

FAITH, PLACE AND PEOPLE IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND



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Essays in Honour of Margaret Spufford

Edited by
Trevor Dean, Glyn Parry and Edward Vallance

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*In memory of Margaret Spufford, who transformed the social history
of early modern England*

And to Peter Spufford (1934–2017).

Francis Spufford: 'He was her collaborator, supporter, and always first sounding-board for ideas; and vice versa. Shortly before he died, my father was talking to the Dutch historian Jan Lucassen about what a revolution in his thinking it had been when he first read Braudel in the 1950s. And then he added firmly, "But of course the biggest intellectual influence of my life was Margaret."'



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Seventeenth-Century Sussex', *Textile History* 43 (2012), 5–22; 'Giles Moore's Clothes: The Clothing of a Sussex Rector, 1656–1679', *Costume* 49 (2015), 32–54; "I Think myself Honestly Decker": Attitudes to the Clothing of the Rural Poor in Seventeenth-Century England', *Rural History* 26 (2015), 17–33; "They Tell me they were in Fashion Last Year": Samuel and Elizabeth Jeake and Clothing Fashions in Late Seventeenth-Century London and Rye', *Costume* 50 (2016), 20–41.

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Record Office Abbreviations

ERO	Essex Record Office
ESRO	East Sussex Record Office
HRO	Hampshire Record Office
KAC	Kendal Archive Centre
KHLC	Kent History and Library Centre
LMA	London Metropolitan Archives
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
LRO	Lichfield Record Office
PCC	Prerogative Court of Canterbury
PRO	Public Record Office
SHC	Surrey History Centre
TNA	The National Archives, Kew
WCRO	Warwickshire County Record Office
WHC	Wiltshire History Centre
WSRO	West Sussex Record Office

The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend John Perkins: Scenes of Clerical Life in Late Seventeenth- Century England*

Steve Hindle

In her fictional description of a dinner party at 'Milby' (Warwickshire) in the late 1820s, the novelist George Eliot presents pen portraits of six clergymen around the table who may be regarded as archetypes of the clerical profession: the hospitable minister, at home entertaining guests in his well-appointed vicarage; the clerical magistrate, invariably feuding with his quarrelsome congregation; the misanthropic evangelical, always running into debt; the intellectually ambitious Cambridge graduate, with aspirations to be a poet; the energetic pastor, fastidious in his self-presentation; and the frustrated incumbent of an impoverished rural living, destined for a successful career as a metropolitan lecturer. A seventh clergyman seated in the Milby vicarage dining room is, however, singled out by Eliot for praise as 'the true parish priest':

the pastor beloved, consulted, relied on by his flock; a clergyman who is not associated with the undertaker, but thought of as the surest helper under a difficulty, as a monitor who is encouraging rather than severe, [and who] has the wonderful art of preaching sermons which the wheelwright and the blacksmith can understand; not because he talks condescending twaddle, but because he can call a spade a spade, and knows how to disencumber ideas of their wordy frippery.

* This chapter would not have been possible without the extraordinary generosity of Matthew Enger and Heather Falvey. As part of his hugely significant contribution to the 'Social Topography' project from which this chapter is derived, Matthew designed and created the map and the pew plan which appear here as Map 3.1 and Figure 3.1. As Research Assistant on the British Academy grant which facilitated the completion of the data collection process, Heather transcribed all the extant probate material and much of the litigation relating to the parish of Chilvers Coton, and her tabulation of the wills and inventories has been invaluable for this and many other working papers. I am also grateful to audiences at The Huntington Library for their enthusiasm and curiosity. I regard it as a privilege that John Demos commented so warmly and constructively on an earlier draft.

Indeed, Eliot's 'true parish priest', Martin Cleves, stands as the ideal type of country parson, a man who might be described in the rough idiom of Warwickshire labourers and artisans as an 'uncommon knowin', sensible, free-spoken gentleman; very kind and good natur'd too'.¹

Eliot's vivid characterisation of the ideal parish clergyman is particularly resonant in a volume of essays dedicated to the memory of Margaret Spufford, not least because it so elegantly weaves the minister into the social and economic fabric of the local community in which he lived. Although Spufford's work on the history of religion is primarily associated with her project to establish the descent of rural dissent, her commitment to demonstrate 'the importance of religion in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries' invariably led her back to the relationships between clergymen and parishioners *as people*.² Although famous for her insistence that religion was primarily a matter of faith and was therefore essentially to be understood as a spiritual relationship between believers and their God, she was always keen to locate religious practice in its social and economic context.³ Eliot's allusions to those wheelwrights, blacksmiths, artisans and labourers whose spiritual needs clergymen were expected to meet would surely have been music to Spufford's ears. Doubtless she would have shared the recent scepticism, discussed below, that the standards of the nineteenth century are not the most appropriate by which to judge the pastoral conduct of seventeenth-century clergymen, but she would have certainly applauded Eliot's emphasis on the importance of effective communication between a vicar and his flock.

Until very recently, analyses of the Anglican church at the end of the seventeenth century (and, indeed, into the eighteenth) have adopted the Victorian stereotypes of corpulent curates and snoozing congregations.⁴ The received wisdom is that the church hierarchy – somnolent, complacent and negligent as it was – was rewarded with the congregations that it deserved: uninterested, disaffected and listless. The most notable exceptions are Donald Spaeth's groundbreaking analysis of the church 'in an age of danger', a volume which comes closest to offering a systematic exploration of the social fabric of the church in the parish; and Jeremy Gregory's forensic discussion of

¹ 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton [1857]', in George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, ed. Thomas A. Noble (Oxford, 2000), pp. 46–47. First published in 1857, the story is set some three decades in the past. For the context in Eliot's career, see Kathryn Hughes, *George Eliot: The Last Victorian* (London, 1998), pp. 177–202.

² Margaret Spufford, ed., *The World of Rural Dissenters, 1520–1725* (Cambridge, 1995), esp. ch. 1, 'The Importance of Religion in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries'.

³ Margaret Spufford, 'Puritanism and Social Control?', in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 41–57; Margaret Spufford, *Contrasting Communities: English Villagers in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Cambridge, 1974), pt 3.

⁴ Mark Goldie, 'Voluntary Anglicans', *The Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 977–90.

churchmanship in the diocese of Canterbury.⁵ Based on rigorous analysis of the ecclesiastical records of Wiltshire and of Kent, Spaeth and Gregory independently reach broadly similar conclusions. They cumulatively present a vision of the Restoration parish in which clerical absenteeism was still very frequent; in which church attendance was by no means regular; in which the clergy and the vicarages in which they lived were gradually becoming gentrified; in which the clergy were more often than not born, and frequently married, into clerical dynasties; in which book learning and borrowing were increasingly common among clergymen; and in which questions of agrarian management, especially the issue of whether the new crops of 'alternative agriculture' were titheable, were growing ever more resonant. In all these respects, it might be argued, the social and economic distance between the vicarage and the cottages, and perhaps even the farms, with which it was surrounded was growing ever greater.⁶ Although most previous commentators had followed nineteenth-century critics in interpreting this type of evidence as an index of the abject failure of restoration churchmanship, Spaeth in particular takes a more optimistic, perhaps even 'consumerist' line. Indeed, he argues that the congregations of the Restoration were by no means a church of passive and deferential lay people: where clergy were absent, they were not generally that distant and might serve the cure reasonably well even when they were non-resident; where parsons were becoming more affluent 'squarsons', their congregations generally benefited from their increased social standing and authority, especially when their clergy could deal with landowners more or less as equals; when the clergy owned books they frequently lent them to members of the congregation; tithe payments might be interpreted by parishioners as conditional on the provision by ministers of adequate clerical services; and the laity had come to expect effective preaching to such an extent that ministers knew to anticipate scandalously thin congregations when they did not offer a sermon. In all these respects, then, Spaeth's new orthodoxy on parish religion is that congregations might very effectively hold their clergymen to account and could make life very uncomfortable when those clergymen failed to fulfil their pastoral duties.⁷

Spaeth's attempt to re-evaluate the quality of the parish ministry is the logical point of departure for the following discussion of the relationship between one particular clergyman and his flock in late seventeenth-century England. After all, the investigation of the church in its local context might be thought the best means of rehabilitating it, not least because a more demotic and responsive ministry seems likely to emerge from such

⁵ Donald A. Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger: Parsons and Parishioners, 1660–1740* (Cambridge, 2000); Jeremy Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform, 1660–1828: Archbishops of Canterbury and Their Diocese* (Oxford, 2000).

