After the 1914–18 war clerical incumbents faced a difficult time. There was widespread disillusionment about the role of the churches. There were also more severe trade cycles, the depths of which threw many of their parishioners into long-term unemployment. Added to this was a rise in the strength of the episcopacy in making appointments, and the adjustments made necessary by the development of parochial church councils, as well as problems in clergy recruitment and qualifications. This article analyses the changes in Leicestershire, as a microcosm of the English scene, in the appointment, qualifications and payment of clerical incumbents; there was also the challenges presented by the restoration of the Diocese of Leicester.

The period between the two world wars was, from the Church of England’s point of view, one of the most difficult in its history. The ending of the war in 1918 was accompanied by disillusionment with religion among younger people and the flower of a generation had perished in the poppy-fields of Flanders. Congregations of all denominations who expected survivors coming back from military service to return to the pews were disappointed. In Leicester, Gallowtree Gate Congregational Chapel was so badly hit by the non-return of men from the trenches that it had to close in 1921. At Victoria Road (Baptist) Church the war had so reduced the Reverend Peter Thomson’s ‘hugely successful Sunday afternoon Men’s Meeting... that it dwindled and died’. Its Sunday school, which had had 381 pupils and 54 teachers in 1911, had only 60 pupils and 10 teachers in 1936. At St. Paul’s in Leicester, a popular Oxford Movement parish, it was noted that ‘Men and Women did not seem to want to come to church and the children were quickly affected by the general irreligious atmosphere, due in part to natural reaction following upon five years of war’.

Throughout the country Anglican confirmations declined markedly, from 216,888 in 1918 to 182,738 in 1936, Easter Day communicants from 2,290,662 to 2,241,825. Statistical evidence in Leicestershire is complicated by the fact

---

1 G. T. Rimmington & A. McWhirr, Gallowtree Gate Congregational Chapel, Leicester 1823–1921: An history of the chapel and a list of interments in the graveyard (Leicester, 1999), p. 20.
3 East Midland Baptist Association Year Book, 1912 and 1936–7.
4 J. E. Hextall & A. Brightman, Fifty Years of Church, Men and Things at St. Paul’s, Leicester, 1871–1921 (Leicester, 1921), p. 73.

that the county was part of the Peterborough diocese until 1926. However the combined figures for both dioceses indicate that the number of confirmations declined by 15 per cent, from 5,976 to 4,892 between 1918 and 1936, while the number of Easter communicants declined by 5 per cent, from 70,434 to 66,676.5

Clergy moreover, besides having to cope with lower church attendance, were also confronted, like everyone else, with wildly fluctuating trade cycles displaying ever greater amplitude between boom and depression. This not only affected their own stipends but, in the Great Depression of 1927–1932, resulted in long term unemployment among their parishioners at a time when, in Leicestershire in particular, there was a need, after 1926, for the resourcing of a new diocese. They were also having to make adjustments to their working practice. Since 1919, the Enabling Act had made it obligatory for parishes to have elected parochial church councils, which were invested with some decision-making powers that were not always to the taste of clergymen used to more authoritarian styles of leadership.6 This was further exacerbated by problems in clergy recruitment.

Throughout England there was a lower intake of young deacons and therefore greater reliance on older candidates. The anonymous preface to Crockford’s Clerical Directory in 1925 notes that ‘the Church needs a minimum of about 700 fresh clergy annually, and it is many years since that figure was even approached... at a recent ordination in a popular diocese one-half of those who were admitted were over 60 years of age’ The average number of inductions during the preceding six years was no more than 287, the result being that only a little over a thousand were under 35 years of age.7 By 1927 it was noted that the average age of existing clergy was ‘nearer sixty than fifty, and this means that the rate of death and retirement... at present... about 550 per annum will accelerate rapidly during the next ten years’.8 This national picture was ‘writ small’ in Leicestershire.

