churches and chapels already exceeded the local population and by 1950 it was almost three times greater. Even in 1851 there were signs that the two Church of England churches were struggling, surrounded by largely Nonconformist parishioners. They had no Sunday School and shared an incumbent who received from one church £168 in tithes and £54 in glebe and,

from the other, £20 in tithes, £49 in glebe and £34 from an endowment. Evidently not over-busy with occasional offices, he received just two pounds, five shillings in fees. A decade later the two parishes were separated again and remained separate until shortly after Owen's time there.

As a percentage of the total adult population in 1851 and 1950 chapel-going in Glan-llyn was remarkably unchanged, with at least half claiming to go to a chapel once a week and half of them claiming to go at least twice. However, as a result of depopulation, actual attendances on a Sunday can be estimated as 112 in 1851 and only 58 in 1950[82]. In addition, Owen noted that Sunday Schools and weekday prayer meetings were both declining, and that chapels were having to hold 'joint Sunday services in each chapel alternately, but this arrangement… derives from the weakness of both'[83]. Finding preachers was also proving problematic:

> When no preacher is available, there should be present, ideally, sufficient members capable of conducting a prayer meeting between them. The success of such a meeting, in a purely superficial sense, depends on the presence of persons able and willing to come forward and 'take part'. Such persons are fewer than formerly, and this poses a problem which the chapels find difficult to solve. For example, out of over forty members in one of the smaller chapels, only two or three can 'take part' in a prayer meeting; at another chapel only two out of a congregation of fifteen. Conditions are similar in the larger chapels where there are only a dozen or so in congregations of between 100 and 150. Since the prayers uttered are sometimes barely audible throughout the whole chapel, and since they tend to become stereotyped in content and form, there is less variation in the prayer meeting than might be expected from the number of people taking part. The tendency is to look on the preaching meetings as the 'real' services and to regard the prayer meetings merely as stop-gaps'[84].

By 1990 membership of the Nonconformist chapels had remained relatively high (at over a third of the local population), but actual attendances radically declined. Three of the chapels had closed, and another four seldom had a service, with an average attendance of about 15. Anglicans (by now dis-established in Wales) no longer had a resident incumbent in either parish and only one of them now had a regular service, attended by about 17.[85] The sociologist Steve Bruce, two decades later, found chapel closures in Glan-llyn almost complete[86]. It has ceased to be an enclave of rural, Welsh-speaking, chapelgoing resilience.

It is sometimes claimed that, in New Towns particularly, there was a revival of churchgoing in the 1950s. Clive Field's *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*[87] examines this claim carefully. The question mark in its title is important. Despite many claims that there was a religious revival in the 1950s – based, for example, upon some New Town churches being built, along with a freshly re-built Coventry Cathedral (financed by the Government's war damage fund and by public subscription), as well as conversions within crusades such as those of Billy Graham – Field argues that the statistical evidence from British churches and public opinion polls does not support any measurable revival. Here and in his next book[88], Field argues at length that Callum Brown's claims to the contrary are misguided. Attendances at Roman Catholic churches did not decline, and the Sunday School Movement was now well past its early-century peak – their enrolments across denominations, which, as already noted, had involved over half of all children under fifteen between 1891 and 1911, had reduced to just one-fifth by 1961[89].

The 1960s were manifestly not a high-point in British churchgoing (as Callum Brown[90] claims), so the much-heralded sexual freedoms did not *initiate* churchgoing decline and, subsequently, the erosion of distinctively Christian belief (as he also claims). About identifying 1963 as the specific turning point for 'revolutionary secularization', Field adds cuttingly that Brown 'has been able to do little more than point to a miscellany of

unconnected events… the presumed criticality of 1963 is little more than an act of faith'[91]. Instead, he concludes, as we do, that there was an ongoing process of decline going back into the 19th century albeit with one short and limited exception – not in the 1950s, but in the early months of the First World War.

There is also tentative evidence from amalgamated Opinion Polls that, in the absence of active adult churchgoing, traditional Christian beliefs by now showed signs of decline. Near majority belief in a Personal God and in Life After Death both dipped somewhat between the 1960s and 1970s, while minority beliefs in reincarnation, horoscopes, lucky charms and black magic persisted and belief in ghosts actually increased[92].

The remarkably consistent school studies of 11-15 year-olds led by Anglican priest and academic psychologist Leslie Francis from 1974 until 1994 showed sharp changes in such 'traditional' Christian beliefs, almost halving over this period about whether 'Jesus helps me', 'God is very real to me' or 'Prayer helps me a lot'[93]

However, qualitative data collected by the *Mass Observation* social research project, 1937-1969 and updated in the 1980s and 1990s, suggest a more complex and less linear picture. The social historian James Hinton[94], self-identifying as an atheist, reaches the significant conclusion that 'for many of these people (whether identifying as religious or not) religious belief or its absence was fraught with ambiguity, ambivalence, uncertainty, longing, or, in some cases, guilt', adding that 'opinion polls are unlikely to register such complexities'. In the terminology of our chapter 7, religious belief and unbelief for many respondents was closer to alienation than to a source of resonance.

Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists responded by forming re-unions (for Methodists, as well as for Scottish Presbyterians) or new unions, particularly the freshly created United Reformed Church, and many denominations in the 1950s also held repeated evangelistic crusades to encourage conversions. The major exception to the widespread decline were newer Pentecostal urban churches and the British Catholic Church[95]. The latter had not (yet) overbuilt following the Reformation, even when it was legal for it to do so. Multiple Masses in a single church building were, and remain, the British (but not European) Catholic norm with few exceptions. Celibate clergy and observant mass-goers sustained British Catholic finances and attendances until the 1960s. Still thriving Pentecostal churches – recorded in York assiduously by David Goodhew[96] – now took over some of the urban chapels vacated by older Nonconformist denominations.

The Church of England's own published statistics suggest a four-fold decline in baptisms between 1958 and 2000 and significant declines in both Christmas and Easter communicants in the same period.

London has always been atypical – certainly never traditionally agrarian and also without the mass industrialisation of the mainly northern cities. Much of the London population has migrated to the suburbs, leaving most city-centre churches with thinly attended Sunday congregations for more than two centuries. Though demographically atypical, London includes about a fifth of the English population, so its statistics will always be important in national averages. Field's research[97] concludes that about one third of the London population attended church and chapels (of all denominations) in the mid-19th century, falling to one fifth by 1900 and around one tenth in 1990. Field adds that 'the Church of England has been the clear loser in this process…. By the early twenty-first century, only one in eight church attenders in Greater London was Anglican.'[98]

Evidence remains limited, not just in London, because, as Field, ironically, notes: 'Churches no longer have the appetite for ecumenical statistical projects that produce depressingly predictable results'.[99] Recent publicity from the Church of England has tended to focus upon

growth from the extremely low point of 2020 when churches were closed in response to Covid, but the Church's own *Statistics for Mission* show a drop of more than one-quarter in adult weekly attendances between 2014 and 2024, in part, we surmise, because megabenefices have reduced weekly services in every church to fortnightly in many.

Governance and economy

Just after the First World War, Parliament largely gave up its previous right and responsibility to introduce, scrutinize and approve – or otherwise – legislation that affects the Church. The *Church of England Assembly (Powers) Act* of 1919 gave the Church Assembly the right to draft Measures, which have the same status as Acts of Parliament, on any issue relating to the Church. These are submitted to the Ecclesiastical Committee of Parliament (a joint committee of the Commons and the Lords) who in turn recommend to Parliament that the Measure be passed into law, or not – but without the power to make amendments. This procedure remained after the Assembly was transformed into the General Synod by the *Synodical Government Measure* of 1969. Parliament has passed many Measures prepared by the Church, but notably twice rejected the *Prayer Book Measure* in 1927 and 1928, ostensibly because of proposed changes in relation to the Reservation of consecrated bread and wine[100].

During the 20th century the model of parish finance continued to change. A century after tithes were commuted from in-kind to monetary payments, they were replaced in the *Tithe Act* of 1936. Those who paid tithes (or rent-charges as they were formally known) were required to make payments to the government in the form of a 60-year annuity; those clergy who previously received tithes received nothing directly, but Queen Anne's Bounty received a government bond, on which interest was paid until it expired after 60 years. The intention was that no tithe-related transactions would occur after 1996, but the administration of a multitude of small payments led to the early cancellation of the annuities in the *Finance Act* of 1977.

Bonds were issued to Queen Anne's Bounty, rather than to individual clergy, because the bonds were marketable, and it was not felt to be right that an incumbent should sell the bond, spend the proceeds and so potentially leave nothing to his successor. Queen Anne's Bounty and the Church Commissioners retained a role in augmenting stipends and could use income from these bonds to do so. But inequalities remained: even in the 1960s, Leslie Paul[101] reported that stipends of incumbents varied between £750 and £2500, with assistant curates receiving around £500, although (in contrast to the characterful Sydney Smith 120 years earlier) he recognised that 'the number of "plums" is not as great as rumour would have it'.[102] By Paul's time, bishops were paid stipends that were detached from the assets that had previously generated them. This followed from the *Episcopal Endowments and Stipends Measure* of 1943 which empowered the Ecclesiastical Commissioners to take over the endowments and property of any see, to pay a stipend to bishops, to provide a suitable residence and to meet various expenses. Bishops' incomes ceased to depend on the wealth or otherwise of their position – ahead of the same principle being applied to parish clergy.

During the interwar period, the sale of patronage rights (these rights were marketable commodities, known as advowsons) was greatly restricted by the *Benefices Act of 1898 (Amendment) Measure* of 1923 and finally outlawed in the *Patronage (Benefices) Measure* of 1986. Patrons might formally nominate a priest to a parish and the local PCC is consulted, but the power to make an appointment (or not) remained with the bishop.

A further major governance change occurred in 1948 when Queen Anne's Bounty and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners were merged by the *Church Commissioners Measure 1947*. The Church Commissioners took over all of the functions and the assets of the two predecessor bodies, including the augmentation of clergy stipends, the payment of bishops

and support for cathedrals. An almost breathless and very detailed account of their investment strategies, successes, mistakes and disasters can be found in Andrew Chandler's history of the Commissioners.[103]

The transfer of glebe

Parishioners have always contributed to the costs of running the Church of England, but this moved from parish level to dioceses when the latter expected quotas or parish shares to enable them to meet their diocesan expenditure. The 1964 *Paul Report* strongly recommended the pooling of assets to enable a uniform stipend and this was achieved following the *Endowments and Glebe Measure* of 1976 which transferred all remaining glebe from parishes to dioceses. Previously, when glebe land was sold, Queen Anne's Bounty – and then the Church Commissioners – held the resulting sale value, and paid interest on it to the parish in place of the income from the glebe itself; after 1978, glebe was detached from individual parishes, and held by (and sold by, in some cases) the dioceses. Paul also argued that there should be no distinction in payment between beneficed and unbeneficed clergy, that there should be a common stipend on a national scale and that pension differences should be resolved.

The transfer of glebe closely followed the transfer of responsibility for parsonages from incumbents to dioceses in the 1972 *Repair of Benefice Buildings Measure* and led to the current situation in which a diocese takes all of the funds from the sale of redundant clergy housing and could sell glebe even when some houses and some glebe originated in local funds and benefactions. This enforced transfer away from local parishes followed the precedent established by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in the 19th century through which Church assets were reassigned by legislation. Section 15 of the 1976 Measure starts bluntly:

> Any glebe land which immediately before the appointed day [1 April 1978] is … vested … in the incumbent of a benefice shall on the day without any conveyance or other assurance vest…. in the Diocesan Board of Finance.

The House of Commons *Hansard* entry for 5 May 1976[104] reported that there were 'about 30,000 acres of glebe land in England and much of it is farmed'. There were over 11000 benefices at that time and in the House of Lords on 26 July 1976 the Bishop of London (Gerald Ellison) stated[105] that 'of the 4,846 benefices which receive income from glebe, 4,622 – that is all but 224 – receive less than £1,000'. To put this amount into perspective, the recommended national minimum stipend in 1979 for clergymen of incumbent status was £3,300[106].

There is little doubt that managing less than £1000 of glebe land was either not a priority or was an unwelcome burden on many clergy. In a written answer to a question[107] in the House of Commons on 19 July 1982, Sir William van Straubenzee, the Second Church Estates Commissioner, stated that the annual income generated from glebe had increased from £2.1 million to £4 million between the transfer in 1978 and 1982 (£9 million to £17 million in today's prices). He confirmed that the transfer did not impact the administrative costs of the Church Commissioners (who, of course, were not directly a party to the transfer), but that he was not able to say whether there had been any increase in costs in dioceses as a result of the transfer. It would seem that most appointed agents to manage their newly acquired glebe, so that the additional labour involved did not greatly increase the number of diocesan employees. He added that:

> it is reasonable to assume that, if dioceses have incurred any additional cost, this will have been more than offset both by savings in the time of and cost to incumbents in administering glebe before 1978, as well as the substantial increases in income that have been secured.

No-one would have asked, or been able to answer, whether a transfer of glebe land to fewer than forty-four separate diocesan entities would have yielded even greater financial benefits.

The transfer of glebe ensured that the previous practice of levelling up lower clergy stipends was replaced by a regime of (almost) uniform stipends across the country. Clergy were and are paid through a national payroll system operated by the Church Commissioners, but the funding for their stipends, national insurance and pensions comes from the dioceses out of their glebe income and parish contributions.

Clergy numbers and deployment

Leslie Paul was unusually eclectic – starting adulthood in the 1920s as a folk religionist, journalist and poet, before returning to the Church of England, eventually as a priest, author and lecturer in ethics and social studies at Queen's College, Birmingham. His influential 1964 report analysed the considerable decline in attendances in the Church of England (despite the optimism of some church leaders at the time) and, as already noted, the continuing inequalities in parish clergy stipends. He set out declining Sunday attendances relentlessly, diocese by diocese, and concluded that[108] 'whether we base membership most broadly on infant baptism or more narrowly upon confirmation figures, there is in both cases serious evidence of decline'. His main conclusion was that

> the evidence urges upon us … a reform of the ministerial structure and of the pastoral machinery of the Church, or rather not one single reform, but an interlocking series of reforms; in fact, an operation of the utmost delicacy and complexity. Though the difficulties stare us in the face, the alternatives are chilling - to do nothing, which means to abandon the nation to its religious decline and the clergy to their isolation, or to attempt a few piecemeal reforms which may save face but leave the central missionary problem to the conurbations unresolved. The crux of the whole problem of deployment seems to me this - though short of manpower the Church cannot use the clergy it has as effectively as it ought to: it is bad stewardship. It needs more clergy, but it has no moral right to ask for them unless it can deploy them effectively[109].

On clergy deployment, he argued that many more clergy were needed especially in urban areas, where traditional parish models do not always work well:

> The distribution of clergy is in inverse proportion to pastoral need. A pattern repeats itself time and time again: the greater the density of population the fewer relatively the number of clergy. But another pattern superimposes itself: the greater the density of population the poorer the pastoral results of the Church, the feebler its total impact. One might go further and say, the greater the density of population the more congregations approximate to ingatherings of the elect rather than to representative parochial congregations. And so the greater the density of population the more areas become mission areas against the problems of which the traditional parochial forms appear largely ineffective[110].

In 1958 almost half of the livings in the Church of England had populations of less than 1500, and a quarter had less than 1000. The rural-urban contrast was great: in Hereford parochial clergy on average each had just over 1000 people in their parishes, whereas those in Birmingham had more than six times as many. Three decades later, both dioceses had larger parishes: on average populations of 3000 in Hereford and 7600 in Birmingham[111].

Leslie Paul made a number of proposals to reduce this urban/rural discrepancy: bishops, he argued, should be given power to reorganize areas; clergy freehold should be turned instead into a ten-year leasehold; clergy should be allowed to retire at 65; at 70, freehold/leasehold should automatically be lost; group and team ministries should be fostered; extra-parochial ministries in universities and in industry should be increased; ordinands should be directed to

urban areas of pastoral need during their first five years of ministry; patronage should be transformed into a staffing or appointments advisory system, with private patrons represented only on regional boards; and a directory of vacancies should be established and made available to clergy intending to move. Many of these changes have happened, although some remain controversial and some – such as an increase in non-parochial, stipendiary clergy – run counter to our proposals in Part 2.

Leslie Paul's aspirations about clergy numbers have now proved to be wildly optimistic, even with the welcome influx of women as priests after 1994. In 1964, he believed[112] that by 1970 there would 809 deacons ordained; in fact, there were just 437. By 1980 the number had reduced to 309, with an additional 119 deacons ordained into non-stipendiary ministry. The *Deacons (Ordination of Women*) *Measure* of 1986 temporarily stopped the decline in 1990 with 361 deacons being ordained. The latest figures from General Synod[113] indicate that 355 ordinands entered training in 2024, down from 587 in 2018. If this trend continues, retirements will continue to outnumber ordinations and the overall number of clergy will continue to decline.

Paul wanted the Church to train more clergy. In 1961 there were around 15,500 stipendiary clergy and his target of one priest to 2500 in the population required there to be another two hundred. His more ambitious target of one stipendiary priest to 1500 people would have required almost a doubling of numbers. In reality, by 1991, there was one clergyperson to around 4300 people because the number of stipendiary priests and deacons fell to around 11,000. Now there are fewer than 7000 priests in full- and part- time stipendiary posts.