⁶ Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 30–58, 133–54; Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform*, pp. 69–101, 146–77.

⁷ Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 254–9.

a micro-historical analysis.⁸ The minister in question here is the Reverend John Perkins (1638–91), who served as the vicar of All Saints in Chilvers Coton near Nuneaton in north-east Warwickshire from 1680 until his death. The historian of lay–clerical relations is singularly well placed to characterise Perkins’s relationship with his congregation, because he happened to be the incumbent of a parish that has come to be recognised as one of the most remarkably well documented of all seventeenth-century rural communities. Chilvers Coton was the parish of residence of Sir Richard Newdigate (1644–1710), the second baronet of Arbury, whose estate overshadowed it and whose ambitions to collect information about his tenants, resources, rights and obligations culminated in 1684 in a massive five-volume manorial survey.⁹ Three features of Newdigate’s survey in particular are of inestimable value as we seek to place John Perkins in the spiritual, social and economic networks of Chilvers Coton: first, the surveyor Thomas Hewitt’s map of the more densely populated north-easterly part of the parish (known as Coton Town), completed in June 1684;¹⁰ second, the churchwardens’ listing of the owners and occupants of all the pews in the parish church, probably drawn up in November 1684;¹¹ and third, an occupational ‘census-type listing’ of the names, ages and professions of each of the 780 residents, spread across 176 households throughout the parish, finalised and engrossed in early December 1684.¹² Each of these sources would be remarkable in and of itself, but taken together, and supplemented by other sources including the relevant probate material and ecclesiastical court records, they present an unrivalled opportunity to observe lay–clerical relations ‘in motion’ as Perkins interacted with his congregation both within and beyond the nave of All Saints. They also resonate closely with the type of evidence with which Margaret Spufford self-evidently loved engaging, especially in her focus on ‘poverty portrayed’ in the Staffordshire parish of Eccleshall; and, more tangentially, in her own

⁸ See the various essays in Jeremy Gregory and Jeffrey Chamberlain, eds, *The National Church in Local Perspective: The Church of England and the Regions, 1660–1800* (Woodbridge, 2003).

⁹ Steve Hindle, ‘Sir Richard Newdigate and the “Great Survey” of Chilvers Coton: Fiscal Seigneurialism in Late-Seventeenth-Century Warwickshire’, in *William Dugdale, Historian, 1605–86: His Life, His Writings and His County*, ed. Christopher Dyer and Catherine Richardson (Woodbridge, 2009), pp. 164–86. And see Steve Hindle, ‘Below Stairs at Arbury Hall: Sir Richard Newdigate and His Household Staff, c.1670–1710’, *Historical Research* 85 (2012), 71–88; and Steve Hindle, ‘Work, Reward and Labour Discipline in Late Seventeenth-Century England’, in *Remaking English Society: Social Relations and Social Change in Early Modern England*, ed. Steve Hindle, Alexandra Shepard and John Walter (Woodbridge, 2013), pp. 255–80. The survey survives as WCRO, CR136 (Newdigate Papers), V13 (manor of St Johns); V12, V101, V109 (manor of Griff and Coton); V122 (manor of Arbury Moorbarn).

¹⁰ WCRO CR136/M14.

¹¹ WCRO CR136/V12, pp. 81–83.

¹² WCRO CR136/V12, pp. 64–73.

conjectural comments about the context in which Sir Richard Newdigate's survey was commissioned.¹³

Through spatially-sensitive nominal record-linkage of these sources in the Chilvers Coton archive, it is possible to reconstruct the relationship between John Perkins and his congregation in so far as it is represented, first, in the seating arrangements in All Saints church as they were visible to him as he preached from the pulpit; second, in the vernacular architecture and material culture of his vicarage in comparison to the living conditions of the cottages, houses and farms with which it was surrounded; and third, in the context of his obligations to visit the sick and dying in the parlours and bedchambers of households throughout the parish. Taken together, these three views *from the pulpit, in the vicarage and around the deathbed* represent scenes of a clerical life which was, as we shall see, characterised by a distant, somewhat austere mode of pastoral conduct, and beset by family tragedy. The personal fortunes of the Reverend John Perkins, like those of the Reverend Amos Barton, the protagonist of the first story in Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, were sad indeed, and his failure to engage his congregation not only stands in marked contrast to the clerical achievements of his predecessors and successors at All Saints, but suggests also that the problems faced by the Restoration clergy were 'personal and psychological' rather than structural or systemic.¹⁴ Only by weaving the individual history, character and style of the clergyman into the fabric of his local community can the cultural dynamics of Restoration churchmanship be meaningfully delineated and analysed. So we must start with the Reverend Perkins himself, reconstructing his social and economic status as it was recorded in Sir Richard Newdigate's 'Great Survey' of Chilvers Coton.

The clergyman, his household and his economic status

Those were the days when a clergyman could hold three small livings, starve a curate a-piece on two of them, and live badly himself on the third.¹⁵

In December 1684, John Perkins described himself as forty-six years of age and was living with his family in the vicarage immediately to the west of All Saints church, at the far eastern end of the parish of Chilvers Coton (Map 3.1). He therefore lived on the geographical periphery of the community, with only the church itself and three other households (one of them empty) lying between his residence and the parish boundary with neighbouring Attleborough a half-mile to the east. The households most distant from the vicarage lay just

¹³ Margaret Spufford, *Poverty Portrayed: Gregory King and the Parish of Eccleshall in Staffordshire in the 1690s* (Keele, 1995), 13–14. See Hindle, 'Sir Richard Newdigate and the "Great Survey" of Chilvers Coton', pp. 175–77.

¹⁴ See Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, p. 8.

¹⁵ Eliot, 'Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', p. 7.

over a mile to the north-west on the Wash Lane boundary with Nuneaton; almost two miles southwards in the hamlet of Griff bordering on the coalmining parish of Bedworth; and four miles to the west on Nuthurst Heath, which extended into the adjacent parish of Arley. Overall, Perkins had pastoral responsibilities for some 780 souls living in 176 households, a population large enough to test his reserves of emotional and physical energy.¹⁶ Although the bulk, perhaps two-thirds, of his parishioners lived in the houses and cottages of Coton Town, straggling a mile immediately to the west of the vicarage, the middling farms in the west of the parish were scattered across the Arbury woodland, and visiting them with any frequency on foot would doubtless have worn out his shoe leather. It comes as little surprise, therefore, to learn that Perkins owned a horse (a mare valued at £3 10s), upon which he almost certainly perambulated the parish and beyond.¹⁷