Questions arise as to how the clergy fared. What effects had the war and its aftermath made upon them? The purpose of this study is to analyse the appointments, qualifications and stipendiary structure experienced by the clerical incumbents of Leicestershire during a period of rapid and stressful change. Whereas other published research has relied mainly upon data for one particular year within a period,9 in this paper the author, because of the rapidity of some of the changes, has selected two years, 1925 and 1936, slightly more than a decade apart, for detailed examination. Reliance has been made mainly on Kelly’s Directories and the annually published Crockford’s Clerical Directories, as well as the annually published diocesan calendars.

7 Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1924), xv.
8 Ibid. (1927), vii.
APPOMENTS

There had been no basic change in the system of appointments since the dissolution of the monasteries, when many advowsons (the right to present incumbents for induction into a living) which had been held by religious houses (like the abbey in Leicester) were offered for sale. There had, however, been some modifications. After 1923 the Benefice Act (1898) Amendment Measure made it possible for benefices under private patronage to be augmented by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, ‘so long as the private patronage was unsaleable’.10 This caveat effectively prevented further sales of advowsons, causing many private patrons, most of whom were in any case beset by economic problems, to begin to lose interest. This was accompanied by a marked decline in the influence of wealthy landowners, who were in the process of disinvesting themselves of agricultural lands and the villages attached to them. It has been noted that ‘as a consequence of the War, the pressure of taxation and the great increase in expenses... had left no option to many landowners; it was simply impossible to go on’. The Duke of Rutland, for instance, the wealthiest landowner in north-eastern Leicestershire, sold 2,066 acres in Bottesford parish in 1920, along with all the property in the village. The withdrawal from ownership in many villages resulted also in the disposal of advowsons, so that the Duke, who had controlled sixteen advowsons in 1908, had reduced his patronage to seven by 1936.11

The effects were clearly to be seen in the statistical information available. In 1846 57% of the advowsons in Leicestershire were in private hands. By 1877 this had fallen to 49%, by 1908 to 46% and by 1925 the disinvestment had slipped rapidly, to 39% (101 advowsons) with a further reduction in 1936 to 30% (72 advowsons). In 1908 51 advowsons (22%) were controlled by titled people by 1925 these were reduced to 34 (13%) in 1925 and to 26 (11%) in 1936.

As the fortunes of the great landowners had been waning the strength of the bishops had been growing. In 1924 7,052 benefices (52%) in England were still in the hands of private patrons whilst those in the hands of other clergy, especially the diocesan bishops, numbered 4,854 (36%), which gave the episcopacy considerably greater authority in the appointment of clerical incumbents than they had enjoyed in the nineteenth century.12 In 1830 the bishops had controlled only 12% of English advowsons, while private patrons held 48 per cent.13 In Leicestershire by 1936 the largest single block was controlled by the diocesan bishop, the foundations of whose strength had been laid by his predecessors. Between 1853 and 1878 806 English advowsons had been added to the 1,853 the bishops already controlled. In 1924 the bishops were able to claim that they had 2,838 advowsons (21%) under

12 Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1924), x.
their control. Peterborough Bishop William Magee (1868–1891), within whose diocese Leicestershire lay, pursued the episcopal policy so vigorously that by 1876 there were 72 benefices in his gift, enabling him to employ young men in the difficult urban parishes of Leicester and transfer them in middle-age to rural situations. He and his successors ensured that by 1908 45 (17%) of Leicestershire’s advowsons were in episcopal hands. This had increased to 65 (25%) in 1925 and by 1936 it had 70 (30%). Bishop Cyril Bardsley, the first bishop of the restored diocese of Leicester from 1927, was therefore in a far better position to carry out Bishop Magee’s policy than the latter had ever been. By 1936 he controlled 31 (86%) of the advowsons within the city of Leicester and 39 outside.

The right of self-appointment by clergy had disappeared with the Amendment of the Benefices Act (1898) in 1923, but it was still possible for a relative to own the advowson and make the presentation. In 1877 there had been 40 (20 per cent) of Leicestershire appointments made in this way, but by 1908 numbers had been reduced to 24 (9%). In 1925 there were only 16 (6%) and in 1936 only 8 (3%). Most of these were in small and relatively unimportant benefices. At Cotesbach, for instance, where the population was only 136 in 1936, the official patron was Mrs M. E. Marriott, but the rector, James Edward Marriott, who was also lord of the manor and principal landowner, and who lived in Cotesbach Hall, regarded himself as patron. At Husbands Bosworth the patron and rector in 1936 was Maurice Lamb, who had been there since 1898. At the little parish of Misterton

the rector, Edmund Milo Richards, had been presented to the benefice by his wife in 1915. At Barwell, the only substantial benefice in this situation, Alfred Titley had been presented by his mother in 1909 after the death of his father, Richard, who had been patron and rector since 1868. Although by 1936 Mrs. Titley had died, the patronage remained with the family, being passed to Alfred Titley’s son.