Paul's hopes for clergy numbers assumed that ordinands would continue to be predominantly young, unmarried men who could be directed in increasing numbers for five years to urban training parishes. In reality, in 1990 less than a third of those ordained deacon into full-time ministry were aged under 30 (in Leslie Paul's time it was three-fifths). Today, a young, unmarried ordinand has become much rarer. Instead, a middle-aged, married ordinand (male or female), a house-owner with a family, is much more typical. She or he may or may not be particularly tempted to move their home and family to become the incumbent of a rural multi-church benefice or move into an urban priority area. They will also serve for fewer years so that more ordinands are needed to reach any target number of clergy. Even the present-day dependency of the Church upon retired clergy to cover an increasing number of vacancies may be unsustainable in the future, given the current small number and age-profile of current ordinands.

The Church Commissioners

When the Commissioners were formed in 1948, the tradition of the predecessor bodies was to avoid stock market investments because they were felt to be akin to gambling. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners were sensitive to this parallel because they had, from time to time, been criticised on the basis that, it was claimed, some of their property rents in cities derived from premises used for illicit gambling and prostitution. But, as any competent investment manager will confirm, a portfolio that excludes stock market investments is likely to provide significantly less income and growth in the long term than one that has a sizeable fraction of its assets held in equities. The Church Commissioners changed this policy very soon after they were formed in 1948 and thereafter have held their assets in a mixture of shares, bonds, land and property, both in the United Kingdom and overseas.

The acceptance of 'gambling' on the stock market and other speculative investments by the Church Commissioners meant that they could take advantage of opportunities that they hoped, or perhaps assumed, would enable them to meet their commitments. However, they clearly underestimated those commitments, especially for the payment of clergy pensions, to

the extent that actuarial estimates (which they did not appear to have sought, or perhaps ignored) show that their potential income would be overcommitted on pensions alone if policy did not change before the early 21st Century. If pensions continued to be funded by the Commissioners, the 1995 *Turnbull Report* estimated that the resulting payments, which had taken around seven percent of their income in 1954 and over half by 1994, would absorb almost all by the early 21st century. These commitments had been 'assumed without any detailed assessment of the long-term effect'[114].

To compound the impact of this fundamental error, the Commissioners greatly over-invested in risky commercial property in both the United Kingdom and the United States. These investments included a number of very large shopping centres, most of which were completed (often over budget) but few of which yielded the full expected return. Many were financed by borrowing at variable interest rates which fluctuated significantly. They acquired, at much enhanced prices, around 800 hectares of land near Ashford in Kent before planning consent for development had been granted, on the basis that the town would become a major hub following the completion of the Channel Tunnel. The Ashford project also involved significant fees for architects and other professionals. The fields remain green, and no cross-channel train currently stops at Ashford 'International'.

The property investments are variously estimated to have resulted in the loss of between £500 million and £800 million of the Church Commissioners' assets (£2.5 billion to £3 billion at today's prices). These losses were first brought to public attention by the journalist John Plender[115] who scrutinized the Church Commissioners' annual reports and accounts, which were then far from transparent. Plender quotes property experts about what he refers to as 'a fateful decision. They not only increased their commitment to property but did so on borrowed money'. He reports that in their 1990 Annual Report the Commissioners described borrowing for property developments as being 'in accordance with normal commercial practice'. Those consulted by *The Financial Times* included 'fund managers [who] found this statement bizarre. For a closed fund with no new money coming in, borrowing for high-risk speculative development was in their view, extremely unorthodox'. And even standard pension funds into which employers and employees make contributions, so that 'new money' comes in on a regular basis, would be unlikely, probably unwise, to borrow in the way favoured by the Commissioners at that time.

A fuller description of the investments and the subsequent reaction of the Commissioners – which included attempts to silence or discredit those who expressed concerns was written by the journalist Terry Lovell[116]. The Church itself instigated an investigation – whose membership did not live up to modern standards of independence and accountability – as the 'Lambeth Group'. Those who want to follow the depressing narrative of high-level incompetence are referred to those sources. Beyond all the detail is the underlying recognition that post-war archbishops and bishops had little appetite or skill for evaluating the activities of the Commissioners – and neither did most in the wider Church. The governance arrangements avoided external accountability and proper scrutiny to an extent that would not have applied to other investment funds.

Of greater importance now is that the reaction seems to have been to rectify the problems of poor governance, the failure to understand risk, the lack of expertise and the great reluctance to submit to independent scrutiny. The Commissioners' portfolio and risk appetite seem now to be much more appropriate to an institution that provides funds for a significant proportion of the Church economy.

Following the realization of the growing cost of the Commissioners' unfunded pension liabilities, the assets needed to ensure the payment of clergy pensions are now ring-fenced into the Church of England Funded Pension Scheme. Pensions accrued up to 1998 remain the

responsibility of the Church Commissioners, but after that date, a separately managed pension fund receives income and pays pensions. The income comes from dioceses who must pay an actuarially justified contribution into the fund. The fund can only be used to benefit retired clergy and their dependents, in a similar manner to other such schemes. This change does not generate any additional revenues – except from a relatively small number of non-Church organisations that meet the costs of some clergy – but is important in helping to safeguard the future incomes of clergy and their families. The Commissioners alone could not have done that.

The belated recognition of the burden of clergy pensions alongside the desire to increase both stipends and pensions meant that the income from the historic assets was insufficient to meet all the financial commitments in the Church. Dioceses became explicitly dependent upon the parish share which reached £200 million in 2000 (£400 million in today's prices). The parish share meets the gap between the dioceses' incomes from historic assets and their total expenditure. In return, it is argued, dioceses can ensure the continued payment of clergy stipends and pension contributions so that parishes-in-general see some benefit. Individual parishes might struggle to accept the validity of this alleged benefit given that the required contribution remains even when there is a vacancy (which is often not filled for a long period, apparently to save money) following the resignation or retirement of a priest, and the parish is left both to contribute their share and to pay the costs of visiting clergy to maintain some services. As our evidence about the decline in church attendance shows, this burden on active parishioners increases over time.

The ordination of women

Soon after he was installed as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1991, George Carey campaigned actively for the ordination of women on the grounds of equality and in recognition of the decline in male vocations. However, the approval by General Synod of the *Ordination of Women Measure* in 1993 and the related legislation[117] had some financial consequences for the Church of England. In a House of Commons debate[118] in February 2002, it was stated that 412 claims had been made by priests who resigned their positions because they could not accept the Measure, and that the then budgeted cost of compensation paid by the Church Commissioners would be £24 million over more than a decade (around £50 million at today's prices). Given the unprecedented nature of the decision within the Church and the lack of secular parallels where the religious exemption to sex discrimination in employment could not apply, it is difficult to judge whether this sum was reasonable. The Church also now has five additional bishops as Provincial Episcopal Visitors ('flying bishops' in the vernacular) who provide sacramental and pastoral support to parishes and priest who are opposed to women's ministry – although these parishes remain within their geographical diocese for matters relating to finance, administration and deployment. The extremely conservative nature of the decision-making system used by the General Synod (the change required and just achieved a two-thirds majority in each of the three houses – bishops, clergy and laity), makes it likely that the financial and pastoral provisions were instrumental in gaining sufficient support. The main impact of the Measure on the Church economy was, of course, that far more than 412 women have been ordained: in the figures for 2025 just over a third of 'active clergy' are female[119].

Overall assessment

Positively: *After a century of proposals, the overlapping bureaucracies of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and Queen Anne's Bounty were merged into the Church Commissioners who continued to support more equal stipends. Tithes were ended, arguably ending an*

anachronism that would be unlikely to survive in a multicultural society. By the end of the century Church England stipends were almost equalized following the transfer of parish assets – mainly glebe and parsonages – to dioceses. The management of glebe land became more professional so that overall income increased, though the better endowed parishes lost out, and the management task was divided between 44 dioceses. Greatly improved pension arrangements (and compulsory retirement) for clergy were introduced, and, right at the end of the century, this provision was put onto a sustainable basis by separating the funding of future pensions from other commitments of the Church Commissioners. Busy politicians will also have welcomed the transfer of much of the Church legislative process to the Church Assembly. In the 1930s Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists responded to their ongoing decline by forming re-unions (for Methodists, as well as for Scottish Presbyterians) or new unions, particularly the freshly created United Reformed Church. Many denominations in the 1950s also held repeated evangelistic crusades to encourage conversions.

***Negatively*:** *According to its own statistics, Church of England attendances, Christmas and Easter communicants and baptisms declined almost uniformly. Other denominations have fared little better despite unions and re-unions, and many were left with a multiplicity of now unneeded, expensive chapels and kirks inherited from formerly antagonistic neighbours, and closing them is likely to foster decline. The better endowed Church of England typically responded less by closing its unneeded churches in the 20th century than by amalgamating them (as Methodists previously had also done) into ever larger and ever less effective groups or benefices with shared clergy and infrequent services. In rural areas the Church of England has benefitted slightly from former chapelgoers who are still keen but no longer have a local chapel to go to, but this benefit does not match its losses through elderly parishioners simply not being replaced by younger ones, a fact perhaps best illustrated by the major decline in baptisms. In urban areas, Clive Field's analysis of the 1950s was unable to find any statistical support for a reversal of decline resulting from either evangelistic crusades or new Church of England churches being built in postwar New Towns. In addition, Steve Bruce maintains that the growth of predominantly Black (as distinct from older, predominantly White) Pentecostal churches has not compensated for the on-going growth of 'no religion' responses in polls, especially of young adults.*

Tithes, and their cash successors, no longer brought in income to the Church and, to make matters worse, the Church Commissioners seriously mismanaged the Church of England's historic funds. Beyond some limited tax concessions, no money comes to the Church from the national exchequer, as it had done in earlier times. This means that the Church has only two sources of income: from its historic assets held by the Church Commissioners and the dioceses, and from parish contributions. The losses sustained by the Commissioners' investment policies in the later part of the century emphasised this reliance upon parishioners, who are expected to contribute more to fund clergy pensions and to avoid reductions in clergy stipends or clergy numbers. Meanwhile, the administrative overheads of the Church of England have continued to expand. During the century the number of dioceses increased from 31 to 44, each with its own bureaucracy, not least for managing their acquired glebe. The number of bishops increased from 46 to 107 and archdeacons from 78 to 122. Every diocese had a diocesan secretary and a finance director (under various titles) so that dioceses had over 300 senior administrators by the end of the century. A significant growth in overheads ran alongside a steady reduction in Church attendances.

Chapter 5: The Twenty-First Century

Even discounting temporary closures during Covid-19, adult attendances at churches and chapels (urban and rural) continue to decline in the present century, and the Sunday School Movement has largely collapsed, replaced sometimes by initiatives such as Messy Church. As we have noted, Church of England attendances have fallen by one quarter in the last ten years. Fresh Expressions and other 'strategic investments' might boost individual congregations, but have little overall effect upon national statistics of decline and might turn out to be difficult to sustain over time at local level. The Church of England's own official statistics clearly show this continuing pattern, as do those of the Catholic Church in England and Wales today.

It has become difficult to find any longitudinal data about church or chapel attendances, electoral or membership rolls, affiliations, Christmas and Easter communicants, Mass statistics, baptisms, confirmations, ordinations, church weddings and even funerals, or (more tentatively) Christian beliefs, that do not reflect decline. The Government population censuses of 2001-2021 [120] included religious affiliation for the first time (probably in order to map ethnic diversity in Britain) and provide a clear example. Christian leaders reacted positively to the early evidence that some six out of ten people identified as 'Christian' – according, at least, to the householders who filled in the census returns – but by 2021 this had reduced to less than half. Many Christian leaders were similarly positive about a Bible Society 2025 *Quiet Revival* report that claimed a significant increase in young people attending church at least once-a-month. However, this report was soon withdrawn by the Bible Society once the sampling methods used for its poll were found to be deeply flawed.[121] and did not match the long-term evidence provided by the statistically more robust polls of *British Social Attitudes* and *The British Household Panel Survey*[122].

Clive Field is also more doubtful than David Goodhew about the durability of, say, South London's typically Afro-Caribbean, urban Pentecostal churches – the few Nonconformist urban congregations to show significant growth in recent decades[123]. And Steve Bruce has set various imminent dates (in particular 2031) for the total collapse of British Methodism.[124] Roman Catholic adult and youth attendances at Mass, outside London and away from university cities, have also declined[125]. Across denominations, average attendances on a Sunday account, Field estimates, for just a twentieth of the British population[126].

The non-religious Callum Brown's evidence based upon recorded oral interviews of the elderly in the 1990s is also relevant here. Most of those interviewed claim that their childhood was more involved in churches and chapels than that of their children or grandchildren[127]. The equally non-religious Steve Bruce's observations about the increase in those claiming to have 'no religion' across the Western World (including, for once, the USA) are also pertinent, as is his claim that examples of 'church growth' in Britain today fail to match wider patterns of religious disaffiliation[128].

The evangelical statistician Peter Brierley, who has done more primary research in this area than anyone else, has diligently recorded and mapped changing patterns of Christian belonging in modern Britain, while recognizing frankly the decline of the Church of England and other mainstream denominations over the last few decades, alongside an increase in the number and strength of independent and Pentecostal congregations in many cities and university campuses. Significantly, he notes (without joy) that: 'Between 2015 and 2020 some 880 churches were started in the UK, but against this there were 1,900 church closures, of which 540 were Methodist, but closures occurred in every denominational group. Hence why growth is offset by decline'[129].

The mathematically sophisticated research of the population sociologists David Voas and Laura Watt offers a more detached perspective. Their 2014 report commissioned by *The Church Growth Research Programme* concludes that:

> The reason for decline in affiliation and attendance is the failure to replace older generations of churchgoers. The problem is not adults leaving the Church: it is that half of the children of churchgoing parents do not attend when they reach adulthood… it is easier to raise people as churchgoers than to turn the unchurched into attenders… Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment.[130]

Of course, we can all think of individual exceptions to this, but *on average* it rings true. At a popular level, it is often claimed that there is a single factor that causes churchgoing to decline. Ironically, there is no widespread agreement about what this factor actually is – secularization, urbanization, modernity, intellectual scepticism, Sunday shopping, Sunday sport, inadequate numbers of priests and ministers, materialism, sexual laxity, liberalism, secular education, and so forth. The Voas-Watt explanation cuts through such monolithic assertions: the seeds of churchgoing start in families and flourish in some of their offspring more than others.

Working as one Body

The significant losses made by the Church Commissioners in the 1980s and 1990s and other concerns about Church governance and decision-making led to the 1995 Report, *Working as One Body*, chaired by the Bishop of Durham, Michael Turnbull (which we have referred to as *The Turnbull Report*). This report is clear about the primacy of parishes and the need for the national Church to recognise this:

> The mission of the Church of England is most clearly and gloriously seen in the parishes[131] … The proportion which lay people are now paying towards the cost of ministry is rising year by year and with this change has come an increased demand for accountability for the way in which the Church's resources are used[132].

The report recognises that:

> .. the Church cannot simply pull out of parishes that do not 'pay' and simply concentrate on 'successful' areas'[133].

This report is critical of the lack of co-ordination and standardization in the collection of statistics and calls for a major review of data collection. It also comments on the number of reports on a great variety of topics that have been produced with little evidence of follow-up. This problem that has not gone away. For example, the 2021 report of the Archbishops' Anti-Racism Taskforce, *From Lament to Action*, cites twenty-five previous reports related to racial justice produced by the Church since 1985 with little sign of their being implemented. The taskforce has since produced six more reports and is 'charged with monitoring, holding to account and supporting the implementation of the forty-seven recommendations of the Racial Justice Taskforce'[134].

Not all of the *Turnbull Report's* recommendations have been implemented in the way that it recommends, but the debates that followed led to the changes in clergy pension arrangements and to the formation of the Archbishops' Council under the *National Institutions Measure* of 1999. A principal role of the Council in the Church economy arose from section 2(3) of the Measure:

> The Council shall consider and determine how to apply or distribute such sums as have been made available by the Church Commissioners … above, but those sums shall not be applied or distributed by the Council for any purpose other than one for which the

> balance in the Church Commissioners' general fund was available immediately before the coming into force of this section and in applying or distributing those sums the Council shall have particular regard to the requirements of section 67 of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners Act 1840 relating to the *making of additional provision for the cure of souls in parishes where such assistance is most required* [our italics].

So, the Measure empowers the Council (which needs to seek the approval of General Synod for its own budget) to decide how the income generated by the Church Commissioners should be used, within the constraints of their charitable objectives. The italicized phrase requires that the Council continues the tradition, started by Queen Anne's Bounty and consistently continued thereafter, of focusing support on poorer parishes. But it is important to note that the Council has introduced successive policies that focus on the assessed prosperity and needs of dioceses, leaving each of the dioceses to devise their own arrangements for seeking individual parish contributions. In contrast, until the late 20th century, augmentations of clergy incomes by the Commissioners were made largely to parishes.

