

Coping with Change

Tony Scrase

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COPING WITH CHANGE: THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY VICARS CHORAL OF WELLS

TONY SCRASE

INTRODUCTION

It is obvious that the religious changes of the 16th century must have placed great stress on a body such as the vicars choral. But there was much else going on. Even before Henry VIII's break with Rome the vicars were experiencing difficulties associated with falling numbers and declining income from rents. There were more subtle changes. Patterns of behaviour were altering. Individuals were becoming more self-assertive, a phenomenon seen as associated with the Renaissance.

In addition, the administrative framework was shaken before the systematic reforms began. To explain it is necessary to briefly outline the system. Vicars choral were nominated by the canon for whom they would deputise. They were approved by the dean and chapter for a year's probation with another vicar appointed as their 'hearer'. After a year, they were re-assessed with, from 1348, the other vicars entitled to give their views. If successful they were made perpetual although this life tenure was subject to the dean and chapter's disciplinary powers. Bishops had a more distant role although their periodic visitations could lead to comments or new regulations. Also, they presented new vicars to a house in the close, presumably reflecting Bishop Ralph of Shrewsbury's construction of the close using the site of a canonical house in his gift. From the late-13th century the vicars were expected to do more than sing. They also provided managerial help. Bishops could call on the services of two vicars but more significantly they provided the cathedral communar, escheator, keeper or warden of the fabric and sub-treasurer. The grant of corporate status to the vicars led to the appointment of more officers. There were two principals, five seniors (who the retiring principals selected to help them chose the next year's appointments), two receivers of whom the receiver general was the more significant and had to be backed by two sureties, three auditors and a steward. The steward served for a week and the post rotated around the

close. Principals, seniors, the receiver general and auditors were selected annually. Everybody was expected to take their turn as receiver general.¹ This and the rotating stewardship suggest an approach of sharing unattractive jobs. The same idea probably underlay the practice of allocating sets of properties to a group of vicars (or in the case of the Wareyn mass to two canons and a group of vicars). The last survivors then transferred the properties to another group.² It was also a practice that avoided the need to obtain a mortmain licence from the crown. The establishment of Bubwith's Almshouse in the mid-fourteenth century created another role, the warden, that was considered appropriate for one of the vicars.

The 16th century began with three absentee bishops. The last of these, Thomas Wolsey, subsequently turned his greedy eyes on the office of dean and its financial rewards. He made his illegitimate son Thomas Wynter dean although he was under age and abroad at the time. Later Thomas Cromwell made himself dean while under Elizabeth I there were three successive lay deans 1570–1602. Elizabeth was using the office to fund her diplomatic and legal services. At such times, more responsibility fell on the sub-dean and the most senior canon who presided over chapter meetings. In the medieval period the dean's vicar also assumed a significant role in the dean's absence and something of this was still apparent late in the 16th century.

THE FIRST 30 YEARS

The new century began in what seemed to be a familiar way. Vicars were still granted study leave or permission to go on pilgrimage.³ Also the dean and chapter were engaged in a periodic scrutiny of the vicars. Individuals were disciplined for abusive language, arguments that occasionally led to blows, neglect of duties and sexual lapses. There was also a more general warning about wandering

about during services, chatting and buying things from laymen. In fact, the full range of medieval complaints except for the extravagant dress that had attracted the disapproval of both bishops Ralph of Shrewsbury and Bekynton.⁴ But there were signs of change. Fights were becoming more violent. In 1504 John Braddon's many offences included carrying a long knife concealed under his clothing. In 1506 Walter Phillip and Thomas Prows were disciplined for fighting with long knives. This was not a matter of grabbing a penknife or the knife everybody carried to cut their food in the heat of the moment. Nothing paralleled it since Ralph of Shrewsbury's time when he complained of vicars wearing swords when they went into town. Then the swords were for use on townsfolk not on colleagues. Some were also unwilling to accept the public humiliation of penance. Braddon failed to attend, sending a derisory note saying he was busy and suggesting Canon Church did his penance for him. In 1510 William Paty, who had already been in trouble for fighting in the house of a 'suspect woman' in Estwells, was charged with absenteeism. He refused penance and quit.⁵

There were underlying signs of problems due to declining numbers and a shortage of persons suitable for administrative roles. The vicars' close was built to house 42. By 1377 after the plague outbreak the actual number was 37 plus one probationer. Numbers seem to have drifted down through the 15th century and Anne Crawford estimated them at about 24 in 1500.⁶ If that is so, they recovered somewhat reaching 29 by 1535⁷ and still being around 22 at the end of Edward VI's reign. However, regular listings are only available after 1550. Clearly, there was a shortage of vicars with ability to undertake administrative roles devised when some 40 vicars were available. Between 1500 and 1514 only two vicars held each of the roles of communar, warden of the fabric and sub-treasurer. Furthermore, two of these had been in post for years previously. John Fox was sub-treasurer from 1494/5 to 1508/9. Richard Pomeroy was warden of the fabric from 1488/9 to 1502/3. He was then replaced by John Orchard but resumed the role in 1506/7. He also had other duties. From 1467 to 1519 he was one of a group administering the Wareyn properties and in 1501/2 he was one of the vicars' principals. The chapter obviously realised the load he carried as in 1502 he was excused attending night services for good and diligent service, a favour usually granted to old and infirm vicars. He was about 60 but does not seem to have been infirm

as he lived for 20 years more. Also in 1503/4 they accepted his excuses when they had wanted him to be communar. The situation with the escheator was complicated by the custom of the vicars offering three candidates. In 1506/7 and 1507/8 the chapter tried two of the nominees who obviously did not suit. The third Thomas Weston was then tried and held the post until 1520/1.⁸