The economic resources available to Perkins were, however, very slim. Chilvers Coton was by no means a prize living, valued at as little as £17, with associated rights in respect of its small glebe (worth a further £8) and of its small tithes (worth about £12).¹⁸ Perkins's income from tithe was therefore a very significant proportion of his assets, and the revenue stream might slow to a trickle when tithe payers were dilatory or recalcitrant. This unpredictable situation was compounded by the highly complex nature of the tithe arrangements, described in some detail by a parishioner in the late 1650s. Tithe was apparently payable in the form of wool, lambs, pigs, geese and calves. Lambs were usually payable at Mayday, the geese at Lammastide and the other livestock as they matured (the calves within two weeks of birth or when fit for the butcher, the pigs when three weeks old). Easter offerings included the cash payable on all the tithable crops and wool, a contribution of eggs, and a range of oblations payable at rates graduated by social and economic status: tuppence for every married person, tuppence for every servant, tuppence for every communicant, fourpence for every tradesman, fourpence for every ale seller, a penny for every garden and a penny payable for the use of tobacco.¹⁹ The small tithes included not only a tenth of the value of the relevant crops, but a halfpenny for every sheepskin sheared in the parish, a cumulative sum which must have been as difficult to calculate as it was to extract.²⁰ Like his predecessors, moreover, Perkins himself was only a bit-part player in the game of communal agriculture, for the vicarage itself had no associated common rights of the kind which might insulate

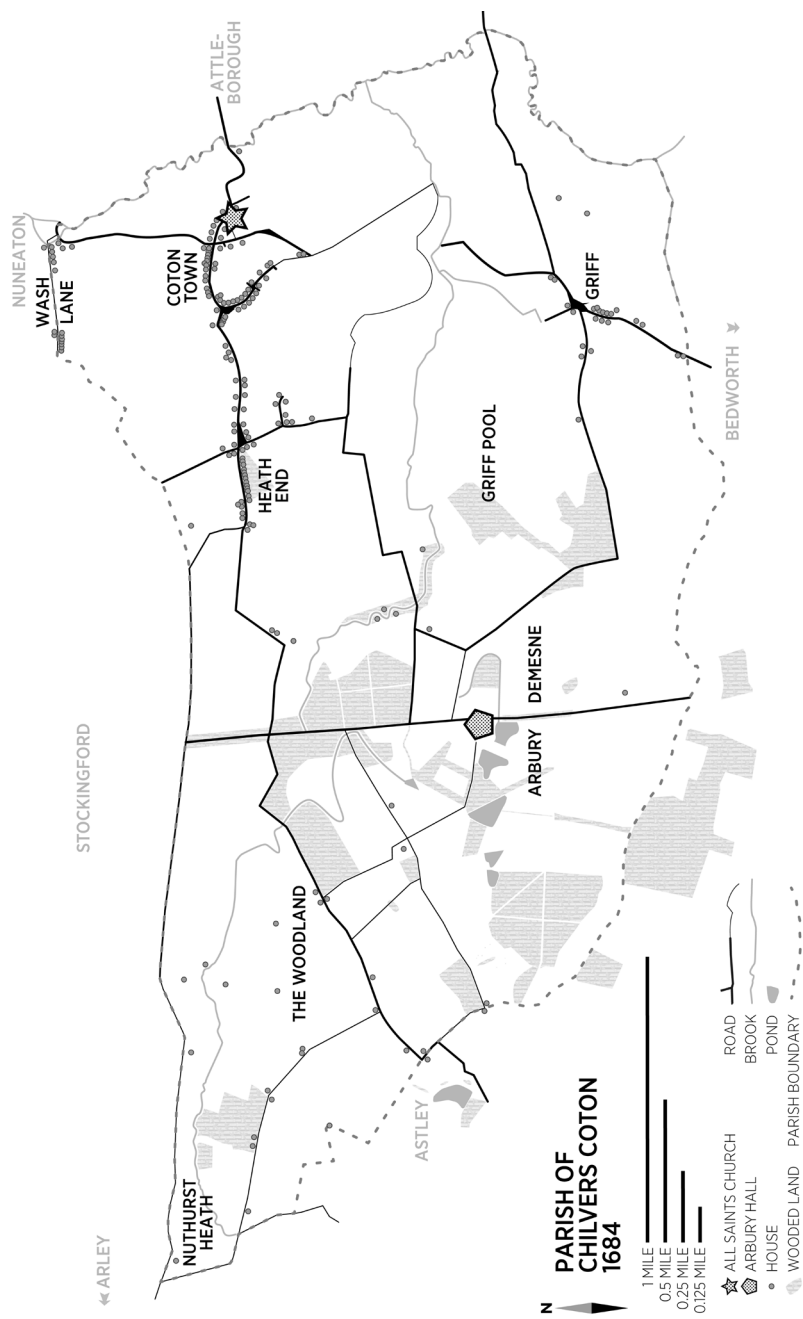
¹⁶ WCRO CR136/V12, pp. 64–73.

¹⁷ LRO, INV John Perkins of Chilvers Coton, clerk (29 Oct 1691).

¹⁸ J. L. Salter, 'Warwickshire Clergy, 1660–1714' (PhD thesis, 2 vols, University of Birmingham, 1975), I, p. 221. See the analysis of clerical poverty in Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 31–34.

¹⁹ TNA, E134/1657/Trin3 (John Barrows, clerk *v* William Archer, 1657), fol. 3 (deposition of Peter Holmes, husbandman).

²⁰ TNA E134/1657/Trin3, fol. 3 (deposition of Richard Paul, yeoman).



Map 3.1 Schematic map of Chilvers Coton, showing the church and vicarage in relation to the households in the parish.

the poorer households from indigence.²¹ It was little wonder, therefore, that over time sympathetic townsmen had done what little they could to augment these meagre resources: the parishioners had recently granted the vicar rent-free access to a small croft of town land nominally worth £1 10s a year, but amounting to less than ten acres (barely 1 per cent) of the strips in the common field system. Cumulatively, then, the vicarage, its garden close, its tithes and its communal strips were worth a mere £38 10s.²² The vicars of Chilvers Coton were accordingly beholden to their landlords the Newdigates for the small change of casual charity which constituted the currency of patronage. One measure of the insecurity with which they perforce lived is the fact that within the first eighteen months of his incumbency, Sir Richard Newdigate would be obliged to give Perkins's successor John Viall two separate cash gifts worth £13.²³

The relative poverty of the living would have been little surprise to Perkins, for he was a local man, hailing from Merevale, only six miles distant. He nonetheless endured a somewhat circuitous route to Chilvers Coton.²⁴ He matriculated at St John's College, Oxford, in the 1650s, and was ordained by 1655. By 1658 he was incumbent of the Warwickshire parish of Shustoke (only eight miles distant), and by 1661 was also serving the adjacent living of Maxstoke. At the time of his first marriage, to Anne White (which even the minister who performed the ceremony thought scandalous), his critics regarded him as the 'pretended vicar' of Shustoke, and it seems that his conformity immediately after the Restoration settlement was ambiguous at best. He was accordingly ejected from the two livings in 1662, although his young son Walter was buried in Shustoke in 1666. Perkins subsequently conformed, but remained closely associated with the radical vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, John Ward. Ward had a reputation as an unapologetic republican, regarding the regicide as 'the greatest mercie to us' second only 'to the sending of Jesus Christ', and when drawing up his will in 1678 he trusted Perkins sufficiently to ask him to deliver his funeral sermon.²⁵ By that time, Perkins had been licensed to preach

²¹ WCRO CR136/V109, pp. 73–77. See Steve Hindle, *On the Parish? The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England, 1550–1750* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 27–48.

²² WCRO CR136/V109, pp. 70–72; V12, pp. 61–63.

²³ WCRO CR136/V17, p. 197 (23 Sept 1693).

²⁴ The following account is based on Salter, 'Warwickshire Clergy', II, pp. 316–18 (entry nos. 581–83 for 'Perkins, John'), on the assumption that nos. 581 and 582 were in fact one and the same individual. The online Clergy of the Church of England Database (CCed person ID 57254) unhelpfully confuses no. 581 (John Perkins 1633–91, vicar of Chilvers Coton, 1680–91) with no. 583 (John Perkins 1653–1713, vicar of Hampton-in-Arden, 1682–1713): <http://theclergydatabase.org.uk/> (accessed 31 January 2017).