This focus on poorer dioceses has been reflected in several ways. The Darlow formula was used from 2002 as an attempt to identify poor and rich dioceses and to support the former by more than the latter. This formula allocated funds to dioceses partly according to church attendance, and this implied that funding increased most in areas where attendance was declining fastest. This was strongly criticised as rewarding decline.[135] Plainly, effective funding formulae need to give positive incentives – as, for example, Queen Anne's Bounty match-funded benefactions to the poorest parishes – and this was recognised in the switch in 2017 to the Lowest Income Communities Fund. This is allocated in varying amounts to a majority of dioceses, based on the average incomes and the populations of each diocese but not on attendance or parish contributions. Central expenditure on clergy training, and the administrative costs of the Archbishops' Council were met through the apportionment of costs to dioceses using a formula that recognised the considerable differentials in the wealth of dioceses. Diocesan expenditure on support for those in training was likewise shared across the country through an abstruse mechanism known as 'pooling' (now discontinued: these. costs are now all borne centrally).

The second major tranche of funding from the Church Commissioners has been allocated by Archbishops' Council since 2017 to strategic developments that are designed to increase participation in 'cold spots' – including those where provision of ministry is largely absent because of demographic changes – and those where it is felt that active intervention is needed to reach out to social groups such as children and young people for whom traditional forms of church are thought to be less appropriate (see chapter 6).

Diocesan mergers

A, so far unique, reduction in the number of dioceses occurred in 2014, when Ripon & Leeds, Bradford and Wakefield were merged through a process overseen by the Dioceses Commission and approved by General Synod. There had been financial challenges in all but Wakefield, but the new diocese of Leeds did not reduce the number of bishops and non-parochial archdeacons, and all three cathedrals retained their status. A BBC report[136] quoted John Packer, Bishop of Ripon and Leeds, as saying that the number of people employed 'will be reduced over time, but there is no immediate risk of job losses'. In 2011 the three dioceses employed 75 staff; in 2017, the combined diocese employed 80 staff[137]. So it is not clear what, if any, immediate savings were made, although over 25 years (see the Appendix) Leeds had a very small growth in diocesan employees compared with most other dioceses.

Informed local sources assure us that:

> The merger is regarded as a totally misconceived and mishandled notion. The local issues are that the new diocese includes areas that are distant and utterly unrelated – from Hawes in the Dales National Park to South Elmsall, a former mining community in Wakefield. Unsurprisingly, that geographical spread has affected people's desire to give money to fund the diocese, with lessons for most dioceses with large geographical areas and very varied populations. The areas covered by the six bishops are disproportionate; for example the new Wakefield has three deaneries only. Three cathedrals are a nonsense, but to close them would be a disaster. Changes in boundaries could have helped to keep Leeds in one diocese incorporating Bradford, which had run deficits for some years. Sharing some functions across dioceses could have helped as happens in some dioceses in southern England. The final decision was appallingly badly handled – it was stated that voices would be heard, but the Archbishop of York overruled all dissension at the end. The decision was taken on a show of hands in the General Synod, not even the normal electronic vote. It was disastrous for personal relations and led to three years of planning blight.

Another informed local source has told us a similar story (in reverse) about a possible merger of the two dioceses within Kent:

> Rochester diocese was having a rocky financial patch. This led eventually to what in the business world might have been administration, but they managed to pull through after implementing some serious cuts to their costs… I recall suggesting to our committee that this was an opportunity to work more closely with our neighbouring diocese and indeed perhaps merge. The Bishop did not discourage the former but suggested that history stood in the way of the latter – nothing happened.

Any radical proposal that attempts to address the recent unsustainable growth in diocesan administrations is likely to meet similar, competing oppositions: mergers don't lead to a better use of resources, and we cannot disturb historic boundaries. These potential arguments are particularly ironic when dioceses are busy merging parishes with even longer standing historic boundaries. Doubtless the early Victorians also opposed changes. For a while they succeeded, but, disastrously, when enthusiasm for churchgoing began to wane in the new urban, industrial cities, the later Victorians began to expand the number of dioceses, cathedrals, bishops and archdeacons to little obvious effect in terms of church attendances.

Diocesan administration

Our Timeline has identified the growth in the number of dioceses from 22 in 1600 to 42 in 2013 and, following the Leeds merger, to 40 now, each with its own diocesan bishop. Suffragans and assistant bishops appeared again in the late 19th Century, and now there are over 60. Many dioceses call upon the services of retired bishops as, of course, parishes call upon retired clergy as a major resource simply to ensure that services continue at all. Archdeacons are perhaps less prominent now that bishops do not reside for long periods in London and there are suffragans, but their number has doubled to over 120 and most no longer have a role in a parish. There are even a few 'assistant' or 'associate' archdeacons. Around six thousand benefices have replaced over twelve thousand single parishes as the smallest administrative unit, at least as far as diocesan support and regulation are concerned.

Numbers of senior clergy can be found in historic diocesan records. Records of the numbers of staff involved in the administration of dioceses are much more difficult to find before 2000. Since then, all dioceses have submitted their accounts to both the Charity Commission and Companies House, and the latter has around 25 years available on-line. They reveal that

the number of diocesan employees increased by eighty percent – once more centralising power -- from around 1300 in 2005 to around 2300 in 2025

This growth in the number and power of staff within diocesan administrations can be contrasted with the reduction in the number and significance of clergy working in parishes or benefices. The Church's own *Ministry Statistics* report that in 2000 there were around 8700 full-time priests in parishes; *Statistics for Mission* show that that number had fallen by one quarter by 2025. Church attendances and the (inflation adjusted) receipts from parish share have continued to decline by around forty percent and twenty percent respectively. Any charity whose administration increases while its fund-raising activists decline will, as the Church of England demonstrates, end up with major financial problems. Retired clergy and others with permission to officiate are increasingly vital in sustaining services – but they too will decline when there are fewer stipendiary clergy left to reach retirement age.

It has been suggested to us that the growth of administrative activities and staff is a widespread phenomenon caused by an increased emphasis on issues like health and safety, data security and changes in employment laws over the last 25 years. All public sector bodies, including health trusts, national and local government, schools and universities have been affected by the *Freedom of Information Act* of 2000 and this has, for some at least, required significant management and administrative input. Successive *Data Protection Acts* have had a significant impact on the NHS which holds large amounts of potentially valuable and highly confidential patient data, and on schools that keep detailed personal records about their pupils. Providers of social housing have to ensure compliance on an increasing range of issues, such as eliminating damp and mould and monitoring water supplies for legionella. Fund-raising charities, including PCCs, are now expected to have policies relating to unacceptable donations.

This growth in the costs of compliance and, where appropriate, accreditation is, of course, very visible, but it is not clear to us that dioceses are much affected. They are employers, of course, and have data on clergy whom they do not formally employ, but most of the responsibility for health and safety and effective communication with churchgoers rests at parish level and in cathedrals, and fundraising questions rarely arise directly because dioceses receive few donations. The Freedom of Information Act does not place obligations on PCCs, dioceses or the National Church Institutions. We look further at the expensive decision to develop forty diocesan safeguarding teams, rather than having a simpler national structure, in chapter 6. In our view it is very difficult to argue that the growth in diocesan employees can be traced mainly to increased costs of compliance – except perhaps with the Church's own policies and bureaucratic practices that are unnecessarily replicated over forty dioceses.

Central institutions.

Following the governance changes made in the 1990s, the three largest central institutions of the Church of England are the Church Commissioners, the Pensions Board and the Archbishops' Council, which has a primary responsibility for allocating much of the income generated by the Commissioners. There are also staff at Lambeth and Bishopthorpe (York) who support the national roles of the archbishops, and the Churches Conservation Trust that helps to protect churches at risk of serious decay. Since 2014, these central bodies have shared a number of back-office functions through Church of England Central Services which was established in part as a result of challenges that showed duplication and lack of co-ordination between the central bodies. Their annual accounts show that currently these central institutions employ at least 800 people.

Successful national initiatives have been developed that avoid replications in each of the dioceses. For many years, the Church Commissioners have run the payroll for clergy as a

national service. Over the last few years this has been done for under £1 million[138]. If dioceses paid their own clergy, it is inconceivable that the operation would be similarly efficient. A more recent example is of the Parish Giving Scheme, which collects bank transfers from many parishioners, reclaims the tax through Gift Aid and sends the money on to volunteer parish treasurers across almost all dioceses whose burdens are reduced by this national service. The Scheme is run by a team of nine people[139]. It was started in Gloucester diocese nearly twenty years ago and has now been adopted by many others, rather than being replicated in every diocese, although some dioceses seem to have devised their own badged webpages to describe what it does. A third example of a helpful central resource is the Parish Resources website[140] which is important for PCCs because it provides guidance and templates to help them to follow charity law.

The central role of the Church Commissioners remains the generation of income from the historic assets that came originally from the Ecclesiastical Commissioners and from Queen Anne's Bounty. But the Commission has also retained a role in Pastoral Reorganisations that enforce mergers of parishes into benefices and also a role in the fate of redundant churches (see chapter 6).

The main deliberative and legislative institution for the Church of England is the General Synod, which has over 500 members mainly from the dioceses. The Synod meets two or three times a year over three to five days and debates a very wide range of policy issues and, like its predecessor the Church Assembly, considers Measures that are passed to Parliament for final approval. Its running costs are considerable, particularly when account is taken of the time commitment of its members, some of whom – including the clergy members at least – must take time off from their jobs to attend. The Synod would have to legislate itself to change its membership, so it has the same conservative bias that affects proposals to make changes to Parliament or to the national electoral system.

Church Commissioners' funding

The majority of the Church of England's historic assets are managed by the Church Commissioners. Over the last 30 years, they have achieved an average annual return of around nine per cent. Some of that income is needed to preserve the value of their assets in inflation-adjusted terms, and the real return is around six per cent each year since they recovered from their self-imposed difficulties of the 1990s.

In 2025, the main categories of their expenditure, or provisions for future expenditure, were[141]

- £122 million for clergy pensions accrued up to 1998.
- £202 million for 'supporting dioceses and the local church'. This includes around £30 million to support lower income dioceses assessed using deprivation measures provided by the Office for National Statistics. In 2025 multi-year investments totalling £198 million were approved through the Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board (see chapter 6). Much of this funding will be provided in future years, offset by the continuing funding of those approved in earlier years.
- £53 million for bishops' and archbishops' ministry. This includes the stipends of around 100 bishops (varying as vacancies arise and are not filled at once, though they are almost always filled eventually), their expenses and office costs and the maintenance of their accommodation, although most suffragans have housing provided by their diocese. Each bishop costs, on average, half a million pounds, perhaps putting into perspective the figures from the mid 19th century (discussed in chapter 3) when incomes met bishops' personal needs, their expenses and the upkeep of palaces.

- £18 million for cathedrals' ministry, including payment for three clergy posts in each cathedral.

The Commissioners also made provision of £137 million for the National Redress Scheme, which will fund support and compensation for victims of abuse within the Church.

Church Buildings

At several points we have noted different financial bases across denominations for building and repairing churches or chapels. Historically, the Church of England largely continued, like the Medieval Church, to expect the State or rich local benefactors to provide the necessary funds, whether this was for the Wren Churches and following the Great Fire of 1666 or the more widespread Waterloo Churches, which were funded largely by Exchequer grants in the early 19th century. It is estimated that it has between eight and over nine thousand medieval or part-medieval churches, depicted memorably as 'a dispersed gallery of vernacular art… without equal anywhere in the world',[142] and some of Europe's finest historic cathedrals. These churches are maintained through local fundraising initiatives and many remain open to the public, although most offer only an occasional Sunday service. So far, despite serious financial pressures (with many cathedral deans reporting substantial deficits), it has made remarkably few of these buildings redundant.

In contrast, Nonconformists have typically had to rely upon their own members to build and repair their chapels, sometimes leaving these members deeply in debt, even when their chapel had been declared redundant. The Methodist Connexion and the Church of Scotland have both been particularly ruthless about selling off their chapels and kirks to private developers -- sometimes leading to poor publicity, as when an impressive kirk just off the Royal Mile was 'converted' into a betting-shop, or when their main Gallic-speaking kirk became simply a booking office for the Edinburgh Festival and, thus, glaring signs of secularisation.

In contrast, again, the Catholic Church in England and Wales, having lost its buildings in the Reformation, initially built cautiously. The 1791 Catholic Relief Act first re-allowed it to build new public places of worship, helped, then by Catholic Bishops being reinstated in 1829 and Catholic Dioceses being created in 1850. By then, some estimates suggest that there were already more than five hundred chapels, some monastic but others not and that, by 1900, this number had almost trebled, with each church/chapel or place of worship typically serving an area covering some three Church of England parishes and, as has been noted several times already, offering multiple weekend Masses. More reliable statistics have been gathered by the *Catholic Directory* from 1950 onwards, recording some two thousand places of worship open to the public (which could include schools and hospitals), that almost doubled by 1990, but declined sharply afterwards.[143]

Unlike the Church of England in 1900 – and unlike, say, the Catholic Church in France – the Catholic Church in England and Wales was basically an urban denomination primarily serving an urban, industrial, migrant population. Nevertheless, by the early 21st century it had begun to experience similar historic-building problems, leading it, too, to plead for Government funding.[144] It had been affected, as noted already, by a sharp numerical reduction of Massgoing outside London, together with a halving of baptisms, church marriages and ordinations. Victorian churches built inexpensively to serve urban manual workers, are now showing their age, especially in the North West, and, despite its initial, comparative caution about building too many churches, the Catholic Church in England and Wales still has some three thousand places of worship, a quarter of them listed, yet with little of the splendour of the buildings that once were theirs, but are now Anglican.

The first quarter century

Statistics published by the Church in annual accounts and by its data services team are readily available for the whole of the first quarter of the twenty-first century. Our Appendix reports them as accurately as possible. In broad terms, they show that in the forty mainland dioceses:

- stipendiary clergy numbers have declined by one-third;
- attendances have declined by around forty percent;
- diocesan employees (excluding clergy) have increased by eighty percent;
- parish shares that are used by dioceses to meet much of the costs of clergy have fallen, in inflation adjusted terms, by twenty percent, although clergy numbers have fallen by more.

Such disturbing outcomes would lead to radical change in most other contexts. Part 2 of this report outlines some of the radical changes that we believe the Church of England should make.

Overall assessment

Positively: *Of course, it is far too early to assess the 21st century. Our Timeline up to this point suggests that the Church of England has made major financial and deployment changes in past centuries – some more successful than others – especially when its leaders such as Archbishop John Bird Sumner took a careful note of changing finances and demographics. George Carey did the same when he too became Archbishop of Canterbury. He recognised frankly the extent of churchgoing decline today and initiated three major strategic changes to try to address it—changes that have been accepted by all three of his successors – ordaining women as priests, setting up the Turnbull Report which led to the formation of the Archbishops' Council, and introducing Strategic Investments. Ordaining women addressed their historic inequality within the Church of England, but it also compensated for a serious decline in male vocations. Setting up the Archbishops' Council provided a new potentiality for strategic changes to redirect finances to reduce decline, such as Fresh Expressions. The latter could then be deployed strategically within parochial churches and deaneries to supplement, rather than simply to replace, more traditional forms of Anglican worship. Or, so it was hoped.*

Negatively: *Sadly, the Church of England – along with most other British denominations, including the Catholic Church but not, perhaps, minority Black Pentecostal churches – continues to decline overall in terms of Sunday-by-Sunday attendances, Christmas and Easter communicants, baptisms, confirmations, church weddings, church funerals, ordinations, electoral role membership and nominal affiliations, while bureaucracy in each Diocese continues to expand. As the 21st century unfolds, this trend, if it continues, is likely to cause very serious problems for the viability of the Church of England, since it is local congregations rather than diocesan bureaucracies that have the potential for generating additional funds for ongoing expenses. Replacing parochial clergy with non-parochial administrators (clerical or lay) in every diocese for functions (such as safeguarding, liaison with church schools, and promoting social justice) that might be provided less expensively and more efficiently by a single national office, is not a remotely sustainable policy.*

Herein lies the major challenge for the Church of England that the rest of this Report seeks to address.

PART TWO: RECONFIGURING THE CHURCH

Principles

The Church of England has always had a 'live agenda' including how best to use its resources to meet the fundamental ambition of providing ministry across the whole country. At the time of writing, at least six issues illustrate the other challenges that the Church faces or has set itself. We outline these in chapter 6, and in chapter 7 we reflect on the mission of the Church in our post-industrial world. In chapter 8, we reflect on the need to encourage people to come forward for ordination – unafraid to say that better pay and conditions would help, but coupling this with recognition of the professional roles of clergy and the urgent need to reduce micromanagement by often distant authorities. Chapters 9 and 10 elaborate on our central proposals relating to the use of resources and the location of decision-making. In brief:

- *Localism*: Decisions should be taken as close as possible to the people they effect or in whose name they are made. Deaneries, not dioceses, should be the principal budget-holders, deciding on the deployment of clergy using their local contributions and an allocation from the Church's historic resources to adjust for the deprivation of their populations.
- *Efficiency*: The number of dioceses, senior clergy and diocesan administrators should be reduced to realise economies of scale (chapter 10 shows that there is plenty of scope for this) and to restrain the centralisation of power. There should be an in-depth review of whether support activities are best run centrally, by deaneries, by dioceses, or not at all.
- *Transparency*: Those who allocate money to initiatives and strategic investments should be more transparent about their effectiveness, opportunity cost and sustainability, reporting openly on both successful and unsuccessful projects. There should be full recognition that spending income or allocating capital from historic assets to projects (see chapter 6) reduces the money available to support parishes and cathedrals. Those projects might be very desirable, but they are costly.