Colleges and universities retained a small proportion of advowsons. Originally this had enabled them to ‘retire’ men who married and thus disqualified themselves from holding Fellowships. This, however, had become unnecessary since the 1870s, after which Fellows were allowed to be married. In any case, an increasing number of Fellows were laymen. Nevertheless some colleges continued to appoint men from their own graduate lists. At Barrow-on-Soar, for instance, the incumbent in 1936 was a Cambridge graduate from St. John’s College, which owned the advowson. Mostly, however, they had gone beyond this and opened the appointments to others. At Hatheren, for instance, where the University of Oxford was the patron, a graduate of Cambridge had been appointed. At Aston Flamville Balliol College, Oxford, even presented a nongraduate priest from Lichfield Theological College. The custom of universities and colleges in owning advowsons was clearly a survival from the nineteenth century, but it entailed duties which the dons usually took seriously.

TRAINING AND QUALIFICATIONS

Although the education and training of the clergy was changing from the mid-nineteenth century onward it is nevertheless true to say that all Victorian clergy were educated but few were trained. The growth of theological colleges, some of which were not attached to universities, provided training in theology and pastoralia to mature lower-middle class men with other professional or business experience. Furthermore, the development of colleges like Westcott House, Wycliffe Hall and St. Stephen’s House in Oxford and Ridley Hall in Cambridge encouraged specific training in theology for ordinands who were graduates. By Edwardian times bishops were demanding that candidates for the ministry should have specific training.17 This demand was strengthened further by the Canterbury decision in 1909 that all candidates should take a common ordination examination, and that, from 1917, all ordinands should attend a theological college, if only for a single term.18

Although it was being lamented in 1925 that ‘it is a matter of common knowledge that about 25 per cent of the candidates who take the General Ordination Examination fail to satisfy the modest requirements of the Board of Examiners’ it was clear that men with experience as teachers or clerks were needed. There were some indeed who preferred mature candidates even if their educational levels were lower than had been customarily expected. Kelsey Sterling

notes that ‘Non-graduates were the ‘new men’ of the late-Victorian ministry, men whose background training and experience in theological colleges found them professionally better prepared than graduates to deal with the exigencies of parochial life in cities and towns’. Many of those who came forward in the immediate post-war years had been in the armed forces and served in the trenches. The preface of Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1925) stated that ‘up to December 31st, 1923, 1,155 Service Candidates and seven Civilians had been ordained under the auspices of the Central Advisory Council’. Five of these had taken first-class honours at Oxford or Cambridge, but most of them were at the lower end of the educational spectrum, entering colleges as non-graduates. They were also nearer the lower end of the social scale than most of their colleagues, and accordingly were often poorly regarded even when they displayed more than average ability. One Leicester Cambridge graduate incumbent remarked that his assistant curate was ‘very good but he has this Nottingham accent’.

In Leicestershire, where there had been no difficulty in attracting graduates as incumbents during Victorian and Edwardian times, the number of graduates was still considerable. In 1925 there were 198 graduates out of 252 (79%), while in 1936, although there was a significant reduction, there were 156 graduates out of 232 (67%). Cambridge continued to head the list, with 86 (43%) of all graduates in 1925 and 69 (44%) in 1936. Oxford graduates were also still prominent, with 65 (33%) in 1925 and 43 (28%) in 1936. The number of graduates from

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduates</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Durham</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dublin</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Universities</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total graduates</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-graduates</th>
<th>1925</th>
<th>1936</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trained in theological colleges</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University education but no degree</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No training recorded</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total nongraduates</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total incumbents</td>
<td>252</td>
<td>232</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the graduates 93 had been trained also in a theological college in 1925, 86 in 1936. 78% were graduates in 1925, 67% in 1936.

elsewhere was increasing, however, and in 1925 47 (24%) were ‘redbrick’ rather than ‘Oxbridge’. In 1936 the number of ‘redbrick’ graduates although at 44 were slightly less in number had increased to 28%.