²⁵ Charles Severn, ed., *Diary of the Rev. John Ward, A.M., Vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, Extending from 1648 to 1679* (London, 1839), p. 122. TNA PROB 11/426, fol. 78 (will of John Ward, vicar of Stratford-upon-Avon, 1 June 1682). Salter, 'Warwickshire Clergy', II, pp. 425–26 (no. 785).

at Kingsbury (Warwickshire) and went on to serve (for Ward) as curate of Boddington (Northamptonshire), before being instituted as vicar of Chilvers Coton in October 1680. Perkins's latent nonconformity may actually have made him more acceptable to Newdigate, whose own political dissidence rendered him vulnerable to accusations of disloyalty to the regime.²⁶ By the time Perkins moved into the vicarage adjacent to All Saints late in the winter of 1680, he had remarried: his second wife was Elizabeth, aged thirty-eight, and living with them were four children – Ann aged fourteen, John aged twelve, Thomas aged ten and Elizabeth aged five – though whether they were his natural or stepchildren is unclear. Also co-resident with them, in an arrangement entirely characteristic of the complex early modern 'household-family', were two domestic servants, Mary Marshall aged twenty-three and Elizabeth Smith aged sixteen, neither of whom seems to have been a local girl by birth.²⁷

Nothing at all has survived of what John Perkins wrote: he published nothing, and there are no extant notes for, or on, any of his sermons. If he did, as requested, preach at the funeral of Joseph Ward in 1682, his eulogy never went to press. His political and ecclesiological vicissitudes during the 1660s and 1670s nonetheless suggest that his conformity was lukewarm at best. From this perspective, the spiritual and moral quiescence of Chilvers Coton is particularly striking: very little litigation of any kind originating in the parish seems to have reached the consistory courts at Lichfield, and what there was does not seem to have been generated by conflict between Perkins and his parishioners. Although there had been an almighty battle in the Court of Exchequer in the late 1650s over his predecessor's rights to tithe, Perkins himself does not seem to have used the law courts to protect his economic interests.²⁸ Nor does he appear to have faced a significant problem of dissent. There were no recusants in the parish, and the activities of the one dissenter, the Quaker shoemaker John Moore, who lived in Printoffs Farm a mile to the south in the hamlet of Griff, seem to have been effectively monitored by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities from as early as 1662 into the late 1680s.²⁹ The churchwardens made a few presentments for clandestine

²⁶ Steve Hindle, 'The Rye House Plot: The View from Arbury Hall' (unpublished paper).

²⁷ WCRO CR136/V12, p. 64 (household no. 7); Naomi Tadmor, 'The Concept of the Household-Family in Eighteenth-Century England', *Past and Present* 151 (1996), 111–40.

²⁸ TNA, E134/1657/Trin3: E134/1657/Mich10; see also Steve Hindle, 'A Warwickshire Community at Law: The Chilvers Coton Tithe Dispute of 1657' (unpublished paper).

²⁹ WCRO CR136/V12, p. 71 (household no. 138). S. C. Radcliff, H. C. Johnson and N. J. Williams, eds, *Warwick County Records* (9 vols, Warwick, 1935–64), 6, p. 141 (Easter 1662), 7, p. 254 (Easter 1682), 8, pp. 3 (Trinity 1682), 46 (Trinity 1683), 67 (Michaelmas 1683), 121 (Epiphany 1685); LRO B/V/1/82, fols 37v (17 Mar 1680), 63 (21 Oct 1680), 78 (6 May 1681); B/V/1/85, unfol. (28 Aug 1685). Moore was dead by November 1692, when his wife was presented in respect of the administration

marriage and initiated very occasional prosecutions for fornication, some of which resulted in a requirement that the offenders perform public penance in the chancel of All Saints, but for the most part Chilvers Coton gives the impression of a spiritually calm and morally upright environment.³⁰

A later case of sexual immorality implies, however, that whenever the authorities discovered moral lapses in the parish, they had generally followed a long-standing tradition of quiet admonition rather than exemplary punishment. In 1711, Mary, wife of James Paul, was presented in the consistory for adultery with Henry Beighton, and it was alleged that she had urged him to abuse his wife, sell his estate and disinherit his children.³¹ Mary had previously committed adultery with John Drought, and had also attempted a similar affair with John Bradnock, using his brother Henry, blacksmith to the Newdigate household, as a go-between. For these earlier offences she had been 'sharply chid' by Justice Chetwynd at Grendon, but apparently to no effect. It is striking that the magistrate, perhaps on the advice of Newdigate, had tried to contain the scandals through informal pressure, and that formal prosecution in the Lichfield consistory court resulted only when Mary's behaviour involved Beighton, another (highly respected) servant of the Newdigate family.³² Mary Paul's case is the exception that proves the general rule that there was an overriding preference, perhaps under the watchful eye of Sir Richard Newdigate himself, for dealing quietly with moral offences. That is not to say that the management of the pastoral concerns of Chilvers Coton was by any means an easy task: it was by Warwickshire standards a populous and economically differentiated parish, in which ministering to the daily needs of a diverse congregation must have tested John Perkins's skills to the limit.

This complex situation was compounded by the presence within the parish of a rival claimant to Sir Richard Newdigate's clerical patronage: Arbury Hall had its own resident chaplain, from 1682 Mr John Scot (a graduate of Queen's College, Oxford), with whom, according to the references in his journal, Newdigate frequently dined, discoursed and played chess. There were also

of her late husband's goods (LRO B/V/1/85, unfol., 28 Nov 1692). For Warwickshire Quakers more generally, see Judith J. Hurwich, 'Dissent and Catholicism in English Society: A Study of Warwickshire, 1660–1720', *Journal of British Studies* 16 (1976), 24–58.

³⁰ Fornication: LRO B/V/1/92, unfol., 18 July 1704 (Adam and Elizabeth Shaw; William Pain and his wife), 18 Apr 1705 (John and Sarah Elliott). Clandestine marriage: B/V/1/76, unfol., 15 May 1668 (Job and Jane Hamp); B/V/1/82, fol. 22v (7 Oct 1679, Richard and Mary Archer), 47 (20 May 1680, Cornelius and Elizabeth Carver); B/V/1/85, unfol., 13 Apr 1692 (John and Elizabeth Beighton, Thomas and Sarah Brown), 10 Nov 1693 (Nicholas and Ann Pain); B/V/1/92, unfol., 3 Mar 1695 (Edward and Mary Smith).

³¹ For Henry Beighton, see Alan F. Cook, 'Beighton, Henry (1686/7–1743)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2009), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/1964 (accessed 14 March 2017).

³² LRO B/C/5/1711/Immorality/Chilvers Coton; OD c Paul.

other clergymen with whom Newdigate socialised, including Dr John Inett of Nuneaton (who briefly preceded Scot as Arbury chaplain and whose sermons Newdigate purchased and occasionally copied) and William Wyatt of Astley (who acted as tutor to his children).³³ We occasionally catch Perkins, however, in conversation with Newdigate: they seem to have had a mutually satisfactory exchange in August 1683, for example, when they ‘discourt’ about the glebe lands in Greenmore Field, one of the three great common fields on the unenclosed Arbury estate. Perkins insisted that these six plots, which had apparently been a fairly recent charitable gift to the vicarage, were liable to tithe, and Newdigate quietly slipped him £10 in cash.³⁴ Whether in doing so Newdigate conceded the point or simply hoped to appease Perkins is unclear, but the gift would have undoubtedly made a difference to a clergyman of such limited means. Although they were both Oxford educated (Newdigate at Christ Church – from whence he failed to graduate – and Perkins at St John’s) and probably shared reservations about the high church policies of the Restoration establishment, the two men were far from social equals, and Perkins must have found it difficult to address Newdigate without doffing his hat, still less to look him in the eye. Indeed, it must have been some relief to Perkins that Newdigate so rarely occupied the family pew at All Saints, preferring instead to worship in his Grinling Gibbons-designed chapel at Arbury Hall. If Perkins’s social contact with Newdigate was irregular, he had far more regular opportunities to interact with the rest of his congregation.