If these recommendations are progressed, clergy will be better supported locally and less directed centrally, making the role more attractive. More money will be available to improve the pay and conditions of clergy and ordinands and to increase their numbers. Parishioners who contribute money will see more directly the benefits of their generosity as more money is left in parishes to help with local ministry and church maintenance.

Our views are consistent with the wise conclusion of the *Turnbull Report*:[145]

> Financial decisions are often best made closest to where the money is raised and spent. This breeds an atmosphere of trust and generosity. The more people in local congregations understand exactly what the Church is doing and what resources it needs, the better they will respond.

Chapter 6: Six Challenges

As we write, six important topics are in lively debate both within the Church of England and in the media. All of them involve or could involve significant costs, typically unaccounted and seldom assessed in terms of the total cost to the Church. We outline them here to illustrate the practical and ethical issues that the Church of England currently faces and that would, we contend, be better resolved within the structure that we propose. Localism, efficiency and transparency are currently largely absent.

Safeguarding

The Church of England, along with other denominations, has acknowledged historic and current cases in which it has failed to safeguard the welfare of children and vulnerable adults. Priests, school chaplains and bishops have all been revealed as serious abusers, and several high-profile cover-ups have attracted major public attention. Many denominations today have rightly devoted resources to trying to ensure belated justice for survivors and to train everyone – ordained and lay – that they have a duty to report suspected instances and to ensure that their reports have been taken seriously. The high-profile cases are too well-known to need repetition here. Other cases remain less visible, but are equally painful to those who were the victims of church abusers.

Diocesan websites and annual accounts reveal that around 220 people (representing between 150 and 200 full-time posts: see our appendix) are employed in diocesan teams, with more at national level. This contrasts with the Methodist Church which employs around 34 safeguarding staff nationally and within its districts. In addition, every PCC is expected to have a volunteer safeguarding officer, and to require training for its members and others involved with ministry to children and vulnerable adults. Every priest and many lay workers and volunteers must have an advanced DBS check which is carried out by a Home Office body, not by the Church itself. The Church, after all, does not have investigative powers, unlike local authorities and the police.

Safeguarding is a national issue and the Church of England is a national organisation. So, it is difficult to know why it has opted to focus the necessary checks and reporting at diocesan level. Multiple diocesan inputs risk unclarity and inconsistency when clergy move or have roles in more than one diocese. Even leadership safeguarding training can differ from one diocese to another and is not recorded centrally. The situation is made worse by experiences that suggest that some bishops' offices run separate checks from those in dioceses. As with recent reports about failures in flows of information between colleges and university administrations in Cambridge and Oxford[146], failures of communication and mistaken views of the primacy of data protection over the investigation of allegations of abuse can arise in organisations, including the Church of England, that consist of many legally independent parts.

Our concern is not to comment on the emphasis on safeguarding, particularly given the Church of England's shameful record, but to ask whether the diocesan focus is either efficient or effective. Many of the resources used to train and inform are produced nationally and, indeed, the basic safeguarding training is now on-line. Those who supported the decision to develop diocesan teams in addition to a national service should, at least, identify lower priority work that has been discontinued to release funds for the diocesan safeguarding teams. Given the growth in diocesan administrations as evidenced in the Appendix, that evidence might be difficult to find. The present system is not efficient or transparent. In this instance, localism hardly helps.

Strategic investments

In 2025, the Church's Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment Board allocated close to £100 million of Church Commissioners' funding to its Diocesan Investment Programme. The Commissioners' Annual Report lists investments in twelve dioceses, which together total £89 million and range from £2.2 million to £19.8 million to be spent over periods of up to five years, with some grants described as 'the first phase'. The funding is intended to "support dioceses to advance their plans … prioritising investment in the most deprived contexts." The investments must:

> align with the diocese's overall strategy and the Church's Vision for the 2020s. Data analysis, local consultation, prayer, integrating lessons learnt and specialist knowledge should be combined to discern and design the proposal. Plans must demonstrate that the national funding integrates with the diocese's resources to deliver change in mission and ministry that can be sustained once this temporary national funding has ended.

We have found it difficult to discover further details of these proposals, although they are generally heralded, but seldom costed, in diocesan annual reports. We are also unaware of any systematic reporting on projects that were similarly approved in earlier years. Church publicity indicates that attendances have been growing over the past five years (which is, of course, the period since churches were re-opened after the Covid-19 pandemic). Without supplying any statistical evidence, it claims *a causal connection* between this growth and the strategic investments, but it fails to exclude the possibility that some new church communities have grown at the expense of their neighbours.

Independent assessment is needed so that lessons can be learned: transparency about what has worked and, crucially, what has not, is important to those who are looking at ways of achieving similar ambitions. We accept that any investment programme will include failures as well as successes, and we do not make these comments to criticise those who have made proposals that have not delivered. Yet the Church of England, when spending such large amounts of money, does need to identify evidence about what works and what does not.

We are also concerned about longer term financial sustainability. The demographic contexts of many of these initiatives strongly suggest that there will be sustainability challenges when the initial investment funding is exhausted, especially when projects fail to generate a surplus over their own continuing running costs. Dioceses might have committed to continued funding when projects meet certain criteria, including sustained increases in participation, but any such commitments would seem to imply that parish contributions from churchgoers-in-general must increase, whether or not they or their local areas have benefited from any strategic investment. That is not localism or transparency.

Benefactors and links to slavery

At the time of writing, the proposal to allocate £100 million of the Church Commissioners' assets to Project Spire has been approved by General Synod but is facing legal challenges. The Project is intended to fund 'restorative justice' in response to the concern that some of these historic benefactions were made by people whose wealth came from the transportation and exploitation of enslaved people. We are not qualified to comment on legal challenges to the project, and we assume that if these obstacles are overcome, the allocation will be made. Then we will welcome transparency in illustrating what restorative justice means in practical terms. To save yet another increase in administrators, we hope that grants will be channeled through CMS, USPG and Christian Aid on, say, scholarships for young people from Central Africa and the Caribbean to study in the UK.

The indirect links between Queen Anne's Bounty and slavery were the subject of a 2023 report produced for the Church Commissioners[147]. The first link is that Queen Anne's Bounty encouraged benefactions to help augment low incomes, and most benefactions come from relatively wealthy people. A major source of wealth – and hence of benefactions – until 1809 was from the slave-trade, and, for a longer period, from the profits of industries that used materials such as cotton, tobacco and sugar from plantations where slaves had been exploited.

The second link is that Queen Anne's Bounty allocated its income from First Fruits and Tenths to parishes, sometimes several years before it identified glebe land to buy (chapter 2). Their safest and most secure investment, then as now, was in government bonds, and the South Sea Company had a major role in channeling funds to the government to finance the national debt. The Company also transported slaves across the Atlantic. The steady profitability of its trade in government bonds almost certainly helped the Company to offset the volatility of its profits from the slave trade. The certainty of this income enabled the Company to survive through the South Sea Bubble which was generated by speculation that the Company's shares would rise in value.

None of the glebe, and none of the assets that might have been bought when glebe was sold, remains with parishes. Parish land was transferred to dioceses in the 1970s, and any money received from selling glebe previously was held by Queen Anne's Bounty, so that the capital could not be spent by one incumbent to the detriment of his successors. So, we concur with the conclusion of the 2024 report that the Commissioners inherited assets from Queen Anne's Bounty that had indirect links to slavery, and add that some of the assets, or their successors, are now held by dioceses.

The Commissioners' Annual Report for 2025 states that its 'fund has averaged a return of 9.2% over the past 30 years' which is in the region of six percent annually in real terms. So, the allocation of £100 million of assets to Project Spire, would reduce the annual income that is potentially available for other purposes by around £6 million a year. Under challenge, Archbishop Welby and others put forward the argument that the allocation to Project Spire 'does not reduce the amount of money that is available to support parishes'[148]. We disagree. Within a diminishing Church this £6 million, if allocated to Project Spire, cannot go to budget-holding deaneries to help staunch decline in their parishes. It is also an unusual moral judgement that money can be allocated to restorative justice in a way that does not (according to this argument) cost anyone anything.

Effective leadership involves transparency about what economists call opportunity costs – the things that cannot be done because money can only be spent once. There is still time to announce, for example, that some episcopal vacancies will not be filled, or that dioceses will merge to reduce administrative costs. This might take at least some of the heat out of the debate about the resourcing of Project Spire. If legal challenges prevent the funding being drawn simply from the Church of England's historic resources, senior leaders might then need to persuade individual churchgoers to contribute. This would make the Project more transparent and locally democratic.

Same-sex relationships

Discussions under the title *Living in Love and Faith* (LLF) began in 2017 to try to accommodate opposing, strongly held attitudes to same-sex relationships and marriage, which was legalised in England from 2014. After eight years of debate and disagreement, the House of Bishops paused the LLF process, recognising that no proposal for change would be likely to meet the threshold of a two-thirds majority in each of the three houses of General Synod. Neither, of course, would a proposal for 'no change' be likely command a two-thirds majority: the Church seems to be fairly evenly divided – at least amongst those who express

any opinion – although British Social Attitudes' data suggest that, over time, the opinion of regular churchgoers on issues of family, gender and sexuality do change (especially when they realise, say, that some of their own children are gay or transgender).[149]

During these years of debate, when tentative proposals were put forward, one important principle has been tacitly discarded. Despite the injunction from the *Turnbull Report*[150] that

> The parish must be responsible for its own resources but also be prepared, in a spirit of trust, to give and receive from the rest of the church

several dioceses made arrangements that were designed to ensure that contributions from parishes that are opposed to any recognition by the Church of non-celibate same-sex relationships are only used to support the stipends of priests in parishes that share that view. For example, the Chichester diocesan website[151] states:

> The restricted fund will be used to support the costs of providing ministry in those parishes who are affiliated to a network which is known to hold conservative/traditional convictions on marriage.

Any future financial arrangements need to take on board this point: parishes want to know that the uses made of their contributed funds are acceptable to them whether or not those uses are related to LLF.

There is a risk that any proposal to accommodate both sides in this argument and to keep them within a single Church will lead to increased bureaucracy and overheads. This could involve expenditure beyond that needed to fund the five bishops whose posts were created to support the relatively small minority of parishes and priests who cannot accept women's ministry. There have even been suggestions for a third province[152] (to add to Canterbury and York) to accommodate those who are unhappy with any eventual decision, but the cost in extra administration and legislation is seldom made transparent.

Pastoral re-organisations

For much of its history, the Church of England has wanted to limit clerical pluralism. The underlying judgement was that incumbents should usually have responsibility for, and be resident in, only one main parish (sometimes with a smaller parish attached). But today dioceses, with the final approval of the Church Commissioners are merging areas with up to twenty churches into a single megabenefice, with an imposed structure of clergy and supporting lay ministry. These processes were most recently codified in the *Mission and Pastoral Measure* of 2011. If local needs are paramount, it is not clear why such elaborate decision-making mechanisms are needed. The image of Commissioners travelling 'from London' to make decisions about merging rural parishes has intensified opposition to diocesan plans, and emphasised the top-down nature of the Church's decision processes.

Diocesan plans have to be confirmed by the Church Commissioners, confirming a widespread concern that these deeply unpopular decisions are made arbitrarily by people in far-off places who have no lasting commitment to the parishes concerned. In contrast, our proposals would ensure that the difficult task of spreading ministry across a number of thinly populated areas should be tackled locally and transparently by the deanery concerned. They could deploy the number of full-time or part-time clergy that they are willing to fund using the resources allocated to them.

We do not underestimate the scale of this challenge in a Church where, in contrast to the mid-19th century, there are too few clergy available for each parish to have its own incumbent. Moving decisions on the deployment of clergy from dioceses to deaneries might not lead to a radically different solution. But it would be far more transparent, because local people would know that the outcome depends on their willingness to give, and on the funds available from

the Church's historic resources. Parishioners might not like the outcome, but they would know that it is reached on the same basis as in other places, without input that is based on the judgement, which they question, of the diocese and the temporarily visiting Commissioners.

Net Zero

General Synod has decided that all church buildings should be restructured to reach zero carbon emissions by 2030[153] and produced a 'routemap'. Previously it had set the date as 2045. This places an additional, urgent burden upon hard-pressed parish churches at a time when parish shares are struggling to meet the cost of burgeoning diocesan administrations. It will also, doubtless, involve even more administrators to ensure parish compliance – centralising power once more. Of course, it is right that parishes should be fully aware of human induced climate change. Yet the prospect of expensive alterations to ancient, listed churches, requiring multiple faculties, by 2030, seems to be wholly unrealistic practically and economically. Since their glebe land was transferred to dioceses, parishes have even lost the opportunity to use their endowed assets to plant trees as a part of a carbon offset programme, although the routemap allows that dioceses might do so. Once again this is a decision made by a remote body that is often resented by those in parishes.

Taken together, these six topics contain many failures of localism, of efficiency and of transparency. It is difficult not to conclude that churchgoing decline will continue unabated, partly because money is spent and costly decisions are taken remotely from churchgoers, many of whom regard these aspirations as unrealistic, extravagant, unsustainable and deeply depressing.[154]

Chapter 7: The New Mission Context

Sixty years ago Leslie Paul's Report recognised, more frankly than most Church leaders at the time, that Sunday attendances were declining within the Church of England, relentlessly, diocese by diocese. He concluded, as noted in Chapter 4, that 'whether we base membership most broadly on infant baptism or more narrowly upon confirmation figures, there is in both cases serious evidence of decline.'[155]

Two British sociologists in the 1960s, Bryan Wilson at All Souls, Oxford and David Martin at the London School of Economics, also acknowledged the statistical evidence for this decline, but they assessed its significance very differently. Wilson, religiously agnostic albeit with a penchant for Book of Common Prayer liturgy and a much greater interest in religious sectarian movements, never engaged with church statistics at any depth, but he did note in passing this Church of England decline in his seminal book *Religion in Secular Society* (1966). In contrast, Martin, ordained into the Church of England in the 1980s, in *his* seminal study *A Sociology of English Religion* (1967) and later in *A General Theory of Secularization* (1978) did have a very serious and generally well-informed concern about this evidence. Taken together, their work shaped and divided the discipline of the sociology of religion for decades to come about whether or not the concept of secularization best characterised British culture from the1960s onwards.

Bryan Wilson reflected the dominant view among many sociologists and social historians in the 1960s, that, 'religious thinking, religious practices and religious institutions were once at the very centre of the life of western society, as indeed of all societies', but

> in the twentieth century that situation has manifestly changed, and the process of change continues… Men act less and less in response to religious motivation: they assess the world in empirical and rational terms, and find themselves involved in rational organisations and rationally determined roles which allow small scope for religious predilections as they might privately entertain… It is no longer the dogmas of the Christian Church which dictate behaviour.[156]

David Martin, however, came to international attention with his counter-intuitive 1965 article, entitled provocatively 'Towards Eliminating the Concept of Secularisation'.[157] He even dissented from depicting British culture in the 1960s as 'pluralistic':

> We live, some sociologists suggest, in a pluralistic society in which all views are relativised by competition. Curiously enough, I would argue that our religion is less pluralistic than it was in Victorian times. Enclaves of Hindus and Muslims and enclaves of middle class humanists do not in themselves necessarily make Britain a religiously pluralistic society. In fact, the religion of modern Britain is a deistic, moralistic religion-in-general, which combines a fairly high practice of personal prayer with a considerable degree of superstition.'[158]

Or again,

> far from being secular our culture wobbles between a partially absorbed Christianity, biased towards comfort and the need for confidence, and beliefs in fate, luck and moral governance incongruously joined together.[159]

This depiction is not far from Nicholas Orme's depiction of British medieval religion, noted in Chapter 1.

Wilson and Martin seldom mentioned each other's work in print and conducted their very gentlemanly debate obliquely, realising, perhaps, that their differing rationalist and religious commitments coloured their own sociological perspectives and those of many of their

academic followers. The non-religious Steve Bruce, for example, continued to follow Wilson, even when the latter was losing academic support,[160] whereas the Anglican Grace Davie always favoured Martin.[161] Their 'debate', though, triggered the wider academic discussion about the 'cause' or 'causes' of current churchgoing decline (already noted in chapters 4 and 5) or, more specifically, about whether the urban decline of the Church of England in the 1880s, noted here in Chapter 3 and by Martin in 1967, resulted from urbanisation, as such, or rather from population movements within urban areas.

British culture has changed radically in the present century particularly due to the impact of instant and widespread communication technology. Information and opinions are widely available, and so are misinformation and prejudice, leaving people uncertain about what and whom to trust. Working patterns and expectations have changed, in part due to the aftermath of Covid. More people are now working from home, dependent upon digital media, conscious of the long-term effects of AI, and those who can do so seem to be planning to retire from paid employment sooner rather than later, often with less than secure pensions. More pensioners are surviving longer thanks to modern medicine and a greater awareness of, and commitment to, healthy living, but are conscious of the economic, cognitive and physical burdens of extreme old-age. More young people are now university graduates, but they are worried about their prospects of either unemployment or partial, temporary employment in jobs that do not match their educational attainments. And a million young people are not even in employment, education or training[162].