The reasons for falling numbers were complex. Partly it reflected the fall in population after the plague epidemics. This impacted on both numbers of potential vicars and the number of actual canons that provided the maximum number for them. Religious life had also changed with more emphasis on personal devotion. These factors led to a dramatic decline in numbers at monasteries. However, Harper-Bill demonstrated that there were more ordinations for the secular clergy.⁹ The vicars were, of course, secular but their life with its communal living, discipline and constant round of services had much in common with monastic orders. It may be there were also local factors. The city of Wells was passed its economic peak and may have been less attractive. Certainly, the once numerous chaplains of the parish church of St Cuthbert also fell away rapidly over this period.¹⁰

The vicars offered less to the ambitious. Rewards were falling in real terms and chances of advancement were fewer. Alternative careers were also opening up. The law rather than the church now attracted many younger sons. For those with a passion for music there were now more openings at Court, in great houses or in the choirs of the university colleges. This range of alternatives may explain another feature of recruitment, a failure to retain candidates. The data is only complete for the periods to 1514 and after mid-century, but of 168 persons taken on probation 31 do not appear a year later for consideration for perpetual status or at any later date. This is a wastage rate of over 18% and suggests a mismatch between candidates' expectations and what they found at Wells. There were also those who fell out for clear reasons. Thus in 1507 Gilbert Frauncey was rejected when 15 vicars testified that he lacked a competent voice and was of evil conversation. In the same year, the probationer John Harryes was disciplined for fighting Richard Paty in the house of a 'suspect' woman in Estwells. A month later he confessed to going there again, fighting and striking a man with his hand. He then vanishes from the records.¹¹

The recruitment problem probably explains why unpromising material was given another chance

after being expelled (although we cannot tell if they had outstanding voices). This involved them being taken on probation a second time. Results were mixed. Oliver Grendon was in trouble in 1504 when he was first suspended for neglect of duty and then confessed to laying violent hands on a colleague Hugh Voulez. Both were ordered to avoid the house of a suspect woman, Agnes Frere. Then, in January 1507, he was expelled for breach of the statutes notably by absenteeism. However, he was again admitted on probation in July. He was perpetuated in 1508 but allowed to resign later in the year after further breaches.¹² John Braddon seemed an even worse case. In 1501 he was disciplined for keeping company with a married woman, Joan Millard and going with her to 'suspicious places' despite warnings. He was also accused of abusing two canons. He submitted but was soon in further trouble for disobeying the sub-dean and abusing him. In 1504 he was accused of neglect and again associating with Joan Millard. He then became abusive and was suspended. He submitted nine days later but then fail to appear for penance and the knife incident came to light. He was expelled. In 1505 he formally resigned and abandoned his rights of appeal. This seems to have been an agreed action as he was readmitted on probation in 1508 and perpetuated in under a year. He seems to have reformed as his next disciplinary action was in 1533 when he lost his commons for failure to attend meetings. But he was forgiven on pleading his infirmity. His only later appearance was in 1534 as one of the vicars agreeing to an arbitration over the Christopher (see below).¹³

The pressures were made worse by the actions of the dean and chapter. They were also suffering from falling income. Extra tasks for the vicars choral could help save money. In the past organists and masters of the choristers might be vicars or might be employed separately. Thus, Robert Cator was a vicar but his successor Richard Hygons does not seem to have been. Cator merely received an extra 6s 8d p.a. for playing the organ while Hygon's contract provided for a stipend of £4 13s 4d and a house in the New Works valued at 26s 8d. When Richard Bramston replaced him about 1516 he was also reinstalled as a vicar and partly rewarded by a standard vicars' stipend while he had to live in a house in the close. When he also took on the role of clerk of works the chapter saved even more. This, his service as warden of the fabric and final bequest to the fabric fund suggests a strong interest in architecture. These activities and his know ability

as a musician suggest a Renaissance-man range of talents. His career was highly unusual but from his time the chapter looked to draw the organist and master of the choristers from amongst the vicars.¹⁴

Hygons and Bramston careers overlapped with two succentors, Henry Abyndon and Robert Wydowe, who were the first known music graduates at respectively Cambridge and Oxford. Their combined accomplishments suggest the high standard of music in the cathedral in this period despite difficulties and pressures elsewhere. Both Hygons and Bramston were known well beyond Wells with surviving copies of their major works found at, respectively, Eton and Cambridge. Both are ambitious five-part Marian antiphons. They involve a new incorporation of boys' voices into the polyphony and reflects an expansion of the numbers of choristers in contrast to falling numbers of vicars. The medieval six choristers had increased by 1507 when the chapter ruled that seven choristers should attend Matins on Double Feast days compared with two on ordinary days.¹⁵ By 1535 there were 13 choristers.¹⁶ Any reader wishes to hear what was involved will find that The Sixteen have recorded the Eton Choir Book of c.1510 and Hygons' *Salve Regina* features in Vol. 1 *The Rose and the Ostrich Feather*.¹⁷ It is complicated music, demanding good singers, fine choir training and careful preparation.