The clergyman in the pulpit: preaching, exhortation and communication

After the prayers he always addressed to them a short discourse on some subject suggested by the lesson for the day, striving if by this means some edifying matter might find its way into the pauper mind and conscience – perhaps a task as trying as you could well imagine to the faith and patience of any honest clergyman.³⁵

³³ For Scot, see WCRO CR136/B1306A, unfol., 10 May 1682; 1306B, unfol., 5 and 16 Oct 1682; 1307F, unfol., 28 June and 14 July 1683. For Inett, see Vivienne Larminie, ‘Inett, John (1646/7–1718)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004; online edn May 2015), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/14381 (accessed 14 March 2017); WCRO CR136/B1305A, unfol., 10 June 1680; B1306A, unfol., 10 May 1682; John Inett, *A Sermon Preached at the Assizes Held in Warwick August the First, 1681* (London, 1681); and Newdigate’s copies of other Inett texts at WCRO CR136/B1221D, B2479. For Wyatt, B1305A, unfol., 6, 7 and 9 June 1680; B1305B, unfol., 13 June 1680; B1306A, unfol., 10 May 1682; B1306B, unfol., 17, 18 and 19 Oct 1682; B1307F, unfol., 28 June 1683, 2 and 14 July 1683; B1307D, unfol., 29 July 1683, 5 and 6 Aug 1683; B1307B, unfol., 11 and 14 Sept 1683. For domestic chaplains, see Hugh Adlington and Tom Lockwood, eds, *Chaplains in Early Modern England: Patronage, Literature and Religion* (Manchester, 2013).

³⁴ WCRO CR136/B1307D, unfol., 6 Aug 1683.

³⁵ Eliot, ‘Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton’, p. 21.

On 7 May 1684, the Reverend Perkins stood in the pulpit of All Saints church and preached a Mayday charity sermon to his congregation. This was probably the fourth time that Perkins had fulfilled this annual obligation, imposed upon him in the late 1670s by a charitable gift from the Reverend John Hinckley, the rector of Northfield (Worcestershire), who had been born in Chilvers Coton some sixty years previously.³⁶ 'Having a due, thankful and deep sense of the Christian privilege of consecration and of God's mercys and blessings', Hinckley had given 20s a year to support the vicar of Chilvers Coton in bringing his flock together in this way on the first Sunday in May. As for the theme of the sermon, Hinckley had been both generous and vague, noting that the vicar has 'a large field to expatiate in': not only 'the passion of our common saviour and preparation of the people of the worthy receiving of the sacrament of the body and blood', but also a reminder to the various constituencies in the congregation of their obligations to each other and to God. 'He may occasionally', Hinckley argued, 'minde *the riche* of charity and good works; *the poor* of piety, contentation, industry and justice, lest they neglect their immortal souls and be poore and steale; and *all* that they may perform the vows and promises of their baptismal covenant.' Whether Perkins chose to follow the donor's advice on this particular occasion is unclear, though at the conclusion of the sermon the Chilvers Coton churchwardens would have paid him 6s 8d out of Hinckley's gift and then used their discretion to distribute the remainder (13s 4d) in bread 'among the poore who are present at prayers and sermon'.³⁷ It may well be that the church was particularly full on 7 May: congregations were often scandalously thin when sermons were not preached, but the combination of a sermon and a charitable dole (which also coincided, under the terms of other testamentary bequests, on Good Friday and on Christmas Eve) probably drew even greater numbers than usual.³⁸ This ritual accordingly

³⁶ J. William Black, 'Hinckley, John (1617/18–1695)', in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004), www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/13334 (accessed 10 January 2017).

³⁷ WCRO CR136/c1138 (gift of John Hinckley). The gift is undated: the WCRO catalogue listing implausibly ascribes it to 1600, but since the donor is referred to as prebendary of Lichfield, a position he attained only in 1673, it must date from the mid to late 1670s. By 1684, it was listed in Newdigate's survey among the charitable uses of the parish; and was first inscribed onto its charity board in All Saints in 1696–97, which was repainted in 1735. At his death in 1695, Hinckley codified his gift in his will. WCRO CR136/V12, p. 58; V144, p. 277 (benefactors to the poor recorded); C1238a (Henry Beighton's Bill for Writing the Benefactors in Coton Church, 27 Aug 1735). TNA PROB 11/426/78 (will of John Hinckley, rector of Northfield, 8 June 1695). Newdigate had personal copies of two of Hinckley's publications: *Two Sermons Preached before the Judges of Assize* (London, 1657) and *Pithanelogia, or, A Perswasive to Conformity by Way of a Letter to the Dissenting Brethren* (London, 1670).

³⁸ WCRO CR136/V144, p. 6 summarises the doles that survived to 1655. For the bequests themselves, see LRO INV William Baker of Chilvers Coton, yeoman (4 Aug 1604), which originally stipulated Whitsuntide rather than Christmas Eve; INV Anthony Robinson of Griffie, gentleman (28 Apr 1640).

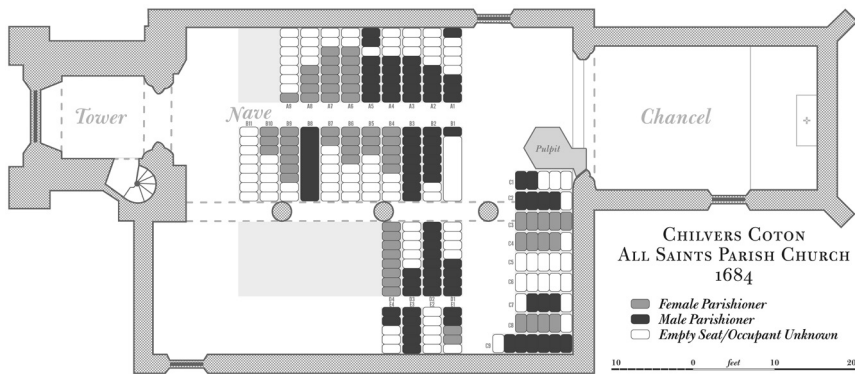


Figure 3.1 Pew plan of All Saints.

offers a remarkable glimpse of a late seventeenth-century clergyman fulfilling his pastoral obligations.