If the debate about secularization now seems somewhat antique, we can turn for help to those social theorists who are currently reflecting deeply about our rapidly changing culture.

Resonance

The German sociologist and philosopher Hartmut Rosa is a particularly helpful guide to this changed culture in his major book *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World*[163]. He has been inspired by the distinguished social philosopher and practising Catholic Charles Taylor, author of the hugely influential *Sources of the Self* (1987) and *A Secular Age* (2007)[164]. Taylor argues that, although modern society as a whole is not purely secular, it does confront individuals with multiple life-style options, one of which is indeed to choose to be purely secular. Yet, even when individuals choose (or simply assume) the increasingly popular option of 'no religion' in their responses to attitude surveys, Western culture still carries echoes of its Christian past, whether individuals recognize this or not. Rosa is clearly sympathetic to this understanding of modern, Western culture, adding that 'resonance', specifically, is a key paradigm for understanding how religion, music and the arts, and an appreciation of the natural world can – and perhaps even *should* – be key, and sometimes rival, 'spheres of resonance' in societies where people increasingly feel isolated and powerless as they struggle for economic survival or improvement.

Rosa's challenge starts from a premise that modern Western democratic societies today are facing a crisis generated by social alienation – a lack of connection to local community and/or to society at large– and what he terms 'social acceleration'. For him a typical defining feature of a modern society is that 'it systematically depends on growth, acceleration, and increasing innovation in order to maintain and reproduce its structure'[165]:

> The quantity of goods produced, distributed, and consumed, of raw materials used, and of change generally now increases as rapidly as do computer processing speeds [and] regardless of how successfully we live, work, and busy ourselves this year, individually and collectively, next year we will have to be a little faster, more efficient, more innovative, better, if we want to maintain our place in the world… The efforts we make

> today do not translate into lasting relief tomorrow, but only create greater difficulties and exacerbate the problem[166].

Rosa sees this as the irrational logic of social acceleration, leading to a widespread sense of dissatisfaction and alienation, as well as to considerable damage to the environment. He depicts this as both a psychological and environmental crisis, 'manifested in the symptoms of stress-, depression-, anxiety-, and burnout-related disorders' at an individual level, and 'that programs of scientific penetration and technological domination aim at nothing other than the intensive and extensive expansion of humanity's share of the world' at an environmental level[167]. In short, for Rosa, social acceleration is both a requirement of modernity and a form of alienation that is deeply destructive for humans and for our environment:

> Late modern subjects are convinced that protecting and preserving forests and oceans, glaciers and beetles, dolphins and polar bears, both for their own sake and for the sake of preserving nature as such, is of paramount importance… They build energy-efficient homes, drive fuel-efficient cars, and book ecofriendly flights, but they still build, drive, and fly, and use 'more world' from year to year in the process…[168].

There is much that Rosa writes here which is attune with, say, the 2024 United Nations' Report *Digital Economy Report: Shaping an environmentally sustainable and inclusive digital future* which argues for 'the need for a new policy mindset' exploring:

> the relationship between digitalization and environmental sustainability… with a view to moving towards a digital economy that leads to both environmental sustainability and inclusive development. The relationship between digitization and environmental impact, is bidirectional, in that digitalization has a significant and growing environmental footprint, yet digital solutions can also play a role in addressing environmental challenges… At present, [however] the world is not on track for achieving either inclusivity or sustainability.[169]

Added to this, Rosa specifically recommends that religion and music should take centre-stage, along with the rest of the arts and enchantment with nature. Experiences of resonance, he believes, in contrast to Bryan Wilson, are being crowded out by the dead-hand of functional modernity and commodification, making life for all of us, on balance, less healthy. A healthy life, he argues, needs resonant relationships.

At several points, he illustrates resonance using the example of tuning forks held close to each other: when one is struck the other vibrates – in other words, their physical interactions are mutually reinforcing. Yet, when placed on the closed lid of a piano, their distinctive sounds are magnified. In that analogy, resonance 'is a dialogue between two or more independent entities, a dialogue that not only permits, but even demands contradiction'.[170] It is different from consonance, which is based on 'unison, harmony and accord', because it allows creative tensions 'in the dramatic action of an opera, or the bottomless sorrow of a requiem' and in the traditions of jazz, soul and blues that originate in the agonies of slaves and, to Rosa, also in heavy metal[171]. So, evidently (and unlike many other intellectuals) he does not rely solely upon Western classical culture. He includes more homely examples as well, as he does in this explanation of resonance:

> We all know what it means to be touched by someone's glance or voice, by a piece of music we listen to, by a book we read, or a place we visit. Thus, the capacity to feel affected by something, and in turn to develop intrinsic interest in the part of the world which affects us, is a core element of any positive way of relating to the world. And as we know from psychologists and psychiatrists, its marked absence is a central element of most forms of depression and burnout. Yet, affection is not enough to overcome alienation. What is additionally required is the capacity to "answer" the call: when we feel

> touched in the way described above, we often tend to give a physical response by developing goose bumps, an increased rate of heartbeat, a changed blood pressure, skin resistance, and so on.[172]

It is not difficult to spot the religious allusions here, even though they obviously depend upon his personal aesthetic, rather than upon purely sociological, judgements. It is reinforced also by Rosa's moral and theological judgements when, following a section on 'the promise of religion' that notes that religiously inspired violence and unchecked sexual abuse – sadly present within churches and church communities – have marred this promise. Then he somewhat flippantly observes: 'Luckily, modernity has found and institutionalized other ways of fulfilling this [promise] that are functionally equivalent to religion without requiring a metaphysical system of belief'[173]. Nature, music, art and history are these functional equivalents. A few pages later in his book *Resonance*, however, he concludes that, unlike religion itself, these apparent equivalents cannot actually 'provide a cohesive cognitive horizon of meaning or blueprint of the world'[174].

Less elusively, he writes:

> We can systematically distinguish three different dimensions of resonance: the social, material, and existential dimensions of resonance. *Social* axes are those that connect us with, and relate us to, other human beings. In most contemporary societies, love, friendship, but also democratic citizenship are conceptualized as "resonant" relationships of this type. *Material* axes are those we establish with certain objects – natural or artefactual, pieces of art, amulets, or tools and materials we work with or use for sports. Yet, I believe with philosophers like Karl Jaspers, William James, and Martin Buber that human subjects also seek and find *existential* "axes of resonance" that connect them with and relate them to life, or existence, or the universe as such. As those authors tried to show quite convincingly, this is what brings about religious experiences, and what makes religion plausible in the first place. The central element of the Bible, or the Quran, or the Upanishads, is the idea that at the root of our existence, at the heart of our being, there is not a silent, indifferent, or repulsive universe, dead matter, or blind mechanisms, but a process of resonance and response.[175]

Perhaps these 'existential axes of resonance' or 'cohesive cognitive horizons of meaning or blueprint of the world' can resonate with all three generations of today's fast changing culture. Religious organisations, including the Church of England and other denominations, have opportunities to help people to find meaning in a changing or threatening world. Today's early retirees might be persuaded to come back to, say, a British rural or Mediterranean church that resonates for them. The house-bound elderly may also have an increasing need for a parish priest who has time to share the Eucharist with them. And young graduates who have experienced increasingly vibrant college chaplaincies might perhaps be persuaded by opportunities to serve, or even to consider ordination as a better option than transient, alienating employment or, simply, unemployment.

But, for any of this to be possible within the Church of England, it needs to change its priorities radically. It needs enhanced funding, support and autonomy for locally-based stipendiary clergy, deaneries that are accountable budget holders making decisions on clergy deployment, and dioceses that can offer leadership but with much-reduced bureaucracy and operating in a structure that eliminates much of the current duplication of functions.

The Church has made radical changes before, and it can make changes without implying that decisions were mistaken or blame people when they have acted in good faith. The economic and social environment is now different, and, as in earlier centuries, bold decisions are needed for the flourishing of the Church's mission in this changed world.

Chapter 8: Parishes and clergy

Parishes have been with us for a thousand years – and, of course, a millennium ago they served a population whose lives were dominated by agriculture. As our Timeline shows, churches, parsonages and the clergy were funded by benefactors, and, to varying degrees, by income from glebe lands and from tithes. The church fundamentally operated at local level, with varying degrees of commitment and success as the diaries of James Woodforde and John Longe (explored in Chapter 2) illustrate. The parish system was sorely tested by the industrial revolution, when small country areas saw massive increases in population – far outrunning their resources. The Ecclesiastical Commissioners used draconian measures to redistribute the Church's wealth to try to fund both churches and clergy in these newly populated areas and that work has continued through the post-industrial growth of suburbs and big new towns. In more recent times, the incomes of clergy have been completely detached from the historic (and largely randomly distributed) assets of their parishes.

The locus of authority for deploying clergy – who goes where – has also changed. Patrons now have little more than a nominal role and have largely lost their centralising power, whereas in earlier times their rights to appoint incumbents to parishes were both dominant in deployment and of personal economic value: they could be sold or bequeathed. Now it is dioceses that have these powers to determine deployment and, backed by the Church Commissioners, they have now created megabenefices in which the link between individual clergy and parishes is seriously weakened.

It is tempting to assess the effectiveness of diocesan decisions about the deployment of clergy and the formation of benefices mainly in relation to rural parishes. This temptation does not refer back to some mythical golden age, but because it is in the countryside that parish identities tend to be stronger. Many small rural communities not only have a church (or several) with its own visible governance through a Parochial Church Council (PCC), but also have a secular parish council as the smallest part of the structure of national and local government. These bodies have some input to planning decisions and are focused on providing facilities and support for local residents. Parish identities remain strong. In contrast, parish boundaries in larger towns and cities are often less well known, and the smallest 'tier' of local government is a town or city council, supported sometimes by a network of more local organisations that serve specific areas but often not parishes. Many people who live or work in urban areas are probably unaware of, or at least uncertain about, which ecclesiastical parish they are in. This division between urban and rural is far from clear cut, but it reminds us that any changes in how the Church of England uses its resources must be assessed across a variety of geographic and demographic contexts.

When most people walked to church for services, baptisms or funerals, it was largely obvious that they would go to their local parish church. Today, even in country areas, people routinely drive across parish boundaries (and sometimes several) to attend church. In towns and cities there are several churches and chapels – and, in some a cathedral – within easy reach on foot, by car or by public transport. For mobile churchgoers, there is genuine choice available that caters for different theological traditions and liturgical styles.

Yet despite the lack of clarity about loyalties to parishes, we remain of the view that the role of clergy even in present day culture is best fulfilled when there is a reasonably clear link between each priest and a geographical area – and that deployment decisions should maintain that link. In addition, those decisions are best made by people who are aware of the needs and contexts of local communities.

In legal terms, the Church of England itself recognises 12,140 parishes[176], which is of course far more than the 5683 full-time parish clergy (see our appendix). But many of those parishes

have been in long-standing relationships with others particularly where one priest could serve a parish along with a smaller neighbour – a practice that was not excluded by the moves against pluralism in the 18th and 19th centuries. These benefices can now be linked under a Joint Council (a form of combined PCC) using standard templates from the national Parish Resources website. Decisions on the organisation of services in several churches and on sharing the costs of ministry are taken locally.

Sceptics might say that priests, church wardens and PCC or Joint Council members are bombarded with requests for information by dioceses, as well as requests for parish share and that these are rarely matched by helpful advice or information on how to run a benefice. The fear in parishes is that, when the local priest resigns or retires, there will be a lengthy period before any decision is taken, and then further mergers or rearrangements will be imposed by people with little local knowledge. Meanwhile diocesan requests for money will continue, and the volunteers will be left to find and pay for clergy to take services.

Clergy training

The Archbishops' Council is responsible for funding and quality-assuring clergy training. The process involved in reaching ordination as a priest starts locally – with candidates identified in parishes, deaneries and dioceses – and ends locally with a curacy in a parish or other context, and then, for those who train for stipendiary ministry, an incumbency or other role. But the locations of the start and finish of this process are commonly in different dioceses and so the funding of the training costs and the living costs of those in training is best managed nationally. With central funding for training, dioceses do not have an incentive to turn away potential trainees because they do not themselves have vacancies, even though opportunities are available elsewhere. This activity is made more complex because there are many training pathways in twenty or so small independent institutions. The curriculum needed to train for a complex clergy role needs to be broad, and that creates a challenge for small institutions.

The organisational and financial challenge is made more difficult because the traditional pattern of training – two or three years in a residential setting – has become less popular as locally based full- and part-time programmes have expanded. Unlike in residential training courses, ordinands do not need to re-locate their families, but the immobility of some trainees means that the Church could not easily focus training in one or two places – even if it had the will to do so. The recent merger of several institutions into Emmanuel Theological College and the appointment in 2026 of a joint Principal for two of the larger training providers[177] are (we hope) signs that the costs to the Church of this vital activity can be reduced, without compromising quality. Long term moves to rationalise the system of clergy training should continue to be supported by national funding, with a view to meeting future needs rather than sustaining patterns that are less relevant to the likely demographics of ordinands.

Clergy numbers

Leslie Paul (see chapter 4) had high ambitions for clergy numbers, based on the ratio of clergy to the general population. He considered targets including one priest to 2500 people which was nearly attained in the 1960s – but not since. His hopes for one stipendiary priest to 1500 are out of sight: growth in the population and the decline in clergy numbers mean that the church is closer to one in ten thousand. So, any proposal that wants to ensure that every local area, however defined, will have its own priest must either accept that the areas are very large, or be accompanied by other proposals that will increase the numbers of clergy.

Workforce planning is a difficult and often unsuccessful activity. Government policies aimed at recruiting more teachers, nurses, doctors or dentists have sometimes been successful, and sometimes not. Pay levels might be increased, or pension entitlements made more generous.

The Church of England controls and funds its own training, pay and pensions and welcome steps have been taken recently to increase stipends, improve pensions and to give more support for ordinands during their period of training[178]. We support the use of national funds in this way, and it is likely that more will be needed.

But the Church has two other challenges. First, it must convince those who feel called to be ordained that there is a secure and rewarding career path ahead of them. This is particularly important when – at least to a first approximation – someone who has progressed through a training programme and a curacy has few other options open to them. If the Church does not have a role them, then who will? In recent times, some of the strategic investment funding from the Church Commissioners[179] has been used to subsidise curacies and 'posts of first responsibility' because it was very likely that diocesan decisions alone would leave some ordinands without a curate's post, or some 'graduating' curates without a post to go to. Greater clarity about the underlying position is of primary importance, and an explicit national commitment that 'parish priests, not bishops or diocesan administrators, are our first priority' would help to give a greater sense of security.

The second challenge is also one that is common across many areas of professional life. Teachers and lecturers complain about a lack of autonomy and the burden of administration and 'paperwork'. Similar comments come from professionals working within the NHS. There is, we believe, a feeling that the personal ambition of most professionals to do their job well – to teach students and heal the sick – has been subsumed by institutional objectives that are reflected in imposed targets. Professionals need a clear framework in which to work but they do not need excessive micro-management from bishops, archdeacons and diocesan managers. Successive reports from the Church's own *Living Ministry*[180] project highlight issues that clergy themselves identify as problems for their own well-being and success in the role. It is vital that potential clergy feel that there is a worthwhile and much valued job to be done and that they have reasonable freedom in doing it. Then, if more come forward, the Church can easily afford to train them, and the shortage of priests will begin to be addressed.

Chapter 9: Deaneries

The Church has had deaneries since medieval times[181], and the role of the rural or area dean was mainly to work for archdeacons as the inspectors of parishes to ensure compliance with requirements of the Church. Some, perhaps many, parish priests find better personal support amongst their deanery colleagues than in mass gatherings of diocesan clergy

The proposal that deaneries should be the primary budget-holders and decision-makers for the deployment of clergy and the local organisation of ministry is not new. *The Myth of the Empty Church* outlined a scheme that builds on conclusions in Leslie Paul's report from the 1960s. The details are somewhat different from those put forward here, but much of the justification remains the same: deaneries are less remote than dioceses, but of sufficient size to allow flexibility and mutual support. That scheme gained little support within the Church, but the changes that have occurred in the past thirty years lead us to conclude that the proposal should be revived, and acted upon.

We have outlined our financial proposal for deployment very simply – and, because it is simple, it is transparent for those who work in the Church and those who pay for the Church. To repeat, our two main recommendations are that:

- Deaneries should be the principal budget-holders and much of the income from the Church's historic resources should be allocated to deaneries according to the deprivation of their populations.
- After a process of transition, deaneries should deploy as many clergy as their parishioners are prepared to pay for from their own contributions and from the income allocated to them.

The information needed for the first recommendation already exists. The Church of England's own data services team has analysed very detailed information from the Office of National Statistics relating to deprivation in each of its 12,140 parishes and 661 deaneries[182]. Crucially, the evidence of deprivation is external to the Church, and so it can be used to distribute funds to deaneries without facing the criticism levelled at the Darlow formula for funding dioceses that it is 'rewarding failure'. We have not attempted to define the exact measures of deprivation that are relevant to our proposal – but we want to see significantly greater support for those deaneries where people would be less able to give to support their church. In general terms, we would expect that the least deprived deaneries would need to meet most, perhaps all, of the full cost of their clergy while the most deprived would meet only a small fraction of the cost.