Some of the graduate incumbents were distinguished scholars. John Hodgson at Humberstone had achieved first-class honours in Classics at the University of London. William Leigh at All Saints’, Leicester, had won the Corus Greek Test Prize and first-class honours in Theology at Cambridge. Frederick Macnutt, who became Archdeacon of Leicester and the first Provost of Leicester, had been Select Preacher at Cambridge in 1916 while an army chaplain, and was the author of several theological books. Andrew Shepherd at St. James the Greater in Leicester had gained first-class honours in Classics at the University of Wales before studying at Oxford, where he gained second-class honours in Literae Humaniiores. He was later awarded a doctorate. Robert Leatherdale at St. Peter’s, Leicester, was awarded a distinction in Theology at Oxford. Harry Ross at Langton was not only a Cambridge graduate. He also gained Mus.Bach. and Mus.Doc. degrees at Trinity College, Dublin, and was additionally a Fellow of the Royal College of Organists. Samuel Shannon at St. Luke’s, Leicester, had gained an Associateship of King’s College, London, before obtaining an Oxford degree and a Bachelor of Divinity degree from Trinity College, Dublin. Edwin Redlich of Little Bowden gained his Cambridge degree as Senior Optime in 1899 and a B.D. in 1920. He was so highly valued that he became a Canon Theologian at Leicester Cathedral. Isaac Raine at Oadby had been a Double Exhibitioner, Hebrew Prizeman and Scholar at Durham.21

Many of the older graduate incumbents had not been trained subsequently at theological colleges. There were still 105 (53% of the graduates) in 1925, and 70 (45%) in 1936, who lacked such training. Some of them, however, had obtained degrees in Theology, like Percy Lidster at Aylestone, a distinguished preacher who gained a London B.A. in 1913, and Douglas Robson of Emmanuel Church in Loughborough, who graduated at Cambridge in 1900, having gained third-class in the Theology Tripos.

Although they were still a small minority the number of nongraduate incumbents in Leicestershire was increasing fairly rapidly. In 1908 there had been only eighteen (10 per cent), a barely tolerated minority.22 By 1925, however, there were 43 (17%) Eleven years later this had risen to 68 (29%). Among them were some who had decided that university studies were either too difficult or irrelevant. Basil Andrewes of St. Helen’s, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, for instance, had studied at St. John’s College, Oxford, but had then migrated to Ely Theological College before graduating. Similarly Richard Pughe of Aston Flamville and Burbage had studied at Durham University, but had moved on to Lichfield Theological College before graduating.

Most of the non-graduates, however, were mature men who had never considered or had the opportunity of university education. They were content to

study at a theological college. Herbert Williams of Earl Shilton, for instance, had had experience as a Church Army Captain before embarking on theological training at St. Aidan’s College in Birkenhead. Albert Parsons of Holy Trinity, Leicester, who had gained a Licentiate in Theology at Durham, later attended London College of Divinity, where he gained first-class in the preliminary theological examination and doubtless strengthened his Evangelical credentials.

Some non-graduates, conscious that they were accorded little respect in the higher echelons of the Church of England or even among some of their colleagues, were able to take advantage of regulations at Durham University that enabled them to add further study after an LTh. Diploma to gain a degree. Herbert Stevens of Coleorton gained his Durham L.Th diploma in 1896 and a B.A. in the following year. Even more remarkably, John Casson of Croft, who completed his L.Th in 1896, found that he had won the University Hebrew Scholarship, which enabled him to complete a B.A. in 1897.