Turning to financial pressures the yield of the vicars' properties had been falling from c.1420. Moniers Lane had been entirely reduced to gardens. The town guild and chapter had responded to such problems by encouraging rebuilding. This was done by issuing leases with favourable terms, on occasion providing building materials and, mainly in the case of the chapter, undertaking redevelopment although in 1511 incoming guild councillors had to contribute towards the cost of rebuilding a High Street property.¹⁸ In contrast the vicars seem to have granted only two rebuilding leases prior to 1500. There was then a long gap from 1485 until c.1533 when their best urban property, the Christopher Inn, 35 High Street, was rebuilt. William Capron, vicar and another long-serving communar, seems to have been the driving force. The result was acrimony with a dispute between Capron's executors and the four vicars managing the property.¹⁹

A number of canons rebuilt chapter properties.²⁰ The vicars were generally less wealthy but did contain men who came from an affluent background or were able to accumulate funds. This can be seen in the way several in each generation were active in the local property market.²¹ But none of them tried

to benefit the vicars' estate besides Capron. Richard Pomeroy instead improved and embellished the vicars' hall while Bramston favoured the cathedral fabric and town burgesses.²²

As the century progressed the insidious pressure of inflation added to the financial difficulties.

To sum up, the early part of the century saw the vicars performing well at their key task. The musical standards established by Robert Cator and Bishop Bekynton continued. However, recruitment was a problem. More additional roles were demanded of the vicars than they had numbers at any one time. The willing or easily put upon found themselves performing several tasks. Finally, the financial situation was deteriorating.

THE YEARS OF DRAMATIC CHANGE 1535–1560

Initially, the break with Rome had little obvious impact. The canons and vicars of Wells took the oaths or signed the statements required. The fate of the London Carthusians soon showed that great faith and courage were required to defy the king. The first apparent impacts were side effects from the dissolution of the monasteries. In 1545 the vicars lost one of their best properties. It was 23 The Liberty. It had been the property of Muchelney Abbey. By 1469 they could no longer maintain it due to falling income. They surrendered it to the dean and chapter. The cathedral treasurer, Hugh Sugar, rebuild it at his own expense and issued ordinances for its use for the benefit of the vicars and the chaplain of St Saviour's Chantry. Then in 1545 the Earl of Hertford (the future Protector Somerset) seized it on the basis of his possession of the 'late monastery of Muchelney'. On Somerset's fall his later seizure of the bishop's palace was returned but this was to remain in crown hands until 1563.²³

When the monastic cathedrals were re-established no attempt was made to duplicate the vicars of the secular cathedrals. Instead they were staffed with singing men. These did not have to be in holy orders. Their qualification was their voices. By the 1550s lay vicars were appearing in Wells. Sometimes the vicars' records identify members as 'layman' or 'lay vicar' and more generally those who were priests were either described as 'clerk' or given the title 'Dom'. Laymen were free to marry so wives began to appear in the close. This process was intensified when priests were permitted to

marry from 1549. This created new disciplinary problems as the unfortunately damaged records of 1552 show.²⁴ There was also the potential for them to be a drain on inadequate resources. In 1557 during a period of shortages and high food prices the steward was forbidden to invite guests to meals and was ordered to keep vicars' wives out of the store-house, his office and the kitchen.²⁵

Lay vicars could hold all the offices of the close except principal that was usually reserved for priests. But there were exceptions. In 1550 the new principals are described as Richard Bramston and Dom John Hyll.²⁶ In 1553 when Bramston was under consideration again there was 'a scrutiny made for the reputation and acceptability of Master Richard Bramston'.²⁷ The issue was probably that he had never advanced beyond minor orders. But there were other possible objections. In 1508 he was ordered to become a sub-deacon or forfeit his place. Instead he moved to Bristol and came back in disguise to entice away the best chorister. Again, he had been permitted to wear lay clothes when operating as clerk of works. Also from 1531 Orme described him as mainly operating as a businessman.²⁸ In fact, he was approved with only George Huchyns, clerk, dissenting. Huchyns status was significant. If only priests were eligible his turn must have been approaching. In the event, he had to wait until 1556 while another layman, Bartholomew Blitheman, (discussed below) served two terms.

1547 was a key year. The government of the strongly Protestant Edward VI abolished prayers for the dead. Chantries and annual commemoration services were swept away and their income diverted to the crown. The vicars choral gained as an institution. They kept their properties but no longer had to perform the masses the donors had required. But individual vicars lost far more. They had been paid to perform these masses and a number of others. Also, commemoration services generally involved distributions of money to those participating. A significant part of their income vanished.

1547 also began to change the nature of the liturgy and music in the cathedral. Until that time the medieval system had persisted. There was a cycle of services at the eight canonical hours beginning with Prime at daybreak and ending with Matins and Lauds well into the evening. Between these there was a Marian mass in the Lady Chapel (a particular responsibility of the vicars since Bishop Jocelin's time²⁹) and a varying number of masses at the

various chantries and altars around the cathedral. These last had gone and a major transformation was completed in 1549. Now there were only three main services, Matins, Holy Communion and Evensong. Furthermore, Communion was held only once or twice a month. The Protestants who were now in charge saw preaching as the way to bring the congregation nearer to God rather than a beautiful liturgy. Singing was to be simpler and more accessible. Formerly, some of the vicars were likely to be singing at any part of the day. Now they had more leisure and could use it to gain other work to supplement their dwindling income and help support themselves and (often) wives and children.

