

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE LAITY AND THE
PAROCHIAL CLERGY DURING THE
HENRICIAN REFORMATION:
THE CASE OF THE NORTH AND WEST MIDLANDS

David Postles

Integral to the 'revisionist' approach to the late-medieval English Church is the contention that there was continued affection for the secular, parochial clergy.¹ The revisionists regard the English Reformation as not inevitable and perceive an effervescent late-medieval Church, in which the lower clergy were key participants in retaining the affection of the laity despite some contemporary criticism of ecclesiastical institutions and personnel. The argument that the late-medieval English Church retained its vibrancy is founded in part on the liturgical performance of the Catholic clergy.² So the relationship between the laity and the

¹ I am extremely grateful for comments by Peter Marshall, Julia Barrow, Rob Lutton, and two anonymous readers. Rather than a wider discussion about the progress of reformed religion, this paper focuses closely on the particular issue of the question of lay satisfaction with the parochial clergy in a regional context. I intend to consider aspects of the progress of reformed religion in this region elsewhere.

² Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400–1580* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 109–11; Jack J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 40–60

David Postles (pot@le.ac.uk) is an independent researcher.

Abstract: Although the concept of anti-clericalism in the early sixteenth century has been successfully challenged, there remain the questions whether and to what extent there was dissatisfaction with the secular clergy. The comprehensive consideration of the Catholic clergy by Peter Marshall approached those issues from a variety of angles. More recently, Tim Cooper has exonerated the secular clergy of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield. Attitudes to the clergy in that diocese are re-examined here through a detailed analysis of testamentary bequests by the laity to the secular (parochial) clergy, from the late 1520s to 1546, throughout the various mutations in direction of the Henrician Reformation. A certain level of indifference is detected in the general paucity of death-bed considerations for the clergy.

Keywords: secular clergy, diocese of Coventry and Lichfield, wills, testamentary bequests, English Reformation, early sixteenth century, Catholicism

10.1484/J.NMS.1.100776

clergy must assume an important place in any discussion of the pre-Reformation condition of the English Church, in general, but also locally and regionally. As explained below, any attempt to construct a general view of the English Church before the Reformation must now address potential local and regional differences. The purpose here is to introduce an investigation of lay–clerical relations in the diocese of Lichfield, which, as we shall see, had an important geographical position in terms of broad differences of religious affiliations and which has not previously been investigated from the particular source material examined here: lay testaments or wills.³ These data are supplemented by a corpus of wills from the archdeaconry of Leicester.

One suggestion from a different perspective from the revisionists has proposed that anticlericalism was not a cause but a consequence of the English Reformation: that there was less dissatisfaction with the clergy before the Reformation than occurred afterwards.⁴ The most extensive and satisfactory ('post-revisionist') discussion of the clergy developed that argument, explaining why the 'functions' of the Catholic priesthood responded to the needs of parishioners well into the sixteenth century: 'that respect for priests could not be

exonerated the English lower clergy by comparison with some of their continental counterparts; Tim Cooper, *The Last Generation of English Catholic Clergy: Parish Priests in the Diocese of Coventry and Lichfield in the Early Sixteenth Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1999) has a very favourable estimation of the clergy in the diocese which is the concern of this paper.

³ Hereafter the term *will* is used, although technically the documents are testaments concerned only with personal (movable) estate (goods and chattels) and not land (real estate, immovable estate), which was the domain of the will (*ultima voluntas*). For one perception of the character of early evangelical (i.e. loosely reformed religion), *The Beginnings of English Protestantism*, ed. by Peter Marshall and Alec Ryrie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 12–13

⁴ Christopher Haigh, 'Anticlericalism and the English Reformation', in *The English Reformation Revised*, ed. by Christopher Haigh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 56–74, countered by David Loades, 'Anticlericalism in the Church of England before 1558: An "eating canker"?' in *Anticlericalism*, ed. by Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), pp. 1–17; Eric Carlson, 'Good Pastors or Careless Shepherds? Parish Ministers and the English Reformation', *History*, 88 (2003), 423–36; Peter Marshall, 'Anticlericalism Revested? Expressions of Discontent in Early Tudor England', in *The Parish in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Clive Burgess and Eamon Duffy (Donington: Tyas, 2006), pp. 365–80; for a somewhat contrary perception, see Robert Whiting, *Local Responses to the English Reformation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 29–33 and Ethan Shagan, 'Anticlericalism, Popular Politics and the English Reformation', in his *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 131–61.