Most non-graduates were less fortunate than those who attended one of the Durham colleges. At King’s College, London, for instance, where there was a distinct separation between London degree studies and non-graduate clerical training, it was rare for those who were awarded the A.K.C. diploma to progress further, unless they were fortunate enough to be able to go to Oxford or Cambridge. Thus Harold Hibbert of Enderby, Henry Adams of St. James, Aylestone Park, Arthur Fothergill of Sharnford, Harry Floyd of Lowesby and Tilton and Patrick Ingham of Peatling Parva had no other qualifications, even though Ingham had gained his A.K.C. with first-class honours.23 Dowland comments that ‘those who had been students only at King’s (or other theological colleges) filled the rank and file positions. It was to take a good deal longer for men of this type to be fully assimilated into the ordained ministry of the Church of England’24. Although writing specifically about the situation in the very early twentieth century he might well have been referring to the inter-war period in Leicestershire.

THE INCOMES PROBLEM

Any discussion of clerical income for the inter-war years has to take account of the gap between gross and net income, attempts to reduce the inequities between the highest and lowest incomes, the problems of income from glebelands and tithing, and the growing tendency to combine parishes, as well as the burden of over-large parsonages in an age when the domestic servant was disappearing.

Even a cursory glance at Leicestershire incumbents’ incomes reveals a considerable difference in some benefices between gross and net income. In 1936, for

---

24 Ibid., p. 621. There had been a move, early in the twentieth Century, to have the AKC recognised as a degree, but the bishops were opposed, despite its rigorous three-year programme. The staff at King’s College, however, had their doubts, because they were concerned about the educational needs of ‘older men who have had little early training, have been in some form of business for some years, and although earnest in their work, have many disadvantages to overcome’. For this reason the College opposed the Episcopal preference at the time for an all-graduate clergy.
instance, the rector of Aston Flamville and Burbage had a gross income of £616, but a net income of only £450. At Burrough-on-the-Hill the rector’s gross income was £485, but net income was £439. A selection of a dozen benefices whose clerical incomes show disparities between gross and net income (Fig. 3) indicates on average that there was a difference of £117 in 1925 and £115 in 1936, a considerable amount when it is realized that this was 20% and 18% of the stipends respectively.

The gap between gross and net income was not constant throughout the stipends of all incumbents. There were benefices where the gap was negligible or even non-existent. In the city of Leicester, for instance, there were 36 parishes in 1936. Of these there were 15 in which gross and net income were the same, while another seven had a differential of £30.

The key to the difference lies in the fact that traditionally the major part of a clerical incumbent’s income came from glebe rents and tithes. As the Crockford’s preface in 1921–22 notes:

>The tithe-owning Clergy have suffered long from a serious grievance. They have been compelled to pay rates upon their tithe... whereas no other section of the community is taxed in this fashion.

In addition the incumbent was responsible for the repair and insurance of glebe buildings, the cost of the collection of income, chancel repairs (if a rector and therefore the receiver of the great tithes), the salary of an assistant curate and possibly a pension for a retired predecessor. Furthermore, he was liable for the payment of first-fruits (a year’s income based upon what would have been paid in the sixteenth century) and tenths thereafter into Queen Anne’s Bounty, for the assistance of benefices even more poverty-stricken than his own.\(^{25}\) To compound the problem, the land rental for tax purposes was ‘assessed by valuers who conventionally assessed it at between 15 and 25 per cent below its actual value’.

\(^{25}\) Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1925), xv-xvi.
So that ‘the country clergy found themselves perhaps the most severely taxed class in the community’.

Attempts were made to ameliorate the financial lot of country clergy following the end of the first world war. First fruits and tenths were abolished in 1926. Dilapidations were taken over by Queen Anne’s Bounty administrators. In 1921 the Ecclesiastical Commissioners began to make pension grants to ‘deserving unbeneficed clergy’ as authorized by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners’ Measure in 1921. They also pledged themselves to ‘a bigger and better augmentations policy’ in respect of incumbents on very low incomes. With this in mind the 1936 Tithe Act ‘extinguished tithe rent charge [but not glebe rents] altogether, compensating its expropriated owners with an issue of marketable 3% stock’.27

Nevertheless there were still problems, as the incomes of Leicestershire incumbents indicate. As Fig. 4 shows, in 1925 208 (89%) had net incomes below £600, 71 (30%) below £300. Even in 1936 193 (84%) had incomes below £600, though by this time there were only 19 (8%) with incomes less than £300.