There were obvious possibilities for employment such as teaching but the striking development at Wells was the appearance of the notary vicar. Such skills offered advantages both to the vicars as a group and the individual. More legal precision was needed in drafting documents and recording deliberations. It was an increasingly litigious age and royal communications needed particularly careful attention. In house skills were likely to cost less. The individual would gain some extra money and the chance of additional work in both the cathedral and the wider community.

The first example dates before the changes of 1547–9. John Smyth was organist by 1534. In 1538 the dean and chapter rewarded him for his work at the organ and in training the choristers. He was granted a chantry in All Saints' Chapel. For this extra income, he was expected to provide books of music for the choristers. Then in the vicars' appointments for 1541/2 he was selected as an auditor. Immediately afterwards he was granted 6s 8d p.a. as a notary's fee for recording the proceedings of the vicars. In 1552 he was one of the five seniors but soon after in Bishop Barlow's visitation he was acting as the bishop's commissary and the vicars had a new notary.³⁰

He was Bartholomew Blitheman. In January 1552, he was noted amongst the fellows by Andrew Thorne, notary. Thorne was another long-serving vicar. He had been principal and auditor and was at the time a long-serving communar. He went on to work as combined communar and escheator besides further terms as principal and auditor.³¹ So his service as vicars' notary may well have been a temporary expedient. Blitheman had been working for Thorne (when communar) in 1547/8. He went on to combine the roles of principal and notary in both 1554 and 1555. In 1556/7 he was also working as chapter scrivener and is last recorded as the vicars'

notary in March 1558.³²

From the mid-1550s a better count of vicars' numbers is possible. For many years, the escheator's accounts had ended in forms such as 'the escheator himself owes £4 5s 5½d out of which he has distributed between 38 persons having a whole year's share and one person with a quarter's share total £4 5s 3d. Remainder 2d in the escheator's hand which he is excused by the auditors.' The statements are complicated and often contain errors of arithmetic as Colchester highlighted in his editing.³³ Thorne, when escheator, made things more straightforward by naming the canons and vicars concerned. His first attempt is hard to understand as 13 vicars receive the same amounts as the canons but a further 14 receive half. Some of these departed and others became perpetual during the year. But some were in mid-career notably Thorne himself and Thomas Hooper.³⁴ However, from 1556/7 the form is clear. Part payments are generally by quarters and can be correlated with vicars who departed or were perpetuated that year. Occasional variations complicate matters. There was a reversion to the old single sum (with the usual faulty arithmetic) in 1564/5. Also, eighths of a year were used once and newly perpetuated vicars calculated at the full rate occasionally. Nevertheless, numbers can be found and also the degree of change (see table). These numbers can be supplemented in 1581 (when there were 14 vicars) and cross-checked in 1592 and 1593. In each of these years the vicars are listed when they considered major issues.³⁵ As in the writer's previous article on the vicars, the schoolmaster (although technically a vicar) is excluded. In fact, this linkage was lost sight of in the late-16th century and only rediscovered in 1606.³⁶

Mary's accession brought a total reversal in religion but most of the vicars continued. Of the 22 listed for 1556/7, 18 had been in place in 1553/4. Much of the difference can be explained by mortality, for example Richard Bramston died in spring 1554. Only one absence seems to relate to doctrine. This concerns John Lambert a senior figure who had served as principal in 1541 and 1542. But at some stage he had married and married priests were a particular target of the incoming bishop, Gilbert Bourne. Many were ejected. Others were humiliated, having their married dissolved or being forced to take vows of chastity in front of their wife.³⁷ Lambert does not seem to have waited for this. He may have followed Dean Turner into exile. He certainly left Wells. He leased St Thomas Street properties from the communar and these were

TABLE 1 – NUMBERS OF VICARS CHORAL BASED ON SURVIVING ESCHEATOR'S ACCOUNTS 1553–1601

Year	Total Number Paid	Full Payment	Part Payment			Estimated Average Number Through Year
			Died or Left	Perpetuated	Reason unknown	
1553/4	27	13	3	6	5	22
1556/7	22	22	–	–	–	22
1558/9	15	12	–	3	–	14
1559/60	18	18	–	–	–	18
1560/1	17	13	3	–	1	14
1561/2	16	14	–	2	–	15
1568/9	20	16	2	2	–	18
1584/5	15	12	3	–	–	13
1586/7	15	15	–	–	–	15
1587/8	12	12	–	–	–	12
1588/9	13	11	1	1	–	12
1589/90	13	13	–	–	–	13
1590/1	13	13	–	–	–	13
1591/2	15	13	–	2	–	14
1592/3	15	13	1	1	–	14
1593/4	15	13	–	1	1 (Lane)	14
1596/7	14	13	1	–	–	13
1600/1	13	13	–	–	–	13

said to be in his wife's hands in 1554. However, he returned on Elizabeth's accession and had a final term as principal in 1562.³⁸ One should not assume that all change under Mary was of this sort. Later in 1557 one of the principals, John Piddesleigh left to become a monk at re-established Westminster Abbey.³⁹ There was no reversion to an all-priest group. Lay vicars continued. When the Wellesley mass was revived in July 1557 it was decided that 10 lay vicars should assist in the singing 'to impose the least burden on the Priest Vicars'.⁴⁰

Bishop Bourne seemed to realise that the return to a full cycle of services sung in Latin meant that the vicars needed more financial support. Soon after his arrival he leased them a field in his park adjacent to Southover and called Waterleaze. He did this with a remission of £20 from the market level fine of £50. The management of this new asset was done in the traditional way. He granted the lease to one vicar, Michael Burton, who transferred it to four colleagues. Managing groups of four (already seen in connection with the Christopher)

seem to have become the norm with fewer vicars available. The vicars then sublet it at a good profit. This arrangement continued until the Ecclesiastical Commissioners took over in 1866.⁴¹

THE ELIZABETHAN AGE

Once again, the vicars show great continuity. The longest serving, Thomas Fudge, had received his house in the close in 1525 so he had served through all the changes of direction.⁴² Another four had been in post by 1542 while four were appointed under Edward VI. Seven had been appointed under Mary. Lambert had now returned and there was one new appointment, William Lyede, the organist.