It is, accordingly, possible to envisage Perkins in the pulpit on 7 May 1684, and reconstruct the view that he enjoyed if he made eye contact with his congregation. All Saints Church only contained sufficient pews to seat approximately 150 individuals, though in three cases blocks of four pews were allocated to the residents of specific properties (Cuttle Mill, Jenners House and Temple House; see Figure 3.1).³⁹ Given that there were 176 households in the parish, it was clear that not even all the household heads, still less all the residents, could easily be accommodated in this space. Indeed, only seventy-three of the household heads listed in Newdigate's census were allocated individual pews, and even some of these were merely referred to as their landlord's seats. More surprisingly, three pews were set aside for specified groups of poor parishioners: the fourth seat in the second row of the middle aisle was, for instance, designated for the 'town house people', residents of the almshouse on the south side of Sea Lane (of whom there were as many as six in 1684); a group of seats on the ninth row of the north aisle was reserved for the 'poor women out of the Heath End and Wash Lane'; and, most strikingly of all, the tenth and final row of the middle aisle was allocated for 'the poor people of Griff'. The fact that so many of the pews could only be identified by the churchwardens in conjunction with houses that stood empty or were associated with freeholds where the owner was non-resident is, moreover, ample testament to the stickiness of a social map which was not fluid enough to accommodate the pace of residential turnover, still less of social change. Conspicuous by their absence, of course, were two other social groups. Neither Sir Richard nor Lady Mary Newdigate, nor their seven children (let alone their twenty-eight resident domestic servants), were allocated pews. This was no oversight, for (as we have seen) Arbury Hall (like many

³⁹ The following discussion is based on WCRO CR136/V12, pp. 81–83.

late seventeenth-century gentry houses) had its own chapel.⁴⁰ It is clear that all the Newdigate servants were expected to attend household services: fines were levied on those who failed to do so, like the shilling (almost 3 per cent of her annual wage) forfeited by Mary Pickard for neglecting the prayer service conducted at Arbury Chapel in 1698.⁴¹ This is not, of course, to deny that the Newdigates had a vicarious presence in Coton church: although the family's own funeral monuments were at Harefield, on the other Newdigate estate in Middlesex, at least thirty-nine (26 per cent) of the 150 pews listed were held by right of Newdigate in his capacity as landlord. Even more strikingly, moreover, the Chilvers Coton parish church pew plan represented a map of the *adult* community. Only one pew was allocated to an individual who was neither a household head nor the spouse of one: Ann, the fifteen-year-old daughter of the resident gentleman Robert Parker, sat alongside her mother in the fourth row of the eastern aisle (though both were seated two rows behind him). With the exception of a 'bench for boys' between the seventh and eighth rows of the central aisle, children were almost invisible in this spatial reconstruction of the social order. This omission is all the more striking given the peculiarly young age structure of the Chilvers Coton population, at a time when in general the national population was relatively old.⁴²

The allocation of seats in parish churches was politically freighted, especially at a time of profound social change, when status consciousness often found one of its more tangible expressions in the assertion of a right to sit in a particular pew.⁴³ The situation in Chilvers Coton seems to have been particularly fraught, but largely because of geographical rather than social mobility. The churchwardens of 1684 complained that the task of definitively allocating pews was impossible, not least because 'wee are crowded in our seates, or kept out of them by persons of other parishes who [should] have nothing to do in our Church'. This, they believed, was 'a very great prejudice to our Parish for it gives a pretence to some of our own parishioners to keep [away] from church,

⁴⁰ Felicity Heal and Clive Holmes, *The Gentry in England and Wales, 1500–1700* (London, 1994), pp. 376–77; J. T. Cliffe, *The World of the Country House in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT, 1999), pp. 35–37; Kenneth Fincham, 'The Roles and Influence of Household Chaplains, c.1600–c.1660', in *Chaplains in Early Modern England*, ed. Hugh Adlington and Tom Lockwood (Manchester, 2013), pp. 11–35.

⁴¹ Hindle, 'Below Stairs at Arbury Hall', pp. 82–83.

⁴² Hindle, 'Sir Richard Newdigate and the "Great Survey" of Chilvers Coton', p. 166.

⁴³ Christopher Marsh, '"Common Prayer" in England, 1560–1640: The View from the Pew', *Past and Present* 171 (2001), 66–94; Christopher Marsh, 'Sacred Space in England, 1560–1640: The View from the Pew', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002), 286–311; Christopher Marsh, 'Order and Place in England, 1580–1640: The View from the Pew', *Journal of British Studies* 44 (2005), 3–26. See Amanda Flather, *The Politics of Place: A Study of Church Seating in Essex, c.1580–1640*, Friends of the Department of English Local History, Friends' Papers 3 (Leicester, 1999). Richard Gough, *A History of Myddle*, ed. David Hey (Harmondsworth, 1981).

because they can have no room when they come here'. Indeed, they argued, 'if all our own parishioners should come to our church, there would not be room for them', let alone for strangers; and accordingly recommended swingeing fines on any person who claimed a seat in All Saints church who should more properly be worshipping in their parish of settlement elsewhere.⁴⁴

Crowded as his congregation certainly was, Perkins could easily have recognised several patterns as his parishioners clustered in their seats, and not only among the poor, the almspeople and the boys to whom specific pews were allocated. As we have seen, there was only one open dissenter in the community, the Quaker shoemaker John Moore, who had almost certainly been both alien and alienating to his neighbours for two decades or more: refusing 'hat honour', abhorring ostentation in dress (especially silk), resisting tithe exactions, disdaining honorifics to his betters, and perhaps even interrupting services.⁴⁵ Moore had a pew allocated him in right of his landlord (Newdigate himself owned Printoff's Farm), and the fact that it was in the second rank of the middle row less than a dozen feet from the pulpit meant that his presence or absence would have been conspicuous to Perkins. Moore was probably attending conventicles in north-east Warwickshire throughout the 1680s, but from 1689 was a member of the registered meeting house some seven miles distant at Baddesley Ensor.⁴⁶ Whenever Moore was persuaded to be present at All Saints, doubtless cussedly wearing his hat, the atmosphere would have been particularly charged, for he sat literally right next to the most prosperous silkweaver in the parish (his neighbor in Griff, John Painter) and immediately behind the son of a gentleman (Robert, heir to Mr John Parker).

Indeed, the two resident gentlemen in the parish would have been equally visible to Perkins. Mr Thomas Spratt sat in the front rank of the southernmost row, and John Parker himself only one row back in the eastern aisle. Similarly, all the leading tenants and ratepayers (including all the jurors of Newdigate's court of survey) would have been in Perkins's sight-line as he preached, and each could easily have caught his eye as they sat in pews which had almost certainly been occupied by their fathers and grandfathers before them. It is even more striking, however, that husbands and wives usually sat apart, the women normally behind their menfolk, and that wives and widows huddled together. Overwhelmingly, the church seating hierarchy was graded by gender and by age rather than simply by class. As a newcomer to All Saints in the early 1680s, therefore, Perkins may initially have found it difficult to recognise the key coordinates in the social map of Chilvers Coton, at least in so far as they were inscribed on the parish pew plan.

⁴⁴ WCRO CR136/V12, p. 83.

⁴⁵ Bill Stevenson, 'The Social Integration of Post-Restoration Dissenters', in Spufford ed., *World of Rural Dissenters*, pp. 332–59, esp. pp. 363–67; Adrian Davies, *The Quakers in English Society, 1655–1725* (Oxford, 2000), passim.

⁴⁶ *Warwick County Records*, 8, p. cviii.

Perkins would have preached to his congregation weekly, but probably administered communion to them only four times a year at most, and most likely only annually at Easter.⁴⁷ In the weeks leading up to Easter in particular, it was his duty to see that all those parishioners who were at odds with one another were reconciled so that they could partake of the Lord's Supper in a state of mutual love and charity. By 1684, at least one of those quarrels concerned the most prominent pew in All Saints church itself, the right to which was claimed by the gentleman Thomas Spratt, but challenged by the carpenter Richard Sutton.⁴⁸ Perkins also had additional obligations at certain times of the agricultural and clerical calendar. After the service on the Sunday morning immediately following the annual Michaelmas meeting of the Arbury manorial court baron, he had to read to the congregation from the pulpit the text of each and every one of the thirty-eight pains and orders through which the local agrarian community was governed and ordered: regulations designed for the benefit of the highways and of husbandry; to prevent the increase of the poor and ease the charge of them; for the preservation of the public peace; and for the ease of the bailiff of the manor.⁴⁹ If the pulpit was the principal medium of political communication in communities like Chilvers Coton, men like Perkins were the landlord's mouthpiece.