Traditionally the greatest source of income had been tithe rent charges and glebe rents. During this period there were still a few benefices which derived the whole of the income from these sources. At Cossington the whole of the gross income in 1925 of £450 was derived entirely from these sources. The same was true for Stoke Golding and Dadlington (£669), Coleorton (£343), Peckleton (£483), Swepstone (£547) and Saddington (£249). For most benefices, however, there were other sources of income. Some had investments, derived mainly from the sale of glebe. In 1920 Frank Walford (rector of Bottesford from 1918 to 1943) sold 545 acres out of 719 of glebe in his parish and invested the proceeds.28 Asfordby had investments amounting to an annual income of £478. Loughborough All Saints received dividends of £770. Misterton owned Coventry Corporation stock with an income of £298. Mountsorrel derived £257 of its income from a bequest made by Dr William Beveridge, Bishop of St. Asaph (1704–8). Packington owned stock worth £77 per annum. At Ratcliffe-on-the-Wreake the sale of glebe had resulted in an income of £240.

Many benefices also derived small amounts of income from charities and fees, but most benefices relied heavily on sums from the Queen Anne’s Bounty and the

---

Ecclesiastical Commissioners. In 1917 the Commissioners had brought all livings, ‘whether in public patronage or private, up to £200 a year if their population was over 300’. By 1928 they had agreed to bring ‘all livings of 300 or more souls up to £350; of 1,000 or more to £375, and of 4,000 or more to £400’. So that the average income in Leicestershire, which had been £392 in 1925, became £444 in 1936. Median incomes, however, were £352 in 1925 and £400 in 1936, indicating that throughout the inter-war period, as in Victorian and Edwardian times, most incumbents had incomes below average. The action of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners was instrumental in bringing up the level of incomes in the city of Leicester, which had over several centuries lagged behind many rural parishes, to the average. As Fig. 5 indicates, the distribution of incomes there differed little from that in the rest of the county.

In the countryside there were still many small parishes with an incumbent to themselves, but the action of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in refusing to help with the stipends in very small parishes forced a number of them to join the ranks of two-parish benefices. As Crockford’s stated in 1936:

Patrons, especially rural ones... know that it [the union of benefices] is inevitable... it becomes harder year by year to get men to take small country parishes principally because they cannot live on the stipends, and, unlike their predecessors, have no other source of income.

In fact, of course, there had always been some benefices that consisted of several parishes. Barwell had always been linked with Stapleton and Potters Marston, and Groby and Ratby had never been independent of each other. The reduction in the number of incumbents from 252 in 1925 to 232 in 1936 was the beginning of a significant movement to bring other rural parishes into the same situation. In 1925, for instance, the benefice of Wanlip had a population of 104, but had remained independent of other parishes. Canon Arthur James had a net income of £342. By 1936, however, it shared a rector with nearby Birstall, which had raised the net income to £487. Croxton Kerrial had a population of 414 in 1925, and a benefice net income of £344. Nearby Branston had a population of 218, and the net income was £450. By 1936 they were sharing an incumbent, and the net income was £665. Similarly Fleckney (population 1,699) with a net income of £350 (derived mainly

29 Best, Temporal Pillars, p. 510.
30 Ellen Smith, Memories of a County Childhood (1983), pp. 19, 56.
from an Ecclesiastical Commissioners’ grant of £338) and Saddington (population 213) with a net income of only £193 in 1925, were coerced into a union. So that by 1936 there was one incumbent with a net income of £449.