Under Elizabeth I Protestantism return and services were reduced to three. So, vicars again had time to look for other employment to supplement inadequate incomes. In this situation, it is noticeable that vicars were more inclined to move on. Thus, Walter Nowell moved to Salisbury

cathedral and Elwy Bevan first to Bristol and then the Chapel Royal.⁴³ This was a period of greater stability but by the final two decades of the century signs of strain were apparent. There were rising tensions both within the vicars and between them and the chapter. In part the tensions represented religious differences as a Puritan party emerged within the church. The differences with the chapter concerned both continuing chapter demands on the dwindling number of vicars and a struggle to control admissions.

Before moving on to examine these matters and other major issues, it is convenient to describe the career of Walter Cely which illustrates many themes. He had been perpetuated late in Mary's reign. His career then followed a familiar path. He was receiver general in 1560/1 and an auditor in 1571/2. Then in 1573 he is described as a notary and agreed his fee of 5s p.a. for working for the vicars. He was also an auditor and serving as receiver general in place of John White. In 1575 he was all of a principal, an auditor and the notary showing that modern scruples about potential conflict of interest were lacking. He had become a priest by then. He was principal again 1576–8.⁴⁴ In May 1578, the chapter charged him and the other principal, John Gibson, with refusing to admit Richard Jonson into the community and to the table of the vicars despite the chapter having approved him on probation. Gibson capitulated but Cely insisted that he was personally unwilling to receive Jonson. He was found guilty of contumacy. The sentence to lose a month's recreational time was scarcely harsh. (Jonson duly took the oath before the vicars nine days later but did not go on to be perpetuated. Perhaps he found his reception too frosty).⁴⁵ In October Cely was in further trouble with the chapter. They decreed that he should not serve in any other church except the cathedral. In December, they were more specific. He had been leaving divine service in the cathedral to go to St Cuthbert's. He was not to repeat this on pain of deprivation. His reaction was to quit.⁴⁶ The chapter seem to have realised his merits nevertheless as he was appointed warden of the Almshouse in 1588 and held the post until 1592 (and probably his death). He appeared once more in the chapter's records in 1591 when he reported to them that Joan Mullins (see below) had done her penance. Whether he was acting as a notary or an official of St Cuthbert's is unclear.⁴⁷

The general disciplinary record shows many similarities to what was described above. Vicars were still prone to arguments that could turn violent.

Some also found it hard to accept punishment. Thus in 1573 Richard Sowte was fined for stirring up a quarrel with Oliver Perse. Then in 1575 Perse was fined for insulting John Ruge, junior, and Ruge for striking him. Perse was involved in another quarrel in 1576 when the probationer John Howell was found guilty of provocation.⁴⁸ But there had been more extreme events in 1575. John Amerye had been admitted on probation in January 1574. In November, his colleagues fined him for breach of the statutes. Then in the New Year he was summonsed before the chapter and charged with striking a fellow with a dagger in the churchyard. His reply was that he was not a vicar and could not be punished by the chapter who immediately dismissed him.⁴⁹

Some of the quarrels seem to have had religious issues at their heart. This is most likely in the case of Thomas Rumsey. He was admitted on probation in 1566. In 1570 there was a hearing on his quarrel with Matthew Nailer and in 1573 he was deprived by his fellows in light 'of all outrages, troubles, slanders, perjuries' he had contrived and in accordance with the injunctions of Bishop Berkeley. Behind this must have lain religious differences. Rumsey must have been the otherwise unnamed vicar who fled to Douai with Canon Bridgewater after the latter was accused of recusancy. No other vicar disappeared from the records at the time. In the circumstances, Richard Sowte was brave to dissent from the decision.⁵⁰

Religious differences in both the chapter and vicars may have led to disputes over admissions. This seems the likely explanation of the puzzling case of Thomas Fisher. In 1575 he was perpetuated despite the canons considering him being split three/three and the majority of vicars testifying to his musical incompetence.⁵¹ It may also lie behind Cely's objections to Jonson and three later cases when in 1579 John Taylor was disciplined for refusing to install Richard Evan, in 1582 when Bevan refused to install William Taylor and in 1587 when Robert Marwood refused to install John Sheppard.⁵² But there was also growing tension between the vicars and chapter over control of admissions that formed part of a set of disputes that led to the two Royal Charters of 1591. Doctrinal differences may also lie behind some of the occasions when vicars were accused of rudeness to the canons. For example, there was an incident in 1576 when John Gibson was charged. It began with Sub-dean Bisse expostulating with him for omitting the litany from the service. The only other

reasons for such an omission seem to be extreme carelessness or blatant corner-cutting.⁵³