The clergyman in the vicarage: hospitality and study

The vicarage . . . seemed part of the common working day world.⁵⁰

The suggestion that over time there may have been growing social distance between the clergy and the congregation of Chilvers Coton is reflected in the increasing affluence of the clergy at the time of their deaths. For three of the clergymen who died in the parish in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries – Richard Paul (1665), John Perkins (1691) and John Viall (1732) – there are extant probate inventories. The increasing value of their moveable estate implies the increasing gentrification of the parish clergy during this period: the value of the goods owned by the vicar of Chilvers Coton increased from £35 in the 1660s, to £115 in the 1690s and to £163 in the 1730s. By 1670 the vicarage had five hearths, which meant there were only three larger houses in the whole parish, one of which was Arbury Hall itself (Figure 3.2). Indeed, the material circumstances of the vicarage appear to have improved significantly across these three generations. The vicarage had at least nine rooms in 1665, at least eleven in 1691 and at least fifteen

⁴⁷ Arnold Hunt, 'The Lord's Supper in Early Modern England', *Past and Present* 161 (1998), 39–83; Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 181–83.

⁴⁸ WCRO CR136/V12, p. 81.

⁴⁹ WCRO CR136/V101, p. 103 (order no. 35).

⁵⁰ Eliot, 'Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', p. 60.



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died in 1691, however, the study contained six stools (four covered with red cloth and two with green), two desks, one side cupboard, a little table and four shelves, some 'ticknall ware' (pottery) with some cheese (!), and a pair of small scales with six weights. This was obviously a space for accounting and calculation, but also for reading and reflection, since after his death two local clergymen were invited to supplement the usual inventory by appraising the value of his books. These they calculated to be worth £9 4s, and therefore constituted a small but significant proportion (8 per cent) of the total value of his inventory (over £115) and an even larger proportion (13 per cent) of the value of his consumer goods (approximately £68).⁵⁴ Important as books were to Perkins, nevertheless, he does not seem to have shared his learning with the children of his parishioners, since the task of catechising the young apparently fell to the village's resident schoolmaster Holmes, who lived a quarter of a mile to the west in Coton Town.⁵⁵

The impression of an austere, bookish and perhaps even alienated figure is reinforced by one other significant item in Perkins's inventory: at the time of his death he was owed over £16 in rent and almost £10 in unpaid tithes.⁵⁶ To be sure, tithe and tithe disputes are one of the great under-explored terrains of parish politics in seventeenth-century England, and there were doubtless thousands of other parishioners who were in arrears in their payments of their vicars' dues, and hundreds of clergymen who died wondering whether they would ever get paid. It is nonetheless striking that Perkins never sought to mobilise his rights at law in the way that his predecessor John Barrows had done, perhaps because he knew he could not count on the support of his congregation to speak well of him.⁵⁷

The clergyman and the deathbed: ministering to the sick and dying

As we bend over the sickbed, all the forces of our nature rush towards the channels of pity, of patience, and of love, and sweep down the miserable choking drift of our quarrels, our debates, our wouldbe wisdom, and our clamorous selfish desires.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ LRO INV John Perkins (1691).

⁵⁵ WCRO CR136/V12, p. 67 (household no. 54).

⁵⁶ LRO INV John Perkins (1691).

⁵⁷ Sir Simon Degge, *The Parson's Counsellor with the Law of Tithes or Tithing* (London, 1676); E. J. Evans, *The Contentious Tithe* (London, 1976); E. J. Evans, 'Tithing Customs and Disputes: The Evidence of Glebe Terriers, 1698–1850', *Agricultural History Review* 18 (1970), 17–35; Laura Brace, *The Idea of Property in Seventeenth-Century England: Tithes and the Individual* (Manchester, 1998); Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 133–54; Gregory, *Restoration, Reformation and Reform*, pp. 147–60.

⁵⁸ Eliot, 'Janet's Repentance', in *Scenes of Clerical Life*, p. 279.

All Perkins's pastoral obligations – preaching from the pulpit, distributing charity, administering communion, exercising hospitality in the vicarage – were shared by successive incumbents of Chilvers Coton, and some doubtless performed them more conscientiously than others. While it is clear that the nave and the vicarage were among the social spaces where relations between the clergyman and his flock were most conspicuously transacted, the most spiritually demanding site of pastoral activity was the deathbed. In this regard, it is particularly striking that John Perkins was rarely if ever present when his parishioners drew up their wills and made their peace with their neighbours and with their God. Even the Quaker John Moore witnessed the will of one of his neighbours, and stood shoulder to shoulder with Perkins's predecessor as vicar when he did so in 1655.⁵⁹ The absence of Perkins's name from every single extant will that was witnessed during his incumbency communicates a profound silence, testifying eloquently to his isolation.

To be sure, family and kin orbited the deathbed in the gravitational fields of the politics of the parish with varying degrees of filial or affinitive duty, but their movements not uncommonly overlapped and intersected with those of the clergyman, whose presence was supposed to help prepare the dying to meet their maker having not only reconciled themselves to their friends and to God, but also set their affairs in order.⁶⁰ In helping the aged and sick to die well, clergymen were often asked to witness the wills of those who were casting up their spiritual and financial accounts. Accordingly, of the 149 extant wills which were subject to probate in Chilvers Coton between 1590 and 1732, almost a quarter (24.8 per cent) were witnessed by the parish clergyman.⁶¹ This tendency was most marked during the early seventeenth century, when Arthur Oldam (vicar 1604–21) witnessed over half of the twenty-six extant wills drawn up during his incumbency; in five cases he was also asked to oversee the will, and in another (where he was not witness) he was appointed executor (and incidentally was also numbered among the beneficiaries). In two of these twenty-six cases, he not only witnessed and oversaw the execution of the will, but was also nominated as the appraiser of the testator's goods. And the range of testators with whom Oldam enjoyed relationships of such intimacy and trust were wide-ranging in both status and wealth, including a yeoman, a miller, three husbandmen, a petty-chapman and four labourers. Nor was this mutual respect between

⁵⁹ TNA PROB 11/256, fols. 221r–22v, Will of Francis Fayrfax of Griffie, yeoman (14 June 1656).

⁶⁰ Keith Wrightson, 'The Politics of the Parish in Early Modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Steve Hindle (London, 1996), pp. 11–46. Christopher Marsh, 'Attitudes to Will-Making in Early Modern England', in *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, ed. Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans and Nigel Goose (Oxford, 2000), pp. 158–75.

⁶¹ The sample is constructed from a search of probate material in both LRO and TNA.

clergyman and testator confined exclusively to menfolk: Oldam also acted on behalf of two widows and a spinster. And when his own time came, he reciprocated both the trust and the generosity: at his death in 1621, his estate was valued at £80, of which he bequeathed £5 to be distributed in bread to the poor on the day of his funeral.⁶²

Oldam's successors were only slightly less active in the politics of the deathbed: John Malen (1621–39), John Barrows (1638–63) and Edward Abbott (1665–76) witnessed 17 per cent, 31 per cent and 22 per cent, respectively, of the extant wills drawn up during their incumbency, and all three were regularly asked to appraise the goods of the deceased. All these men were therefore deeply embedded in the multiple folds of village relationships, and were present at the most significant of all the rites of passage that punctuated the life-cycle in early modern England, offering both spiritual counsel to the terminally ill and administrative advice to the bereaved. And it is clear in myriad other ways that they and their wives were active and popular members of the local community: when Thomas Edson died suddenly as a childless bachelor in 1664, he had a minimal estate, valued at only £3 10s (and even that small sum consisted of debts owed to him), but he bequeathed it all verbally on his deathbed to Ann, the wife of the Reverend John Barrows, and her children, because she had 'maintained' him in his need.⁶³ Barrows in particular seems to have been a scion of a prominent local family. He married the granddaughter of one of the village's most prominent residents, the gentleman Henry Mountford, and in 1645 both he and his children were substantial beneficiaries – in land and in movable goods – of Mountford's will.⁶⁴ When Barrows was forced to sue one of his troublesome and recalcitrant parishioners for non-payment of tithes in 1657, numerous residents of Chilvers Coton rallied round him to vouch for his conscientiousness and faithfulness in performing his pastoral duties: the yeoman Richard Paul claimed to have known Barrows for fourteen years as vicar of Chilvers Coton and believed him 'during all that tyme conscionably to have performed all the offices of a Godly Minister there'; and the nailer Richard Knight the elder never knew Barrows to be 'otherwise than a very peaceable man'.⁶⁵ Well connected and well liked, Barrows seems to have had little difficulty mobilising support and patronage when he needed it.