divorced from sacramental piety', an important argument which has had a profound impact and assuredly presents a cogent reflection on the question of 'anticlericalism'.⁵

Those historians disposed favourably towards the role of the pre-Reformation clergy have discovered general satisfaction with what was essentially a sacramental role, both with its essence and with the clergy's general acquittal of it, particularly as the celebrant of the mass.⁶ One might opine, nonetheless, that sometimes this perception of widespread satisfaction has been predicated on a one-sided interpretation, that is, through the institutional records of the Church, ordinations and recruitment in particular.⁷ To employ economic metaphors, it is a producer-side approach rather than a consumer-side, supply-side rather than demand-side, or, in computing terms, a server-side rather than client-side.⁸ Whilst, indeed, the two aspects are not separable but inter-related, the discussion of the clergy has sometimes been approached from one perspective.⁹ In so far as contemporary criticism of the clergy has been investigated, the critical voices have been relegated to the margin, or interpreted as a critique with the intention of

⁵ Peter Marshall, *The Catholic Priesthood and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). I am inordinately grateful for Peter Marshall's comments on a draft of this paper. The quotation is from a personal communication from him. For some contention over the morality of the clergy in London, Shannon McSheffrey, 'Whoring Priests and Godly Citizens: Law, Morality and Clerical Sexual Misconduct in Late Medieval London', in *Local Identities in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. by Norman Jones and Daniel Woolf (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2007), pp. 58–60.

⁶ Peter Heath, *The English Parish Clergy on the Eve of the Reformation* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969).

⁷ In this present context, Cooper, *Last Generation*. The literature about levels of recruitment is summarized by Claire Cross, 'Ordinations in the Diocese of York 1500–1630', in *Patronage and Recruitment in the Tudor and Early Stuart Church*, ed. by Claire Cross, Borthwick Studies in History, 2 (York: Borthwick Institute, 1996), pp. 5–9. One implication is that there was a demand for priests and that the numbers of men becoming priests signified satisfaction with the clergy: Haigh, *English Reformations*, pp. 37–38, for example; Christopher Marsh, *Popular Religion in Sixteenth-Century England: Holding their Peace* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 93.

⁸ Both sides were, however, explored by Margaret Bowker, *The Secular Clergy in the Diocese of Lincoln, 1495–1520* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968); Bowker, *The Henrician Reformation: The Diocese of Lincoln under John Longland, 1521–1547* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); Christopher Haigh, *Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); see also Michael Zell, 'The Personnel of the Clergy in Kent in the Reformation Period', *English Historical Review*, 89 (1974), 513–33.

⁹ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, is the most rounded assessment to date.

enhancing the existing clerical complement rather than exhibiting an anticlerical content. So Dean Colet's address was an exhortation from within rather than radical criticism for reform.¹⁰ More radical complaint was peripheral in comparison to the general satisfaction. A distinction has therefore been made between an internal, but intellectual, complaint literature from above, in contrast to 'popular' satisfaction associated with different expectations of the lower clergy. Where the defects of the clergy indicated in visitation returns have been addressed, furthermore, their faults have been dismissed as occasional, not representative, and thus having no wider consequence.¹¹ Recently, however, some potential points of attrition between laity and clergy have been identified, ensuing from a form of economic management of parochial temporalities which resulted in some absenteeism, it is suggested, so that the level of non-residence was much higher than previously suspected. Overall, this interpretation proposes that the points of conflict led to legislation (in 1529) to compel the clergy to meet their obligations and the expectations of them, which inadvertently produced a rupture and reform.¹²

Is there another way to assess the level of satisfaction with the secular, parish clergy in the late-medieval English Church? If we discount complaints about the local clergy at visitations, perhaps we might consider legacies and bequests to the clergy in the testaments of English parishioners.¹³ In fact, wills have been one of

¹⁰ Christopher Harper-Bill, 'Dean Colet's Convocation Sermon and the Pre-Reformation Church in England', *History*, 73 (1988), 191–210; Jonathan Arnold, 'Colet, Wolsey and the Politics of Reform: St Paul's Cathedral in 1518', *English Historical Review*, 181 (2006), 979–1001; Arnold, 'John Colet, Preaching and Reform at St Paul's Cathedral, 1505–19', *Reformation and Renaissance Review*, 5 (2003), 205–30. For Colet, Arnold, *Dean John Colet of St Paul's: Humanism and Reform in Early Tudor England* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007).