Other disciplinary matters include the familiar failure to pay bills and the undergraduate-like pranks of younger members such as Fisher bringing his horse into the close. It is interesting that the banned recreational activity was now tennis compared with backgammon in Ralph of Shrewsbury's time.⁵⁴ Disciplinary action also demonstrates that some part-time activities were not acceptable. In 1591 Roger Rugge was ordered to give up keeping an alehouse and selling ale. Such problems were not unique. In 1604 one of the singing men at Norwich was in similar trouble and the problem of inappropriate uses in that cathedral precinct much worse.⁵⁵ Cases of sexual misbehaviour had vanished with the appearance of married vicars but now began to revive, perhaps a result of more censorious attitudes associated with the growth of a Puritan wing in the church. In 1591 Hugh Pound *alias* Sugar was found guilty of incontinence with Joan Mullin. In 1593 Thomas Everett, junior, was charged with adultery with his maidservant and making her pregnant. He tried to delay matters by failing to appear before the chapter. The result was that he was twice excommunicated and an order for his arrest issued. He finally appeared and submitted. His excommunication was lifted but he was dismissed from the cathedral.⁵⁶

The deteriorating financial system compelled some attention to the estate. In 1563 the vicars were able to regain 23 The Liberty. The sequence is interesting. On successive days, the crown granted it to Cecilie Pykerell, widow, of Norwich. She conveyed it to Richard Robertz her heir and he granted it to Thomas Fudge and Thomas Hooper. The rapid transfers must have been prearranged. Fudge and Hooper were then the vicars' principals and both had been in place when the house was seized. They in turn followed the usual practice and granted it to a group of four vicars.⁵⁷ Then in about 1570 something was done about Moniers Lane. The land to the east of the lane was partly used to create two new plots fronting Chamberlain Street.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, nothing survives to show who took the initiative. The vicars had a pond and physick (or herb) garden at the northern end of Tor Street. In the 1591 Charter, it is described as a pond or building plot let to one of the vicars, John Clark junior. He then built a series of small cottages (modern 5 to 8). On later leases, he is described as both vicar and gentleman suggesting that he had independent means.⁵⁹ The success of subletting Waterlease

(where they paid the bishop £1 13s 4d p.a. and initially received £7 but later £13)⁶⁰ led them in 1586 to lease 11 St Thomas Street from St John's Hospital, Bath paying them 7s 2d p.a. but subletting for 14s.⁶¹

We can now turn to the events of the 1590s. The friction between the vicars and chapter together with a number of other issues, for example did they retain their right to own property, led to the petitions for new Royal Charters. The petitions created exaggerated worries on both sides. Seven vicars, the majority recent admissions, wrote to the Attorney General, expressing fear of a scheme to sever them from the chapter and stating their disagreement. Crawford quotes a letter from the chapter expressing concern at the vicars' influence and the disastrous results likely to follow.⁶² In fact, the government commissioners were thorough and fair. Two new charters were issued on the same day in 1591. Broadly, the vicars' constitution was confirmed to be as described above. Their right to their estate was confirmed and their properties listed. The main novelty was a ruling on numbers. The minimum was to be 14 and the maximum 20. This required a small increase as numbers had been 12 or 13 for the previous four years. They did then move up for the rest of the 1590s but were back to 13 in 1600/1. The changes to the chapter were more dramatic. Power now resided in the dignitaries and six to eight residential canons. Non-residents kept an honorary title (and their prebends).

However, this did not solve all the issues. The main problem was the shortage of people to fill necessary roles. The vicars were short of priests and this led to difficulties in finding principals. As a result, Humphrey Bayley, junior, was perpetuated in 1589 and selected as principal in 1590. Apart from Bayley and his colleague, Thomas Welstead, the only possible candidate was John Hewlett. His disciplinary record was not ideal and he seems to have been pursuing a post at Court at this time.⁶³ The vicars had also been unable to find a potential notary from within their ranks and were having to pay for expertise. They therefore tried a different approach. From 1592 they employed John Lane, who had undertaken various recording or accounting roles, around the cathedral. Now he was admitted as a probationary vicar. Unfortunately, his voice was inadequate as the majority of vicars accepted in a discussion with the chapter in 1594 (although mysteriously he received a half-payment in the 1593/4 escheator's accounts).⁶⁴

The chapter was also suffering from shortages

of suitable persons. Sub-dean Phillip Bisse, the recipient of much vicars' rudeness, combined that post with that of succentor which made him responsible for much detailed supervision of the cathedral music. At various times, he had other roles added, thus in 1580/1 and 1581/2 he was warden of the fabric and one of the chapter's auditors.⁶⁵ The chapter had accepted that the vicars could no longer provide wardens of the fabric, who were now drawn from the canons, or communars. This more vital role was sometimes performed by canons but increasingly they had to hire legal expertise. This was expensive. In 1587/8 the lawyer, Bartholomew Haggatt, received a fee of £10. This contrasts with the £1 paid to Andrew Thorne in 1556/7. Thorne also collected a number of smaller sums but again they do not compare with the load of freestone Haggatt was allowed to take from the Camery.⁶⁶ It is understandable that the chapter thought it must make a stand on the remaining offices traditionally performed by the vicars. They comprised the escheator in administration and the tabular in cathedral services.