We can see good arguments to support the extension of this funding arrangement to the appointment of lay ministers and administrators in deaneries, again giving more support to more deprived areas. Help in running the parishes in a deanery is likely to be much more important than any support that a remote diocese might offer. On-line national resources for deanery administrators might be developed, avoiding duplication between dioceses.

The support for deaneries that is available from historic resources should include much of the funding currently used by Archbishops' Council for its strategic projects, plus all of the funding that is currently allocated to support dioceses through the Lowest Income Community Funding[183]. Dioceses should also contribute from the income that they derive from their historic assets, including from the glebe that was transferred to them fifty years ago. Our proposals also include reductions in the numbers of dioceses and in their funding for support roles, and, as these take place, economies of scale will be realised and even more money can be released to support ministry in deaneries and, by extension, in parishes.

Localism

When economists put forward policy proposals, they (should) want to justify them with some backing from the principles and theories that underlie their profession. Perhaps the most famous example is the justification, derived from the work of John Maynard Keynes, for policies like the New Deal in the United States that aimed to end the Great Depression of the 1930s through increased public investment, in dramatic contrast to the prevailing wisdom of the time.

Funding through deaneries promotes localism, sometimes known as subsidiarity. This has a sound economic justification that is based on the recognition that people benefit most when they are able to see the effects of freely made decisions on themselves and those they care about. That includes choices about whether, and how much, to give to their parish. If they don't like what the Church of England does with their money (or perhaps don't know), they can transfer to another denomination or spend their money elsewhere. In many circumstances, enthusiasm for localism is tempered by the recognition that those who control more resources end up benefiting much more than those who are poorer. In the wider economy, attempts to offset this inequality have led to all sorts of difficult but familiar questions about the impact of welfare payments and taxes on incentives to work and about the best way to fund the basic services that make modern life at least tolerable to most. This is much less of an issue within the Church of England where income from historic assets can be used to support more deprived deaneries without directly requiring support from others.

Church leaders might argue that parishioners should be willing to give generously regardless of where their money is used. But if people believe that their contributions are used to fund diocesan overheads, including administration and senior clergy posts from which they see little benefit, they can instead support other charities. More generally, it is commonplace to argue that it is easier to raise money to repair the church roof than to increase the amount that is collected to fund the parish share because donors know and approve what will be done. Our proposals enable donors to know and see what they are funding because the results are local. The present system of parish shares does not.

The cost of a priest

It is fundamental to our proposal that deaneries should themselves decide how to deploy their clergy and any lay resources that they control. This resource base includes locally based non-stipendiary clergy with, or without, a house-for-duty, and those retired clergy who are able, willing and licensed to take services or cover other roles. It would be open to them to allocate one or more parishes to each priest – provided that such a scheme provides full coverage – or to introduce a looser scheme in which ministry responsibilities are shared across a number of parishes, or across the whole deanery.

Plainly, the 'cost of a priest' that the deanery must pay includes his or her stipend together with the normal on-costs faced by any employer: pension contributions and employer's National Insurance. There are two other elements that should also be included: housing and security

Housing: We have seen in our Timeline that, historically, incumbents have typically come into a parish where there is a parsonage, and that they were responsible for its upkeep – leading to difficult problems when dilapidations were charged. When uniform stipends were introduced in the 20th century, the level of the stipend assumed that the incumbent would be housed, and that the cost of maintaining the house would be met by the diocese. This, of course, means that clergy are not significantly disadvantaged if they move to an area in which house prices or rent levels are high by national standards. Under our proposals, deaneries would become responsible for clergy housing, taking ownership of parsonages and paying for

maintenance. The deanery could sell or rent out surplus or unsuitable houses and use the proceeds to pay for more suitable housing, or offer to share the costs for those who are ordained after they have purchased or rented a family home. It might be that deaneries would want to collaborate in engaging agents to manage their housing stock, but they would retain ownership and the responsibility to ensure that their clergy are appropriately housed. As the number of parish-based clergy has fallen over the past half-century, many parsonages have been sold, and the proceeds used to boost diocesan budgets. If this leads to a situation in which a deanery has insufficient housing for the number of clergy that it wants to deploy, the diocese should obtain additional accommodation and transfer it to the deanery. The Church of England has, after all, a long history of transferring assets from one part to another as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners did in the 19th century and the *Endowments and Glebe Measure* did in moving assets from parishes to dioceses in 1978.

Security: Our proposals undoubtedly entail the risk that a deanery will reach the conclusion that it can no longer afford to pay for all the clergy for whom it has previously paid. If it is not mitigated, this risk would be a considerable disincentive to consider ordination and might lead some clergy to leave their deanery posts for more secure employment elsewhere, even before there was any threat to their continued funding. On the other hand, there are now very few jobs that are immune to redundancy on the grounds that employers can no longer afford to pay all of their staff. We propose that the Church Commissioners should establish an 'insurance' scheme which would guarantee every deanery-based priest (say) two years of continued pay after their deanery had given notice that they needed to reduce their clergy numbers. During that time, the clergy involved would be able to explore other posts and make arrangements to move themselves and their family on terms much better than those faced by their parishioners in less secure secular employment. This scheme would be funded by a premium on the cost of a priest that is paid each year by each deanery. So, for example, if five percent of priests, on average, face redundancy from their deanery post at any time, every deanery would pay a premium to meet the resulting cost. The premium would be adjusted from time to time to reflect experience: that is what insurance companies do.

Transition

These proposals for the transfer of budget-holding and decision-making from dioceses to deaneries are ambitious, and it is obvious that the change could not happen overnight. Some clergy currently have tenure in their parishes or benefices, and deaneries might, in total, want to pay the costs of more, or fewer, clergy than are currently available. It will also take time for deaneries to establish working relations within themselves, and for dioceses to adjust to their new primary focus of giving leadership and support to deaneries and parishes while stepping aside from micro-management.

So, we propose that in the first three years after the Church has accepted our recommendations, deaneries would decide how many clergy they would like to deploy, with reductions happening only as clergy retire or leave for other posts and increases only as clergy become available. After that, moves would be less constrained, but the 'insurance' scheme that we have proposed would allow changes on a reasonable timescale.

Chapter 10: Dioceses

There are currently 40 mainland dioceses in England, compared with 22 in 1800 and 31 in 1900. On average, each diocese has 16 deaneries and 300 parishes ─ and we believe that dioceses are too remote to make detailed decisions about ministry at local level. At the same time many activities that are designed to support or regulate local activities are replicated forty times. Their annual reports show that most dioceses have significant resources to produce glossy publications that highlight not only their financial positions but also offer 'good news' stories[184] while parishes, with no such resources, work to proclaim the good news.

Our first proposal relating to dioceses is that there should be fewer of them, to reduce duplication and to realise economies of scale in their remaining responsibilities. Our appendix shows that the populations of the forty mainland dioceses vary from around 300,000 to 4.2 million out of a total population of 57 million. Critics might argue that the size of a diocese is measured by more than its population, perhaps citing a geographical area, but it is difficult to see that distances give much justification for additional administrative costs in the way that they might have done when information and communication moved at the speed of a horse. Covid-era practices have made on-line meetings commonplace. Alternatively, it might be argued that a measure of size should include the number of benefices, but most of the dioceses with largest populations also have the largest numbers of benefices. And, if size is measured by the number of benefices, then pastoral reorganisations that merge parishes reduce the size of dioceses and add to the reasons for merging dioceses too.

The 12 largest dioceses include one-half of the population, forty percent of the bishops and archdeacons and thirty-seven percent of the diocesan employed staff. The other 28 dioceses have half the population, sixty percent of the senior clergy and sixty-three percent of diocesan employees. The smaller dioceses have doubled their staff numbers over the period: the big dioceses have managed with 'only' a 50% increase. The data in our appendix can be used in other ways, but it is very difficult to adopt any approach that does not show considerable economies of scale. The experience of the 2014 merger to form the Diocese of Leeds is not particularly encouraging in terms of its effects on diocesan costs, but the Church might learn from that experience and enforce diocesan mergers, or at least close collaboration, with targets for significant reductions in costs of administration, mainly by moving responsibilities to deaneries or the national institutions and by merging and radically reducing diocesan administrative activities. Since the Yorkshire merger, the Dioceses Commission, which was established in its present form under the *Diocesan Pastoral and Mission Measure* of 2007, seems to have been reluctant to consider any further diocesan mergers despite the evidence that there are economies of scale. It should be reinvigorated, and charged with reducing the number of dioceses to around 30 dioceses by 2032 with a parallel reduction in the numbers of bishops, senior clergy and administrators. The smallest of the twelve largest dioceses has a population of 1.6 million, and that might provide a minimum in the future pattern of dioceses achieved through mergers and boundary changes.

As reported in chapter 5, there might be arguments that dioceses are a part of the historic structure of the Church, which should be preserved. There have, indeed, always been dioceses but their boundaries have changed significantly. Geoffrey Best[185] includes a revealing map of the changes between 1830 and 1850 (when only Manchester and Ripon were newly created). Also, of course, parishes are equally a fundamental part of the historic structure of the church, and nothing now stands in the way of their merger into benefices, so why should historic precedent stand in the way of combining dioceses?

We hope that the Dioceses Commission will be revitalized. In February 2022 the *Church Times*[186] reported that the College of Bishops (which includes all bishops, not just diocesans) had received a confidential consultation document entitled *Bishops and their ministry fit for a new context*. The document:[187]

> sets out the "initial conclusions" of Archbishops Welby and Cottrell and Bishop Mullally, giving options for change. In making the case for change they list a number of areas of concern: the fact that the current deployment of bishops and diocesan structures do not reflect current population patterns [as our appendix shows]; that many suffragan bishops do not have specific responsibility for leading mission in a territorial area; concerns about the costs of diocesan offices; and the fact that data on giving as a percentage of income strongly suggests that the majority of dioceses are not capable of sustaining themselves".

It is not clear whether there has been any follow-up to this document. The report has not been published, and so is not subject to the sort of scrutiny that rightly follows from a challenging, transparent, openly available Report (including this one).

We endorse some of the findings in the leaked document, and wonder whether the role of archdeacons as 'area managers' in their dioceses was taken into account. The roles of archdeacons and suffragan bishops are somewhat different, particularly because a suffragan can deputise for a diocesan bishop in areas that are not open to archdeacons, in particular presiding at confirmations. But both are part of the senior management of a diocese, and the differences in numbers across dioceses, as shown in our appendix, suggest that there must be some overlaps in practice. In secular terms, archdeacons and suffragans might be thought of as having similar seniority: the recommended stipend levels are £44810 and £45410 respectively[188]. Any review of diocesan administration or mergers should ask whether both roles are needed.

We have commented favourably in chapter 5 on the efficiencies gained through central administration for clergy and we think that the Commissioners and Pensions Board should introduce or expand similar schemes for the pay and pensions of lay employees in parishes, deaneries and dioceses. The Parish Giving Scheme and the Parish Resources website are other examples where support and advice are best run nationally, and the same might well be true of safeguarding.

The Church does not always help itself. For example, in recent years, regulations relating to memorials in churchyards have been revised, with some national guidelines[189] but also scope for each diocese to vary the regulations that it imposes on its parishes. So, there are forty versions, all (we assume) consistent with the national policy, but possibly all different and each requiring administration at diocesan level. There appears to be no explanation as to why practices can differ by diocese (which do not run any churchyards at all) but more local variations, within a national framework, at parish or deanery level are not allowed. Either there are national standards, or localism extends down to deaneries or parishes.

We recognise that deaneries need leadership and guidance – rather than detailed direction – in carrying out their roles in deploying resources and managing clergy, and perhaps in making cases for special support from a remaining (but smaller) national fund for strategic developments and innovations. Area deans need support and inspiration, and this is a central role for the diocesan bishops supported, as necessary, by (fewer) senior colleagues. And, as anyone who has run an organisation knows, there will be human resource problems that need external intervention – perhaps particularly relating to discipline. A nationally provided HR function can advise deans and bishops in these cases, but it is likely that these sorts of problems are better resolved at diocesan level, rather than referred to a national institution – unless, of course, they directly involve senior clergy themselves.

A further recommendation that we make is that suffragan/area bishops and archdeacons should normally have a part-time local role providing ministry within a deanery. We believe that they should not themselves be area/rural deans, but their local role would involve participation in the deanery's ministry team. This will bring the wisdom and experience of senior clergy into deanery deliberations, and ensure that senior managers remain aware through first-hand experience of the issues that arise in local contexts.

Chapter 11: Recommendations

Our earlier chapters give the historical context for our recommendations, and an analysis of changes that are possible and needed. Our basic principles emphasise localism, efficiency and transparency and we believe that these are all vital for the allocation and use of the resources of the Church of England. Together they seriously question the current top-down approach.

The decision-making authorities include the Archbishops' Council, Church Commissioners, General Synod, House of Bishops, dioceses and deaneries. All of them should be involved in radical thinking. They should agree to major reviews and to changes in practice, as rapidly as possible. The priority areas for action are:

1. **A thorough examination of the necessity for and location of administrative activities;**
2. **A reduction in the number of dioceses and diocesan bishops to around 30;**
3. **Within these remaining dioceses, a considerable reduction in the numbers of managers and administrators;**
4. **A reduction of at least three-quarters in the money allocated nationally to strategic investments;**
5. **The design of a structure in which deaneries are the primary budget holders;**
6. **The design of a workable budget that allocates funding from historic resources to deaneries on the basis of their relative deprivation.**

From these we also recommend that:

7. **All remaining suffragan bishops and archdeacons have a part-time role in parish ministry;**
8. **Regular and independently verified reports are required about the financing and outcomes of all projects;**
9. **Further moves are made to make a career as a parish priest attractive financially and professionally;**
10. **The responsibility for parsonages moves to deaneries.**

Finally, and crucially, there must be:

11. **An explicit recognition that every proposal for spending income from historic assets eventually requires greater contributions from parishioners;**
12. **A clear demonstration that church leaders are hearing and responding to enormous frustrations in parishes.**

Glossary: some economic terms.

There are important distinctions between **capital** and assets on the one hand and **income** or revenue on the other. The capital yields income and is held in in the form of:

interest-bearing accounts which give a fixed income with no risk of a change in the capital held;

bonds which pay income as a fixed amount of **interest.** A bond can be sold, and its capital value is reduced if other bonds yield higher incomes, because the bond is then less attractive to other savers. The term 'annuity' has been used in the past for an asset of this kind, but that is now generally reserved for forms of income paid after retirement;

shares in companies whose owners receive income in the form **dividends** and whose capital value is affected by the profits (or expected, or rumoured profits) of the company;

land and buildings, whose owners receive income from **rents** and whose capital value can be affected by, for example, planning decisions or the profitability of agriculture.

Except for interest-bearing accounts, these assets can be sold, and their price can increase or decrease giving rise to a **capital gain** or **loss** which is, in effect, also income.

Usually, those who control or own funds want (if possible) the capital value of their assets to increase by at least the rate of inflation so that they are not using resources now at the expense of the future. To achieve this, they retain some of their annual income to add to their capital, rather than using it for current spending.

As well as the income from assets that have accumulated in the past, the Church of England receives income from the contributions of parishioners. A part of this income is passed to dioceses to help meet their costs. We refer to that as **parish share**. The rest of these contributions are retained in parishes to support local ministry and the maintenance of church buildings.

In the Church of England, there have been other capital assets and sources of income. These appear frequently in our Timeline. In summary:

glebe describes the property (mainly agricultural land) that was associated with the parish. The incumbent could let it out for rent, or farm it himself to realise a part of his income. Glebe was transferred from parishes to dioceses in the 20th century.

tithes (sometimes tythes) were legally required and usually enforced as the example of John Longe in chapter 2 illustrates. They were paid as annual income to a parish in the form of ten percent of the product of the land. Tithe barns were built to store it. Some of the tithes were received by the incumbent and others by individuals and institutions – typically called rectors. The incumbent received tithes as long as he remained as incumbent of the parish. The other recipients could sell, transfer or bequeath these **tithe rights**. Tithes were progressively converted from payment in produce to payment in money and were then often known as **rent-charges**. Later, rights to receive tithes were abolished.

patronage allowed the patron to nominate the incumbent of a parish who would then receive a share of the tithes and other income from parish endowments. The rights to bestow patronage, known as **advowsons**, were capital assets that could be sold, transferred or bequeathed. These rights of patronage have been modified to the extent that they no longer have a market price: they can be transferred, but not for money.

Price and wage comparisons

In our Timeline we make comparisons, and there are obvious difficulties in converting money values from earlier centuries into present equivalents. In places we use the Bank of England price index[190], which runs from 1209 to the present day. It reflects prices of goods and services, but, of course, the range and importance of different items varies hugely. Many items that routinely appear in current price indices (such as the Retail Prices Index that was introduced after the Second World War) did not exist before then, let alone three hundred years ago, so it is not possible to interpret the price index as telling us what it would now cost to purchase something that 'an average person' might buy in a much earlier century.

In places we compare incomes such as those of parish clergy and of bishops. Or we compare them with the incomes of other people at around the same time, including the wages of unskilled agricultural workers[191] who were likely to be one of the lowest paid groups in the society of the time. The 2026 National Minimum Wage yields an annual income of £24,400 for someone who works a 40-hour week for 48 weeks of the year. This gives us scope for 'minimum wage' comparisons between then and now. But these comparisons are far from exact, not only because bishops, most stipendiary clergy and a few non-stipendiary clergy who worked in parishes also have a home provided.