CONCLUSION

Changes in patronage, the maintenance of a predominantly graduate clergy infused with non-graduate clergy with experience in classrooms and commercial establishments, and improvements in the stipends of many incumbents in difficult parishes, especially in the city of Leicester, meant that the Leicestershire incumbents were much more professional than many of their predecessors. The squarsons had almost disappeared. Instead there were well-trained men who took their tasks seriously. One vicar in 1919 was noted as having been the first one to teach the village teenagers.31 At the Langtons it was noted that:

Over the years, the Parson had learnt some sense. The harvest festival was no longer heavy with learning... It was about a God of Nature who saw to it that we had three square meals a day.32

At St. Nicholas Church in Leicester it was observed that the aged former schoolmaster vicar, Edward Atkins, ‘worked tirelessly for his small but problem-ridden parish’ and was also ‘very active in the Working Men’s College, located within the parish’.33 Andrew Raby at the Church of the Martyrs in Leicester presided over the building of a new church hall and arranged for a Bible class to be held at 5.30 p.m. each Sunday at the vicarage.34

There was also some evidence of cooperation between incumbent and church members, encouraged by the development of parochial church councils since 1919. Vicar Linwood Wright and his members at St. Mark’s, Leicester, continued in Lewis Donaldson’s Christian Socialist tradition, providing food for the Yorkshire contingent of Hunger Marchers of the National Unemployed Workers’ Movement. They also campaigned for improved housing, and inspired the formation of the Leicester Voluntary Housing Association. Wright himself organised a drama group, and wrote a number of plays for it to perform in the church.35 At All Saints’, Leicester, where population in the parish was decreasing as slums were cleared and church members disappeared to the suburbs, it was noteworthy that, despite the efforts of vicar and the remaining members:

Estimated expenditure is often exceeded... the choir continually needs strengthening; the Sunday school is perpetually embarrassed for lack of teachers; changes in the services, made with the best intentions, fail in their object, and offertory and attendances require constant stimulation

32 Crockford’s Clerical Directory (1936), viii.
34 Plant, Brief History of the Church of the Martyrs, p. 12.
35 B. Buchanan & G. Hulme, St. Mark’s, Leicester: an architectural and historical study (Leicester, 1996), p. 15.
Yet it was concluded that ‘constant note of dissatisfaction is, and always will be, one of the strongest signs of active Church life’.  

Added to the professionalisation of clerical incumbents was the ‘halo’ effect of the development of a new diocese and the enthusiasm for evangelism, overseas mission and church unity of Bishop Cyril Bardsley. Archbishop Cosmo Lang’s call for a revival of religion prior to the coronation of King George VI in 1937 is generally recognised as stemming from Bardsley, who had become ‘chairman of the Archbishops’ Evangelistic Committee in 1934, his own house becoming the centre of evangelistic work in the church of England as a whole’. Initially there was much activity in the city of Leicester, where Bardsley appointed three incumbents as diocesan missioners, with a group of parish priests as a team to cooperate with them. By 1935 the evangelistic efforts in Leicester were extended to the rural areas, with six teams of clergy in different areas, the aim being ‘the quiet permeation of parishes with the evangelistic spirit’.

Bardsley also encouraged overseas mission. Missionary societies were given official support by dioceses throughout the country. The bishop persuaded the new diocesan conference in 1927 to pass a resolution ensuring that ‘a foremost place in their prayer, sympathies and offerings should be given by Churchpeople in every parish to the advancement of the work of the Church overseas’.

The bishop also had a genuine concern for church unity. He addressed the Methodist Conference when it met in Leicester in 1934. He regularly held an annual quiet day for Nonconformist ministers in his own house, promoting understanding and friendship between his own clerical incumbents and their Free Church counterparts.

There can be little doubt that some evening-up of incomes, especially among the hard-worked clergy in Leicester, and specialised training in theological colleges, helped to engender professional attitudes among the clerical incumbents of Leicestershire. The system of appointments had not undergone radical change, but the dominance of the aristocracy was gradually giving way to episcopal decision-making, which further strengthened the concern for greater occupational professionalism in the responsibilities of the men who occupied the pulpits and served at the altars in the churches.

DR GERALD T. RIMMINGTON was Professor of Education, Mount Allison University, Canada, until 1981, when he resigned to enter the full-time Anglican ministry. He retired as Rector of Barwell in 1995. He is now an Honorary Visiting Fellow in the Centre for the History of Religious and Political Pluralism at the University of Leicester. He is also Chairman of the Committee of this Society.

This paper was presented as a lecture to the Cosby Heritage Society on the 23rd May 2006.

37 G. T. Rimmington, Bishop Cyril Bardsley and the Diocese of Leicester, pp. 8, 9, 11.