The crisis came in October 1592. The chapter tried to force the offices on to two unwilling recipients, John Clark, senior, as escheator and Nicholas Clun as tabular, threatening them with deprivation if they did not conform. Principal Welstead issued an inhibition threatening legal action. He in turn was ordered to stop or face deprivation. Welstead went back to the vicars and returned with his fellow principal, Humphrey Bayley. They stated 'neither they nor any of the rest of the vicars choral aforesaid doe intend to doe any service in the said Cathedral Church'. The chapter replied with a warning about rebellion, conspiracy and disobedience. Next day there were signs of second thoughts and negotiations. Welstead and Bayley confessed to having sinned in bearing and stated their intention to serve at divine services. The posts were again offered to Clark and Clun who declined and implore the chapter to offer the offices to somebody else. Hugh Pound *alias* Sugar

was then elected escheator and Humphrey Bayley tabular.⁶⁷ It seems likely that Bayley played a part in this settlement. Next year, when he was appointed a curate of the cathedral he was described as personal vicar of the dean.⁶⁸ This link to the absentee dean gave him leverage.

The vicars passed a series of resolutions that stated their right to approve any of their numbers' acceptance of extra offices with the bishop having powers of arbitrating on disputes. Some matters such as details of admissions and the use of vicars for baptisms and communion in the cathedral were still ongoing when the vicars' Act Book breaks off with a gap in surviving records to 1624.⁶⁹

CONCLUSIONS

There was continuity through the century in the sense that a college of vicars choral was still in place in 1600 with broadly the same constitution and with the same estate. But little else survived. The vicars were no longer all in holy orders. They were in practise part-timers participating in a greatly reduced number of services. In real terms, they were much poorer and many now had a family to support. What the records cannot tell us is how stressed the mid-century vicars were in having to come to terms with a sequence of religious changes and the alterations created in what they were required to do.

This account is far from exhaustive. There are still many areas for scrutiny, for example, the family links within the vicars and between them and both the canons and townfolk. The Everets are a case worth detailed study. Many occur in the town records and they also provided a careless sacristan and two vicars one of whom was dismissed for adultery (indeed this latter may also be the ex-sacristan). Then there is the mysterious case of Robert Everet described as a former vicar and hanged in chains in 1569 but known only from the town records.⁷⁰

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Act Book</i>	L. S. Colchester (ed.) <i>Act Book 1541–1593 of the Vicars Choral of Wells</i> Wells, 1986.
<i>Communar's Accounts</i>	L. S. Colchester (ed.) <i>Wells Cathedral Communar's Accounts 1327–1600</i> Wells, 1984.
<i>Documents</i>	L. S. Colchester (ed.) <i>Documents 1348–1600 of the Vicars Choral of Wells</i> Wells, 1986.
<i>Escheator's Accounts</i>	L. S. Colchester (ed.) <i>Wells Cathedral Escheator's Accounts 1480–1600</i> Wells, 1988.