Clergy in the past had obligations to their parish, their church and their parsonage that had to be met from their income. If a parish incumbent needed a substitute curate or chaplain because he had responsibilities elsewhere, or because he was too ill or too old to run parish services, then he had to pay the curate's stipend out of his own income. Bishops too had to maintain their palaces, and many paid to keep households in their diocese and in London. In the main, similar benefits and obligations did not affect their contemporaries in other occupations, and do not directly impact the personal incomes of clergy or bishops now.

As an illustration of the problems of making comparisons between centuries, we know that about one million pounds was raised for the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral after the Great Fire of 1666. The Bank of England price index translates that as equivalent to around £180 million today. The cost of rebuilding Notre Dame Cathedral after its great fire of 2019 is reported to be between £600 and £700 million. The greatest similarity is that most of the cost of rebuilding St Paul's, and all of the Paris restoration, were raised by benefactions and public subscriptions. The works needed were of course different, but the comparison can illustrate the problem of translating money terms over several centuries. Both restorations called on skilled labour and on materials such as timber, stone and glass. A price index can indicate the inflation in the costs of materials, but the skills and technology used changed enormously in the intervening three and a half centuries. Real wages (standards of living) have increased, of course, and people now buy many things that were unimagined 350 years ago. 17th century workers paid little tax and had no funded health insurance or pensions, and their diets were very different. So, even if the cathedrals in London and Paris had suffered similar damage, we would hesitate to put too much weight on simple comparisons of the costs of the two projects.

Appendix

This data covers 40 mainland dioceses. There were 42 in 2000: the 2000 entry for Leeds is the combined figures for Bradford, Ripon & Leeds and Wakefield.

- diocesan populations (Pop) come from the Church of England data services (https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/statisticsformission2024_amended.pdf) and are for 2021.
- diocesan employees are from the published annual accounts for the Diocesan Boards of Finance (or equivalents) which are available on the Companies House website (https://www.gov.uk/get-information-about-a-company). The data includes only those employed by the Board of Finance. Employee figures are not supplied in the same form across the two years and 42 dioceses. Some report fte, some headcount and some distinguish between full- and part-time – in the last case we have weighted part-time as one half of full-time. In some cases it is possible to distinguish employees who have roles in activities that earn external revenue (such as retreat houses or conference centres) and these have been excluded where possible. No account has been taken of whether those income-earning activities require a subsidy from general diocesan revenues. Beyond that, no account is taken of sources of funding for diocesan employees. Diocesan staff also include a number of clergy who are not included in these figures because they are not employed by the company. Their stipends are paid along with those of parish-based clergy by the Church Commissioners, using funds from the dioceses.
- safeguarding staff (S) are from diocesan websites, and in a few cases from their annual accounts. Some – mainly unspecified – are likely to be part-time or in job-shares, and some might have other responsibilities outside the safeguarding team.
- clergy refers to full-time parish-based clergy in 2000 and April 2026 from https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/church-statistics-2000.pdf and ministry_statistics_20260430_0-3
- parish share shows the actual receipts in 2025 and the receipts in 2000 inflated to 2025 prices from published annual accounts. The Bank of England inflation calculator shows a 91% increase in prices from 2000 to 2025. The figures include arrears from previous years, and exclude any requested parish shares that were not made in the year.
- numbers of bishops (B) and archdeacons (A) are from diocesan websites and include vacant positions on the assumption that they will be filled. Provincial Episcopal Visitors and archdeacons without diocesan roles are excluded.
- attendances come from https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/resources-publications-and-data. There might be some anomalies in definitions between the two years, but these are not easily identified.
- columns marked % show the percentage change from 2000 to 2025.

We do not recommend using this data to compare individual dioceses because we recognise the approximations and different methodologies used. But the overall numbers and trends are strongly indicative of the challenges facing the Church of England.

Diocese	Pop	Diocesan employees			S	Clergy			Parish share collected			B	A
	(k)	2000	2025	%		2000	2025	%	2000	2025	%	2026	2026
Bath & Wells	980	25	58	132	5	225	146	-35	11195	9839	-12	2	3
Birmingham*	1599	57	65	14	4	188	120	-36	7527	4865	-35	2	2
Blackburn	1384	35	63	80	6	222	145	-35	10014	8082	-19	3	2
Bristol	1065	45	77	71	5	129	106	-18	7650	4949	-35	2	2
Canterbury	981	14	61	336	6	160	88	-45	8738	7625	-13	3	3
Carlisle	498	30	64	113	3	140	63	-55	6630	4329	-35	2	3
Chelmsford*	3279	62	95	53	9	391	208	-47	17912	13528	-24	4	6
Chester*	1677	41	56	37	4	262	158	-40	11156	11489	3	3	2
Chichester*	1704	33	54	64	7	321	197	-39	13739	14249	4	3	3
Coventry	896	11	49	345	3	133	118	-11	5573	5073	-9	2	2
Derby	1064	14	39	179	7	171	99	-42	7159	3735	-48	2	3
Durham	1475	22	50	127	3	221	106	-52	7573	4237	-44	2	3
Ely	803	21	40	90	7	141	104	-26	6381	6166	-3	2	2
Exeter	1214	42	56	33	5	237	147	-38	10423	8438	-19	3	4
Gloucester	690	36	96	167	8	146	101	-31	7392	6528	-12	2	2
Guildford	1077	26	64	146	4	185	137	-26	11628	11952	3	2	2
Hereford	322	16	33	106	4	102	68	-33	4764	3299	-31	1	2
Leeds*	2777	75	78	4	9	407	252	-38	22739	11905	-48	6	5
Leicester	1086	22	55	150	6	151	74	-51	6891	3858	-44	2	2
Lichfield*	2202	41	67	63	8	329	157	-52	14709	9138	-38	4	4
Lincoln	1093	33	42	27	4	205	91	-56	6832	3760	-45	3	2
Liverpool*	1621	30	64	113	5	239	130	-46	8114	7233	-11	3	4
London*	4246	57	134	135	12	510	490	-4	22003	24309	10	6	6
Manchester*	2233	43	49	14	6	281	153	-46	10662	5776	-46	3	3
Newcastle	832	14	42	200	4	133	80	-40	5247	3842	-27	2	2
Norwich	928	27	50	85	3	185	129	-30	8112	6808	-16	3	3
Oxford*	2511	41	86	110	9	417	316	-24	19702	19554	-1	4	4
Peterboro	971	23	34	48	4	157	115	-27	7222	6314	-13	2	2
Portsmouth	784	9	39	333	7	104	77	-26	4775	4548	-5	1	3
Rochester	1375	32	40	25	5	204	132	-35	10316	7791	-24	2	3
Salisbury	1148	39	53	36	3	211	156	-26	10289	10267	0	2	4
Sheffield	1278	31	49	58	6	175	105	-40	7386	3899	-47	2	2
Southwark*	2880	69	74	7	6	344	299	-13	18521	16415	-11	4	6
Southwell & N	1152	28	57	104	6	150	109	-27	7713	5804	-25	2	2
St. Albans*	1978	28	51	82	6	259	193	-25	12029	13272	10	3	2
St.Eds & Ip	684	24	70	192	5	140	97	-31	7059	6375	-10	2	4
Truro	573	17	42	147	4	122	58	-52	5990	2988	-50	2	2
Winchester	1255	23	45	96	6	224	136	-39	13341	8347	-37	3	2
Worcester	908	33	51	55	5	140	80	-43	6087	3971	-35	2	2
York	1457	25	61	144	6	249	143	-43	10711	7467	-30	4	3
total	56680	1294	2353	82	225	8710	5683	-35	401904	322024	-20	107	118
big 12	28707	577	873	51	85	3948	2673	-32	178813	151733	-15	45	47
small 28	27973	717	1480	106	140	4762	3010	-37	223091	170291	-24	62	71

* Denotes the 12 largest dioceses. These include half the population.

The deadline for filing accounts for 2025 at Companies House is normally 30 September 2026. By the time of writing, two dioceses had not done so and we have used 2024 figures for diocesan employees and parish share for those dioceses. These are underlined in the above table.

Diocese	Easter attendance			Christmas attendance			weekly average		
	2000	2025	%	2000	2025	%	2000	2025	%
Bath & Wells	49500	24600	-50	84700	52900	-38	34100	16500	-52
Birmingham	24000	14300	-40	38100	25900	-32	20200	13300	-34
Blackburn	45500	22400	-51	58800	36400	-38	40000	16800	-58
Bristol	24600	15700	-36	52600	33700	-36	21500	11800	-45
Canterbury	31500	17200	-45	62700	38800	-38	26300	11600	-56
Carlisle	26500	12300	-54	41000	26800	-35	18900	9800	-48
Chelmsford*	56200	36600	-35	109000	73600	-32	47300	26900	-43
Chester*	51900	26900	-48	87300	56400	-35	46700	21300	-54
Chichester*	71800	42300	-41	136700	86000	-37	51900	28500	-45
Coventry	23100	13800	-40	41700	32200	-23	18000	11700	-35
Derby	26700	13600	-49	48800	28900	-41	23800	10000	-58
Durham	30300	13600	-55	46000	27100	-41	26700	12300	-54
Ely	26400	18500	-30	49900	37500	-25	19000	14100	-26
Exeter	54100	29000	-46	88000	54000	-39	30000	17700	-41
Gloucester	34900	20200	-42	65500	47800	-27	22400	12500	-44
Guildford	41500	25300	-39	93300	59100	-37	31500	17100	-46
Hereford	22400	11200	-50	35800	20000	-44	12700	7900	-38
Leeds*	64700	34000	-47	111600	69900	-37	54600	26300	-52
Leicester	23500	13100	-44	42200	26700	-37	16900	9500	-44
Lichfield*	52200	27300	-48	88100	50800	-42	42100	21200	-50
Lincoln	29000	14900	-49	56200	33200	-41	28600	11800	-59
Liverpool*	40100	20000	-50	60300	31000	-49	37800	17000	-55
London*	87500	78600	-10	123700	102500	-17	77300	62500	-19
Manchester*	34800	21100	-39	45900	23600	-49	37700	18700	-50
Newcastle	21000	12300	-41	40900	27000	-34	15100	10600	-30
Norwich	34700	20900	-40	59400	43500	-27	26600	13100	-51
Oxford*	83400	53600	-36	172000	118000	-31	64700	38500	-40
Peterboro	28100	16000	-43	55800	34100	-39	24800	10900	-56
Portsmouth	25300	13400	-47	46300	29000	-37	16900	9000	-47
Rochester	39700	24700	-38	84200	50100	-40	32600	18300	-44
Salisbury	57900	32400	-44	98100	64600	-34	38000	19500	-49
Sheffield	25900	14300	-45	40600	24300	-40	23800	12600	-47
Southwark*	61100	45400	-26	77700	80200	3	42200	34200	-19
Southwell	22800	14300	-37	40200	28400	-29	18900	11600	-39
St. Albans*	51300	28700	-44	107400	71400	-34	42300	22000	-48
St.Eds & Ip	32500	17100	-47	57600	34800	-40	23300	11700	-50
Truro	28000	13200	-53	40800	22400	-45	17200	7500	-56
Winchester	51200	27900	-46	103900	53000	-49	38900	17300	-56
Worcester	24500	12200	-50	48000	27500	-43	20800	8500	-59
York	44900	23400	-48	83800	54600	-35	36800	19500	-47
total	1605000	936300	-42	2824600	1837700	-35	1268900	691600	-45
big 12	679000	428800	-37	1157800	789300	-32	564800	330400	-42
small 28	926000	507500	-45	787000	521300	-34	399200	225600	-43

Endnotes

[1] *Working as One Body: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England*. Church House Publishing 1995. Often known as the *Turnbull Report*.
[2] *Working as One Body,* para. 2.1.
[3] see churchofengland.org/about/data-services
[4] https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator
[5] Nicholas Orme, *Going to Church in Medieval England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021)
[6] Orme (2021) p. 401.
[7] Orme (2021) p.84.
[8] Orme (2021) pp.162-3.
[9] Orme (2021) p.50.
[10] Orme (2021) pp.60-1.
[11] Gregory Clark, *The Long March of History: Farm Wages, Population, and Economic Growth, England 1209-1869* The Economic History Review, Feb., 2007, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 1. fig. 5, p.116,
[12] Nina Wedell**,** *Tithe owners in Ewyas Lacy,* October 2009 https://www.ewyaslacy.org.uk/-/Research-paper-Tithe-owners-in-Ewyas-Lacy/1800s/nw_ewy_3007
[13] John Evelyn, *Diaries*, available at: https://www.gutenberg.org/files/41218/41218-h/41218-h.htm
[14] Evelynp.303.
[15] Robert Latham and William Matthews (eds.), *The Diaries of Samuel Pepys* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1970).
[16] An entry for Bishop Pearson appears in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography.*
[17] notably, *An Act for Maintenance for Preaching Ministers, and other Pious Uses*. June 1649. https://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/ pp142-148
[18] W. R. Le Fanu, *Queen Anne's Bounty, a short account of its history and work*, (London: Macmillan, 1921).
[19] Clark (2007).
[20] Le Fanu (1921) p. 43
[21] Anthony Russell, *The Clerical Profession* (London: SPCK 1980).
[22] Geoffrey Best, *Temporal Pillars* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964).
[23] See Clark (2007).
[24] Le Fanu (1921) p 38
[25] Using the 500 page Woodforde, James, *Diary of a Country Parson,1758-1802* (London, OUP, 1935) extracted helpfully by John Beresford from James Woodforde's original hand-written five-volumes.
[26] Available in *The Diary of John Longe: Vicar of Coddenham, 1765-1834* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2008) edited by Richard Wilson.
[27] December 2, 1783.
[28] December 1, 1789.
[29] December 6, 1791.
[30] Jon Stobart, *Life in the Georgian Parsonage: Morals, Material Goods and the English Clergy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2025).
[31] November 10 and December 13, 1776.
[32] e.g. December 10, 1786 and January 1, 1792.
[33] e.g. April 8, 1792 and April 19, 1793.
[34] August 14, 1791.
[35] April 19, 1789.
[36] January 28, 1787.
[37] Stobart (2025) p.294.
[38] October 7, 1792.
[39] November 28, 1792.
[40] April 19, 1793 is an exception.
[41] March 11, 1792.
[42] February 3, 1799.
[43] May 8, 1796.
[44] June 12, 1796.
[45] November 11, 1797 and April 11, 1800.
[46] See Stobart (2025) pp.3-7.
[47] Penelope Corfield *The Georgians* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2022) p. 52
[48] Adam Smith, *An Enquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), book 5 chapter 1, part 3, article 3
[49] see Robin Gill's *Myth of the Empty Church* (London: SPCK, 1993, p.86f.) and the updated version *The 'Empty' Church Revisited* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2003, p.66f,) Subsequent page references are given in that order.