¹¹ John A. F. Thomson, *The Early Tudor Church and Society 1485–1529* (London: Longman, 1993), pp. 12–13; Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society under the Tudors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 41–43, 48–49.

¹² Robert Palmer, *Selling the Church: The English Parish in Law, Commerce, and Religion, 1350–1550* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002): for absenteeism, pp. 100–11. For other points of potential conflict in urban places, Susan Brigden, 'Tithe Controversy in Reformation London', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 32 (1981), 285–301; John A. F. Thomson, 'Tithe Disputes in Later Medieval London', *English Historical Review*, 78 (1963), 1–17.

¹³ For a critique of the previous use of evidence from visitations, Palmer, *Selling the Church*, p. 101, who suspects that the returns to visitations were influenced by the agenda in the articles of visitation and the affiliations of the churchwardens.

(if not the) most exploited sources for the revisionist explanation of late-medieval English religion's effervescence, although more recent work using the same material in Kent has arrived at a rather different conclusion.¹⁴ The intention below is to reconsider relations between the laity and the clergy from other evidence and in particular to isolate benefactions to the secular clergy from the wider range of conferment on the fabric and liturgy, in an attempt to consider parishioners' affection for the local clergy.¹⁵ It might be argued that such an exercise cannot be conducted separately from the wider benefactions to the parish church. On the other hand, contentment with institutions does not always imply unconditional respect for the personnel. So the purpose here is to reconsider relations between the local laity and the parochial clergy from the perspective of lay gifts to the clergy at the end of life.

In his magisterial examination of the English clergy in the decades prior to and during the Henrician Reformation, Peter Marshall attempted to assess lay attitudes to the clergy from testamentary evidence. His corpus of 5500 wills between 1500 and 1553 consisted of P.C.C. wills for Kent, Hampshire and Oxfordshire, and from 'most English counties in printed collections'.¹⁶ Although Chesterfield (Derbyshire) testators were included in his purposive sample, the remainder of the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield was not addressed.¹⁷ In his discussion of the clerical personnel of this diocese, Cooper did not examine lay testaments for attitudes towards the clergy.¹⁸ There is, therefore, scope for considering testamentary material in the diocese of Coventry and Lichfield

¹⁴ For example, Scarisbrick, *Reformation and the English People*, pp. 2–11; for the difference in Kent, Rob Lutton, *Lollardy and Orthodox Religion in Pre-Reformation England: Reconstructing Piety* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 2006). For a summary of the use of wills, Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 19–20.

¹⁵ For affection for the 'community of the parish', Beat Kümin, *The Shaping of a Community: The Rise and Reformation of the English Parish c.1400–1560* (Aldershot: Scolar, 1996).

¹⁶ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 3. To some extent, his sample, in the nature of what was available, exhibits some concentration on the perhaps more 'conservative' locations of Yorkshire, Lancashire, and Somerset, although including a significant corpus of Bedfordshire wills. He informs me that that P.C.C. wills were included in part to counter-balance that concentration and widen the geographical compass. P.C.C. wills received probate in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and usually consisted of the wills of the wealthiest testators with personal estate in more than one diocese.

¹⁷ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, pp. 4, 239–41.

¹⁸ Cooper, *The Last Generation*.

(hereafter, simply Lichfield) in more detail, since it has not been exploited. Further than that, however, there is a religio-geographical reason for its assessment, since the diocese was located on the perimeter of the 'golden crescent' where evangelical sentiment might take some hold and locations which were apparently more 'conservative': the diocese had something of a 'liminal' or intermediate position.¹⁹ Since the archdeaconry of Leicester was similarly positioned, testamentary material from that jurisdiction is additionally included. The dissemination of evangelical or reformed ideas was no doubt more complicated than this simple differentiation between conservative north and west and more receptive south and east. That the north and west were indeed more conservative does, however, give some substance to considering a location just below that northern conservatism.²⁰ The wills are subjected to a rigorous examination in terms of quantitative analysis and categorization. It must be admitted that, of course, quantification can be misleading and should be treated with a considerable degree of caution.²¹

Finally, circumspection is needed in how testamentary material is examined in terms of social group. To combine P.C.C. material, inevitably relating to superior status and wealth, with the testaments of other groups may tendentiously affect the conclusions. For the purposes here, P.C.C. wills have been deliberately excluded to remove the socially exclusive social group which they represent, so that a fairer assessment can be elicited of the attitudes, as far as they can be perceived from wills, of the less privileged. Perhaps that statement needs some justification: as illustrated below, it was open to testators to convey their affection to the local clergy through the most minimal of bequests: household stuff such as a sheet, or apparel. The relative paucity of probate material before c. 1520 also complicates matters. Here the probate material is more chronologically confined: the late 1520s to 1546.²² The testamentary data thus comprise more than 2800

¹⁹ Nicholas Tyacke, 'Introduction: Rethinking the "English Reformation"', in *England's Long Reformation 1500–1800*, ed. by Nicholas Tyacke (London: UCL Press, 1998), pp. 1–32.