We may, then, gain some detailed insight into Perkins's relationship with his parishioners in the 1680s by comparing his own pastoral experience with that of his predecessors and immediate successor. It is striking that Perkins

⁶² LRO WILL Arthur Oldam of Chilvers Coton, 'clarke' (1621); INV Arthur Oldam (1621).

⁶³ LRO (nuncupative) WILL Thomas Edson of Chilvers Coton (?Jan 1664).

⁶⁴ TNA PROB 11/194, unfold., WILL Henry Mountford of Chilvers Coton, gentleman (21 Feb 1645).

⁶⁵ TNA, E134/1657/Trin3, m.2 (depositions of Richard Paul, yeoman; and Richard Knight, nailer).

appears never to have been invited or to have inserted himself into the death chamber, conspicuously failing to fulfil one of his more obvious clerical obligations: he neither witnessed a single will nor appraised a single inventory during his eleven years' residence in the vicarage. Since the pattern of will witnessing and inventory appraising suggests that the clergy of this particular Warwickshire village were fairly consistent in their pastoral proximity to their flock over the course of the seventeenth century, the complete withdrawal of the clergyman from the politics of the deathbed in the 1680s is especially noteworthy.

One wonders in turn how his parishioners may have responded when tragedy befell the vicar's own household. As we have seen, Perkins was already familiar with personal loss, having buried one son in the 1660s, but misfortune was to strike again only a few years later. In November 1688, his wife Elizabeth died in the vicarage aged forty-two, when their youngest child was only nine years old. It may be some indication of a seventeenth-century clergyman's reliance on domestic support that Perkins could not endure widowhood for long, and by October 1689, barely a year after Elizabeth's passing, he had remarried, taking as his wife the widow Katherine Millard. The couple did not, however, have long to enjoy their second chance together, for Perkins himself died in October 1691 at the age of fifty-three. His bereavement in 1688 may even have been a crisis point in his relationship with his flock. One wonders whether, as he grieved for his late wife at the graveside, Perkins was consoled by those very neighbours with whom hitherto he had had so little sympathy.

Epilogue: John Perkins and Amos Barton

When set alongside the successful pastoral records of his predecessors and his successors, all of whom seem to have been better connected to, more intimate with and more fully trusted by their parishioners, John Perkins seems to be that most marginal of figures, an alien in the local community that it was his duty to serve. The effective parish clergyman of the late seventeenth century, caught as he was in the inter-hierarchical position of being pastor on the one hand and neighbour on the other, was expected to reconcile the worlds of the study and the deathbed, of the pulpit and the perambulation, of the Oxbridge college and the manorial court. In sociological terms he was expected to be a 'broker', mediating between the concerns of an ecclesiastical hierarchy extending all the way to Lambeth Palace and those of the village community whose horizons were far more constricted and in many respects confined by the parish boundary.⁶⁶ If effective brokerage was the measure of success, then Perkins's decade-long sojourn in Chilvers Coton must be

⁶⁶ Clive Holmes, *Seventeenth Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1980), pp. 47, 52–55, 61–63.

judged a failure – and its most obvious signifier was this particular clergyman's absence from the households of his neighbours, and their absence from his.

And so, finally, we return to the expectations of a rural congregation so powerfully expressed in George Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*. The 'Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', from which Eliot's characterisation of the 'true parish priest' is taken, is set in the parish of 'Shepperton' on the outskirts of 'Milby', thinly disguised fictional renderings of the parish where she was born and educated: Chilvers Coton, to the immediate south-west of Nuneaton.⁶⁷ All Saints had changed little in the 170 years since the churchwardens had drawn up their pew plan, with the addition of a gallery (perhaps to accommodate a choir) the only significant architectural innovation. The allocation of the pews to specific land-holdings had remained constant.⁶⁸ As land agent to the Newdigate family and tenant of Griff Hill Farm, Eliot's father Robert Evans would (like generations of Newdigate tenants before him) have occupied its associated pew in All Saints, on the front row of the aisle just to the north of the pulpit, with the young Mary Ann sitting three rows behind in one of the five pews reserved for the women of the household.⁶⁹ From this vantage point she would throughout her childhood and teenage years have heard the Good Friday preaching of John Hinckley's Mayday sermon and witnessed the distribution of its related bread dole.

Shepperton/Chilvers Coton was, she wrote, 'a parish large enough to create for the clergyman and parish officers an external necessity for abundant shoe leather and an internal necessity for abundant beef and mutton, and poor enough to require frequently priestly consolation in the shape of shillings and sixpences'.⁷⁰ As for All Saints church itself, it had an 'outer coat of rough stucco', 'a red tiled roof' and 'heterogeneous windows patched with desultory bits of painted glass'. Its chancel was 'adorned with the escutcheons of the Oldinport [i.e. Newdigate] family', and there were 'inscriptions on the panels of the singing gallery, telling of benefactions to the poor of Shepperton, with an involuted elegance of capitals and final flourishes'.⁷¹ Among them, doubtless, was Dr Hinckley's gift of a Mayday sermon and bread dole. There were no benches, but rather 'large roomy pews, round which devout church-goers sat during lessons', 'trying to look anywhere else than into each others' eyes'.⁷²

⁶⁷ Carol Martin, 'Rural Life', in *George Eliot in Context*, ed. Margaret Harris (Cambridge, 2013), pp. 257–58.

⁶⁸ WCRO CR136/C1159 ([?late 17th c.] specifications for a gallery at All Saints); Eliot, 'Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', p. 6. See Spaeth, *The Church in an Age of Danger*, pp. 232–37.

⁶⁹ Caroline Dakers, 'Land Agents: Fact and Fiction in the Long Eighteenth Century', in *The Land Agent in Britain: Past, Present and Future*, ed. Carol Beardmore, Steven King and Geoff Monks (Cambridge, 2016), pp. 59–86, esp. pp. 77–84; WCRO CR136/V12, pp. 81–83.

⁷⁰ Eliot, 'Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', p. 7.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Indeed, in an echo of the problems confronting the Chilvers Coton churchwardens in 1684, the 'great square pews were crowded with new faces from distant corners of the parish – perhaps from dissenting chapels'.⁷³ In these respects, George Eliot's vision of the Chilvers Coton congregation at prayer would surely have been familiar to John Perkins almost two hundred years previously.

Although John Perkins (like Amos Barton after him) almost certainly 'failed to touch the spring of goodness by his sermons', he probably 'touched it effectually by his sorrows'. Both Perkins and Barton tragically lost their wives when their families were young, and one might see in Eliot's poignant account of Milly Barton's funeral an echo of the scene in *All Saints* churchyard when Elizabeth Perkins was laid to rest some 170 years previously:

The snow lay thick upon the graves, and the day was cold and dreary; but there was many a sad eye watching that black procession as it passed from the vicarage to the church, and from the church to the open grave. There were men and women standing in that churchyard who had bandied vulgar jests about their pastor, and who had lightly charged him with sin; but now, when they saw him following the coffin, pale and haggard, he was consecrated anew by his great sorrow, and they looked at him with respectful pity.⁷⁴

⁷³ Ibid., p. 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid., pp. 62–63.

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