[50] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.113/85 and Table 6.
[51] Gill (1993 & 2003) Tables 1-3.
[52] Gill (1993 & 2003) Tables 1-6.
[53] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.93f./69f.
[54] Clive Field *Periodizing Secularization: Religious Allegiance and Attendance in Britain, 1880-1945* (Oxford, OUP, 2019), pp.33-5.
[55] John Bird Sumner, *Charges Addressed to the Clergy of the Diocese of Chester*, (London, Hatchard & Son 1841) 5.10-11
[56] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.118/89.
[57] https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C8993
[58] *Census of Great Britain, 1851: Religious Worship: England and Wales: Report and Tables* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1853) p.cxix. Reprinted by Irish University Press, 1979.
[59] *Dictionary of National Biography*: https://www.oxforddnb.com
[60] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.99f./74f.
[61] Le Fanu, (1921) chapter 2
[62] Le Fanu, (1921) p.61.
[63] *Sydney Smith, Wit and Wisdom Collection,* (London: Longmans Green, 1869) p.66. Available at : https://www.scribd.com/document/647008094/Sidney-Smith-The-Wit-and-Wisdom#google_vignette
[64] Sydney Smith, *Letter to Archdeacon Singleton* (London, Longman, 1837).
[65] https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1836-03-10/debates/bfce14f0-53d2-489f-b147-f2a42a46b2af/ChurchReform—ReportOfTheCommissioners
[66] https://www.bmj.com/content/331/7531/1520/related
[67] William Wyndham Malet, *The funds of the church: their appropriation and alienation the cause of ignorance, heresy, and schism: and church self-government the only remedy for these evils: a letter to the Archbishop of Canterbury*, (London: J. Masters, 1850).
[68] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/gs-misc-1455-the-53rd-report-of-the-central-stipends-authority-2025.pdf
[69] Gill, (1993 & 2003), Tables 7-8.
[70] Gill, (1993 & 2003), p.80f/60f.
[71] Gill, (1993 & 2003) Table 7
[72] E.R. Wickham, *Church and People in an Industrial City*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1957).
[73] A. Hume, 'Condition of Liverpool, Religious and Social; Including Notices of the State of Education, Morals, Pauperism, and Crime' (Liverpool: T. Brakel, 1858) pp.12 & 34.
[74] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.38/28
[75] Gill (2003) p.164f.
[76] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.42/32.
[77] ed. D.S. Cairns, *The Army and Religion*, (London: Macmillan, 1919) p.190
[78] Field, 2019, pp.159f. For an earlier period, see Clive D. Field, *Churchgoing in York,1743-2011* (York: Quacks Books, 2022).
[79] Gill, *Theology Shaped by Society* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012) pp.151f.
[80] Seebohm Rowntree and G.R. Lavers, *English Life and Leisure* (London: Longmans, 1951), pp.344-5
[81] Trefor M. Owen 'Chapel and Community in Glan-llyn, Merioneth' in Elwyn Davies and Alwyn D. Rees (eds.), *Welsh Rural Communities* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1960). [See also Owen's *Community Studies in Wales : An Overview* (1985), with 19th century photos, available at: *https://www.researchgate.net/publication/346319600_Community_Studies_in_Wales_An_Overview/fulltext/5fbece22458515b7976f6fd8/Community-Studies-in-Wales-An-Overview.pdf*]
[82] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.62/46.
[83] Owen, p.230.
[84] Owen, pp.193-4.
[85] Gill (1993 & 2003) p.66/49.
[86] Steve Bruce, (2026) *Contemporary Wales*, 23: p.219-39
[87] Clive Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving, and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015)
[88] Clive Field *Secularization in the Long 1960s: Numerating Religion in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017)
[89] Gill (1993 & 2003), Table 6.
[90] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London: Routledge, 2001).
[91] Brown, (2001) p.219.
[92] Gill, Haddaway and Long Marler, *JSSR* 3:3, 1998 and partly updated in B. Clements, *Christian Beliefs and Religious Debates in Post-War Britain*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

[93] Reported in William K. Kay and Leslie Francis, *Drift from the Churches: Attitudes Toward Christianity During Childhood and Adolescence* (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1996).
[94] James Hinton, *Mass Observers Making Meaning: Religion, Spirituality and Atheism in Late 20th Century Britain*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2022, p.11)
[95] David Goodhew and A.P. Cooper (eds), *The Desecularisation of the City* (London: Routledge, 2019).
[96] David Goodhew *Church Growth in Britain*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012)
[97] Clive Field, 'Churchgoing in London: The Statistical Record, 1830s to Present' in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Volume 77 Issue 2, April 2026, pp.332-372.
[98] Field, 'Churchgoing in London', p.361.
[99] Field, 'Churchgoing in London', p.361.
[100] This controversy was reported widely: see for example an 'outsider's view' at https://www.nytimes.com/1927/12/27/archives/the-new-prayer-book-reasons-for-the-revision-and-for-the-heated.html
[101] Leslie Paul, *The Deployment and Payment of Clergy* (London: Church Information Office, 1964) p.119.
[102] Paul, (1964) p.119.
[103] Andrew Chandler, *The Church of England in the Twentieth Century*: *The Church Commissioners and the Politics of Reform 1948-1998*, (Woodbridge: Boydell Press 2006).
[104] https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1976-05-05/debates/19c42805-9c0c-4956-9327-455ea06981f6/NewClause2
[105] (https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1976-07-26/debates/242e21dd-c81c-4982-926e-5cb2de66387f/EndowmentsAndGlebeMeasure)
[106] https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1978/nov/27/clergy-stipends#:~:text=The%20recommended%20national%20minimum%20stipend,of%20between%20£3%2C500%20and%20£3%2C800
[107] https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/1982-07-19/debates/4e97a9fb-f5a3-4c51-ae6f-b523f9c4bef7/EndowmentsAndGlebeMeasure1976
[108] Paul (1964) p.17.
[109] Paul (1964) p.171.
[110] Paul (1964) p.278.
[111] Gill (1993) p.279.
[112] Paul (1964) p.297.
[113] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-07/questions-notice-paper-july-2025.pdf
[114] *Working as One Body*, para 3.7.
[115] John Plender, 'The Unholy Saga of the Church's Missing Millions', *Financial Times* (11 July 1992).
[116] Terry Lovell\, *Number One Millbank: Church of England's Financial Downfall* (London: Harper Collins, 1997)
[117] https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukcm/1993/3/section/8/
[118] https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/written-answers/2002/feb/27/priests-compensation
[119] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/resources-publications-and-data#na
[120] https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021
[121] https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cpwjxx5eyn1o
[122] Gill (2003) p.149 and Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), chapters 4-6.
[123] Clive Field, 'Churchgoing in London: The Statistical Record, 1830s to Present' in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* Volume 77 Issue 2, April 2026, pp.332-372.
[124] E.g. Steve Bruce, *God is Dead* (Oxford: Wiley/Backwell, 2002) and *British Gods* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).
[125] Stephen Bullivant, *Mass Exodus: Catholic Disaffiliation in Britain since Vatican II*, (Oxford: OUP, 2019).
[126] Clive Field, *Counting Religion in Britain 1970-2020* (Oxford: OUP, 2022).
[127] Brown, (2001) chapter 6.
[128] Steve Bruce, (2020).
[129] https://evangelicalfocus.com/lausanne-movement/13872/christianity-in-the-uk
[130] David Voas and Laura Watt *The Church Growth Research Programme: Numerical change in church attendances: National, local and individual factors* (2014) available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-08/report_strands_1_2_rev2-from-cgr-website.pdf
[131] *Working as One Body*, 2.1.
[132] *Working as One* Body, 2.8.
[133] *Working as One Body*, 2.4.
[134] *From Lament to Action* available at: https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2021-04/FromLamentToAction-report.pdf

[135] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2015/16-january/news/uk/use-central-funds-to-subsidise-growth-not-decline-says-task-group
[136] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-24480878
[137] The figures are subject to the caveats discussed in our data appendix.
[138] From the Church Commissioners 2025 annual accounts.
[139] From the PGS annual accounts.
[140] https://parishresources.org.uk
[141] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-05/church-commissioners-for-england-annual-report-accounts-2025-final_0.pdf
[142] Simon Jenkins, *England's Thousand Best Churches* (Penguin: London,1999), p.viii.
[143] We are most grateful to Stephen Bullivant for supplying this information.
[144] https://committees.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/137419/pdf/
[145] *Working as One Body* para 2.38
[146] https://www.thetimes.com/article/fad54f6e-bd95-47ef-b00c-3f6f833daa4a?shareToken=4c28e4ddd7c3962b880a7d
[147] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/governance/national-church-institutions/church-commissioners-england/who-we-are/church-commissioners-links-african-chattel-enslavement
[148] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/news-and-press-releases/bishop-sarah-mullally-archbishop-canterbury-elect-responds-parliamentarians-letter-regarding-church
[149] Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics.*
[150] *Working as One Body* para 2.18
[151] https://www.chichester.anglican.org/parish-share/
[152] https://www.psephizo.com/life-ministry/what-is-the-problem-with-a-third-province-in-the-church-of-england/
[153] https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/net-zero-carbon-routemap
[154] See Letters to *The Times*, August and September, 2026.
[155] Leslie Paul, *The Deployment and Payment of Clergy* (London: Church Information Office, 1964) p.17.
[156] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Allen/Penguin,1966), pp.9-10.
[157] https://ixtheo.de/Record/1758202351
[158] David Martin, 'The Secularisation Question', *Theology* 76:630 (1973), p.86.
[159] David Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion* (London: SCM, 1967) p 76.
[160] See Steve Bruce, *Secularization: In Defence of an Unfashionable Theory* (Oxford: OUP, 2011).
[161] https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/religionglobalsociety/2019/03/professor-david-martin-1929-2019/
[162] https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn06705/
[163] Hartmut Rosa, *Resonance: A Sociology of Our Relationship to the World* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019) and first published in German in 2016.
[164] Both published by Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press,
[165] Rosa (2019) p.405.
[166] Rosa (2019) p.407.
[167] Rosa (2019) p.427.
[168] Rosa (2019) pp.431-2.
[169] https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/der2024_en.pdf, p.179.
[170] Rosa (2019) p.447.
[171] Rosa (2019) p.188.
[172] Hartmut Rosa 'The Idea of Resonance as a Sociological Concept', in *Global Dialogue*, July 9, 2018, accessible at: https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/the-idea-of-resonance-as-a-sociological-concept.
[173] Rosa (2019) p.268.
[174] Rosa (2019) p.280.
[175] Rosa (2019)
[176] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/resources-publications-and-data#na
[177] https://www.chrchtimes.co.uk/articles/2026/26-june/news/uk/joint-principal-named-for-theological-colleges
[178] https://www.churchofengland.org/media/news-and-press-releases/major-investment-local-churches-and-parish-clergy-ps16bn-three-year-national-spending-plans-unveiled
[179] Church Commissioners Annual Report 2025, financial note 4
[180] https://www.churchofengland.org/resources/diocesan-resources/ministry-development/formation/living-ministry
https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2025-12/living-ministry-wave-5-panel-survey-report-lord-for-the-years.pdf
[181] https://www.cambridge.org/core/services/aop-cambridge-core/content/view/23F683B90C025898EDF2BE754BF7C033/S0956618X00003239a.pdf/role_of_the_rural_dean.pdf

[182] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/data-services/resources-publications-and-data#na
[183] https://www.churchofengland.org/about/vision-strategy/funding-strategic-mission-and-ministry/smmib/lowest-income-communities-funding
[184] In 2000, annual reports generally included little other than governance and financial information. They have doubled in length by 2025, though it is far from clear how many people read them.
[185] G.F.A Best, *Temporal Pillars* (Cambridge: CUP, 1964).
[186] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/11-february/news/uk/fewer-dioceses-specialist-bishops-archbishops-confidential-paper-revealed-in-detail
[187] https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2022/18-february/news/uk/bishops-and-their-ministry-full-document
[188] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2026-06/gs-misc-1455-the-53rd-report-of-the-central-stipends-authority-2025.pdf
[189] https://www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2018-11/CCB_Memorials-in-churchyards_Sep-2016.pdf
[190] https://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetary-policy/inflation/inflation-calculator
[191] Gregory Clark *The Long March of History: Farm Wages, Population, and Economic Growth, England 1209-1869* The Economic History Review, Feb., 2007, New Series, Vol. 60, No. 1, pp. 97-135

Index

A

Abbeydore 10
advowsons 32, 67
All things Bright and Beautiful 17
Alnham 22
Amyand, Baronet 10
Archbishop of Canterbury 20, 23, 24, 37, 46
Archbishop of York 42, 64
Archbishops' Council 40, 41, 43, 58, 60, 66
Ardeley 23
Arnold, Matthew 27
Artificial Intelligence 6
Ashford 36
Austen, Jane 17

B

Bank of England 7, 68, 69
Baptists 19, 25, 28
Best, Geoffrey 14, 63
Birmingham 25, 34
bond 32, 67
Branxton 22
Brierley, Peter 39
Bristol 24
British Household Panel Survey 39
British Social Attitudes 39
Bromley 28
Brown, Callum 30, 39
Bruce, Steve 30, 38, 39, 54
Buber, Martin 56
Bullivant, Stephen 8

C

Cairns, D.S. 73
Cambridge 10, 12, 20, 24, 48
Canterbury 9, 23, 51
cathedrals 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 14, 18, 23, 24, 26, 33, 41, 42, 43, 45, 47
Catholic 21, 25, 29
Chandler, Andrew 33
Charity Commission 42
Chester 12, 19, 20, 23
Chichester 51
Christian Aid 49
Church Assembly 32, 38, 44
Church Commissioners ... 4, 14, 23, 24, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 49, 50, 51, 57, 59, 62, 66, 69
Church Growth Research Programme 40
Church Times 64
Clark, Gregory 10
clergy training 35, 41, 58, 59
CMS 49
Coddenham 14, 15, 16, 21
College of Bishops 64
Combe Florey 23
Companies House 42, 69
Corfield, Penelope 16
Coventry 30
Covid-19 ..... 39, 49
curate 10, 15, 16, 18, 59, 68
Custance, John 15, 16

D

Data Protection 43
Davie, Grace 54
deaneries ... 6, 42, 46, 47, 50, 51, 56, 58, 60, 63, 64, 66
Dioceses Commission 41, 63, 64
Dorchester 10

E

Ecclesiastical Census, 1851 ..... 20, 21, 25, 26, 28
Ecclesiastical Commissioners .. 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 32, 33, 35, 37, 41, 44, 57, 62
economies of scale 4, 47, 63
Edinburgh 45
Efficiency 47
Ellison, Gerald 33
Emmanuel Theological College 58
Evelyn, John 11

F

Field, Clive 8, 19, 30, 31, 38, 39
First Fruits and Tenths 13
First World War 28, 31, 32
Fisher, John 11
Francis, Leslie 31
Freedom of Information 43
From Lament to Action 40

G

General Synod . 4, 32, 35, 37, 41, 42, 44, 49, 50, 52, 66
George III 14, 15
Gilbert, Thomas 21
Gill, Robin 1, 5
Glan-llyn 29, 30
glebe ... 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 22, 24, 28, 29, 33, 34, 38, 50, 52, 57, 60, 67
Gloucester 44
Goodhew, David 31, 39
Great Exhibition 27
Great Exhibition of 1851 20

H

Hansard 33
Henry VIII 11
Hinton, James 31
Hume, Abraham 73

J

James, William 56
Jaspers, Karl 56

K

Keynes, J.M. 61

L

Le Fanu, W.R. 21, 22
Leeds 41, 42, 63, 69
Liverpool 20, 25, 26
Living in Love and Faith 50
Living Ministry 59
Localism 47, 48, 61
London 11, 12, 19, 23, 25, 28, 31, 39, 51, 53, 68, 74
Longe, John 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 21, 22, 57, 67
Lovell, Terry 36
Lowest Income Communities Fund 41

M

Malet, W.W. 23, 24
Manchester 20, 23, 63
Mann, Horace 20
Martin, David 53
Mass Observation social research 31
megabenefices 6, 21, 22, 32, 57
Methodist 19, 21, 25, 29, 39, 45, 48
Methodists 19, 25, 28, 31, 38
More, Thomas 11
Mudie-Smith, Richard 25

N

National Minimum Wage 68
National Redress Scheme 45
Nelson, Lord 15
Net Zero 52
New Towns 30, 38
Newcastle 25
Nonconformist .4, 18, 20, 21, 25, 26, 28, 29, 30, 31, 39
Notre Dame Cathedral 68

O

Office for National Statistics 44
Ordination of Women 35, 37
Orme, Nicholas 9, 10, 53
Owen, Dr Richard 11
Owen, Trefor M. 29, 30
Oxford 10, 20, 24, 48, 53, 75

P

parish council 57
Parish Giving Scheme 44, 64
parish share 37, 43, 58, 61, 67, 69
parsonage 9, 10, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 21, 22, 68
Pastoral Reorganisations 44
patron 9, 10, 13, 67
Paul, Leslie 32, 33, 34, 35, 53, 58, 60
PCC 32, 48, 57, 58
Pearson, John 12
pensions .. 16, 22, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 44, 54, 59, 64, 68
Pensions Board 43, 64
Pepys, Samuel 11
Plender, John 36
pluralism 14, 16, 18, 51, 58
pluralities 22
Population Census, 1901 28
Prayer Book Measure 32
Presbyterians 25, 31, 38
Project Spire 49, 50
property 'rights' 24
Provincial Episcopal Visitors 37, 69

Q

Queen Anne's Bounty 13, 14, 16, 18, 21, 22, 26, 28, 32, 33, 37, 41, 44, 50

R

Raikes, Robert 16
rector 9, 10, 12
Reformation 6, 7, 9, 12, 13, 31, 45
rent-charges 32, 67
resonance 31, 54, 55, 56
restorative justice 49, 50
Retail Prices Index 68
Ripon 23, 41, 63, 69
Rochester 11, 42
Roman Catholic Church 4, 7, 20, 31, 39, 45, 46
Roman CatholicCatholic 30
Romney Marsh 29
Rosa, Hartmut 54, 55
Russell, Anthony 14

S

Safeguarding 48
Same-sex relationships 50
Scotland 20, 25, 29, 45
sexual freedoms 30
Simeon, Charles 20
Singleton, Archdeacon 23
Smith, Adam 17
Smith, Sydney 23, 32
South Sea Company 50
speculative investments 35
St Olave, London 11
St Paul's Cathedral 12, 23, 68
Stobart, John 15
Stobart, Jon 15
Strategic Mission and Ministry Investment 44, 49
Sumner, John Bird 19, 20, 23, 46
Sunday School 19, 21, 26, 28, 29, 30, 39

T

Taylor, Charles 54
The Army and Religion 28
The British Weekly 25
Tithe Commissioners 22
tithes .. 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 22, 23, 24, 26, 28, 29, 32, 57, 67
Transparency 47
Turnbull Report 5, 6, 36, 40, 46, 47, 51

U

United Nations 55
USPG 49

V

van Straubenzee, W. 33
Voas, David 40

W

Wakefield 41, 42, 69
Wales 7, 9, 20, 21, 23, 28, 29, 30, 39, 45
Waterloo churches 45
Watt, Laura 40
Weston Longville 14, 16, 19, 21
Wickham, E.R. 73
Wilberforce, William 20
Wilson, Bryan 53, 55
Wilson, Richard 72
Woodforde, James 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 57
Working as One Body 5
Wren churches 12, 19, 45

Y

York 29, 31, 51