HMC <i>Cal. I</i>	W. H. B. Bird and W. P. Baildon (eds.) <i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Volume I</i> Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1907.
HMC <i>Cal. II</i>	W. H. B. Bird and W. P. Baildon (eds.) <i>Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Dean and Chapter of Wells Volume II</i> Historical Manuscripts Commission, London, 1914.
<i>Miscellany</i>	A. Watkins (ed.) <i>Dean Cosyn's Manuscripts and Wells Cathedral Miscellany</i> SRS 56, Taunton, 1941.
<i>SDNQ</i>	<i>Notes and Queries for Somerset and Dorset.</i>
SHC	Somerset Heritage Centre.
SRS	Somerset Record Society.
<i>Valor</i>	J. Caley and J. Hunter (eds.) <i>Valor Ecclesiasticus Volume I</i> London, 1810.
WCA	Wells Cathedral Archives.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ *Miscellany* 140-7; A. J. Scrase 'Who were the Vicars Choral of Wells 1200-1380, *SANHS* 158, 38-40.
- ² HMC *Cal II* Ch. 483 649, Ch. 538 659, Ch. 675 684-5. Chs. 742-3 699.
- ³ HMC *Cal. II* 157, 161, 173.
- ⁴ HMC *Cal. II* 162, 166, 179, 199, 205, 212, 213; *Miscellany* 23, 147.
- ⁵ HMC *Cal. II* 201, 205, 207, 221: *Miscellany* 23.
- ⁶ A. Crawford *The Vicars of Wells* Wells, 2016, 32.
- ⁷ *Valor* 136-9.
- ⁸ HMC *Cal. II* 197, 206, 210.
- ⁹ C. Harper-Bill *The Pre-Reformation Church in England* London, 1989, 47.
- ¹⁰ A. J. Scrase 'The Medieval Priests of St Cuthbert's, Wells and their Housing' *SDNQ* Vol. 37 Part 379, 269-80.
- ¹¹ HMC *Cal. II* 190, 205, 206.
- ¹² HMC *Cal. II* 159, 163, 176-7, 199-200, 203, 207-8.
- ¹³ HMC *Cal. II* 144, 146, 162-3, 179, 182-3, 207, 209, Ch. 752 701.
- ¹⁴ HMC *Cal. II* 205, Chs. 749-50 700-1; F. L. Harrison *Music in Medieval Britain* London, 1958, 425-8; N. Orme 'Two Tudor Schoolmaster-musicians' *SDNQ* Vol. 31, Part 311, 1980, 19-26; L.S. Colchester 'The First Thousand Years' in L. S. Colchester, D. Tudway Quilter and A. Quilter *A History of Wells Cathedral School* Wells, 1985, 22-3; Crawford *Vicars* 31-4; F.W. Weaver (ed.) *Somerset Medieval Wills 1531-58* SRS 21, Taunton, 1905, 154.
- ¹⁵ HMC *Cal. II* 205.
- ¹⁶ *Valor* 128
- ¹⁷ Coro COR16026.
- ¹⁸ A. J. Scrase *Wells: the anatomy of a medieval and early modern property market* Bristol, 1993, 49-51; D. G. Shaw *The Creation of a Community* Oxford, 1993, 48-54; A.J. Scrase and J. Hasler (eds.) *Wells Corporation Property* SRS 87, Taunton, 2002, 9-10.
- ¹⁹ HMC *Cal. II* Ch.711 692, Ch. 752 701.
- ²⁰ HMC *Cal. II* 165, 175-6, 213, 222; *Escheator's Accounts* 280; S. Bates Harbin *Somerset Enrolled Deeds* SRS 51, Taunton, 1936, 9.
- ²¹ HMC *Cal. II* Chs. 733-5 697.
- ²² Crawford *Vicars* 35-6; Weaver *Medieval Wills* 154.
- ²³ HMC *Cal. II* 260, Ch. 691 688, Ch. 694 688-9.
- ²⁴ *Act Book* 11-2.
- ²⁵ *Act Book* 15.
- ²⁶ *Act Book* 10.
- ²⁷ *Act Book* 12.
- ²⁸ HMC *Cal. II* 205, 219-20, Ch. 749 700; Orme 'Two Tudor Schoolmaster-musicians' 21-2.
- ²⁹ HMC *Cal. I* 254, 377; Scrase 'Who were the Vicars Choral' 38.
- ³⁰ HMC *Cal. II* 249; *Act Book* 5, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12.
- ³¹ *Act Book* 5-14, 16.
- ³² *Act Book* 10-6; *Communar's Accounts* 210, 248.
- ³³ *Escheator's Accounts* 238.
- ³⁴ *Escheator's Accounts* 313; for Hooper see *Act Book* 7; *Escheator's Accounts* 338.
- ³⁵ *Escheator's Accounts* 317-8, 335; *Act Book* 42, 56-7.
- ³⁶ Scrase 'Who were the Vicars Choral' 31; HMC *Cal. II* 352.
- ³⁷ H. Maxwell-Lyte (ed.) *Bishops' Registers 1518-59* SRS 59, Taunton, 1940, xiv-xv.
- ³⁸ *Act Book* 5, 6, 20; *Communar's Accounts* 234.
- ³⁹ *Act Book* 15.
- ⁴⁰ *Act Book* 15-6.
- ⁴¹ HMC *Cal. II* Ch. 779 706; *Documents* Ch. 15 7, Ch. 22a 9-11.
- ⁴² Maxwell-Lyte *Bishops' Registers 1518-59* 42.
- ⁴³ *Documents* Ch. 21a 9; Crawford *Vicars* 45.
- ⁴⁴ *Act Book* 27, 29, 33; *Escheator's Accounts* 328.
- ⁴⁵ *Act Book* 37-8.
- ⁴⁶ *Act Book* 38-9.
- ⁴⁷ *Act Book* 48, 52; WCA AH/E/397-8, AH/E/400-2.
- ⁴⁸ *Act Book* 29, 32, 36.

- ⁴⁹ *Act Book* 31-2.
- ⁵⁰ *Act Book* 24, 26, 30; SHC D/D/breg/15 f18; Crawford *Vicars* 47.
- ⁵¹ *Act Book* 32.
- ⁵² *Act Book* 39-40, 43, 48.
- ⁵³ *Act Book* 39.
- ⁵⁴ *Act Book* 29, 31, 34, 38; *Miscellany* 23.
- ⁵⁵ *Act Book* 52; R. Gilchrist *Norwich Cathedral Close* Woodbridge, 2005, 202.
- ⁵⁶ *Act Book* 52, 57-8.
- ⁵⁷ WCA DC/E/14/3a, DC/E/14/3b; HMC *Cal. II* Ch. 791 708, Ch. 799 709.
- ⁵⁸ *Act Book* 33; *Documents* Ch. 22 11.
- ⁵⁹ SHC DD/CC 116013 15, 19, 23; WCA VC/E/3/4 19.
- ⁶⁰ *Act Book* 19; SHC DD/CC 116013 68-9.
- ⁶¹ *Documents* Ch. 22b 12; SHC DD/CC 116013 65-7.
- ⁶² *Act Book* 50-1; Crawford *Vicars* 49.
- ⁶³ *Act Book* 43-4, 48-50.
- ⁶⁴ *Act Book* 53, 55, 58; *Escheator's Accounts* 333, 335, 356.
- ⁶⁵ HMC *Cal. II* 302-3.
- ⁶⁶ *Communar's Accounts* 248, 293; HMC *Cal. II* 303.
- ⁶⁷ *Act Book* 53-4.
- ⁶⁸ *Act Book* 55.
- ⁶⁹ *Act Book* 55-9.
- ⁷⁰ D. Shilton and R. Holsworth (eds.) *Wells City Charters* SRS 46, Taunton, 1932, xxix, 157, 159, 162, 168, 169; *Act Book* 25, 50, 57, 58; HMC *Cal. II* 309; Crawford *Vicars* 47.