²⁰ For the use of the term evangelical for reformed movements in the 1520s, Marshall and Ryrie, *Beginnings of English Protestantism*. For devotional bequests in wills of urban testators in the north and west Midlands, Dave Postles, 'Religion and Uncertainty in Four Midland Urban Centres, c. 1529–1546', *Midland History*, 34 (2009), 22–43, which also discusses the extent to which reformed religion might have been received in urban places.

²¹ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, concentrated more on the 'eight paradigms of priestly "function"' (p. 4), which explains the more allusive use of lay testaments.

²² Robert Whiting, *The Blind Devotion of the People: Popular Religion and the English*

wills from the diocese of Lichfield and about 1100 from the archdeaconry of Leicester between 1522 and 1546. The Lichfield testaments extend from 1528–46. The evidence is circumscribed temporally to the period of uncertainty of the changes in Henrician religious policy. The timespan is purposely selected because of those vicissitudes of official observance. It is evident, of course, that testamentary bequests were ambiguous from several perspectives. In some cases, they might be supplementary to benefactions made during lifetime, so one testator bequeathed 20s. for two trentals ‘after my departure in case thatt I cawse not the same to be seyed In my lyffe tyme’.²³ We should also be aware that such legacies were sometimes aspirational, and the testator did not necessarily leave sufficient resources for their performance or acquittal. The analysis below is concerned purely with lay perceptions of the lower clergy, consequently addressing serially the following aspects of that relationship: the parochial clergy as supervisors and executors; the parochial clergy as kin; and testamentary bequests to the parochial clergy. None of these attributes of the pre-Reformation clergy has been ignored before, but some different interpretations can be adduced.²⁴

The potential for an intimate relationship between laity and local clergy can be illustrated by the testament of Thomas Walsh, probably a singleman, of Wolston, in 1538. He bequeathed his best gown, best cap, and silver spoon to his brother, Sir John. Another 5d. he directed to the clergy for prayer. He appointed as his residuary legatee and sole executor Sir William Clarke, the vicar, to distribute to the poor for his soul’s benefit.²⁵ His probate inventory, however, enumerated personal estate valued at merely £5 11s., £1 7s. of which was consumed in his funeral expenses according to a memorandum. The desires of Walsh thus reflect a range of possible relationships between a lay person with little

Reformation (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 6, illustrates the changing levels of production of wills over the course of the early sixteenth century.

²³ Lichfield Record Office [LRO], B/C/11 Geoffrey Sheryngton of Wigan, 1536.

²⁴ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, Chapter 7 (pp. 194–210), ‘Priest as Neighbour’, esp. pp. 208–09, and also pp. 231–32, for clergy as supervisors, executors, and witnesses of testaments; p. 230 for bequests to the clergy not specifically for masses or other services (20 per cent of his testators); pp. 10–11, 47–49, 51–53, 58, 75, 99–100, 116, 125–26, 132–33, 158–63 for the connection between ‘honesty’ and ‘chastity’. Cooper, *Last Generation*, passim, with more explicit references below. Sometimes clergy appointed as executors were in fact kin: John Walker of Wichnor selected as joint executors his sons, Sir Richard and Sir John: LRO, B/C/11 John Walker, Wichnor, 1542.

²⁵ *Sir* was a title applied to the parochial clergy, in its Latin form as *dominus*

disposable income and the lower clergy: kinship; affection; and trust. We learn, nonetheless, that Walsh was in fact a servant of Clarke, his master, and his single status probably influenced the sort of persons to whom he had recourse. How far was Walsh representative of the laity of lower status in the diocese of Lichfield?²⁶

Clergy as Supervisors and Executors

A number of testators, particularly, but not exclusively, widows, selected the local clergy as the supervisors or overseers of their wills. As an example of a widow following such a course, Joan Farmer of Coventry bequeathed a pair of sheets to her curate and nominated him joint overseer of her will.²⁷ So too in 1541 Joan Rownall, a widow of Long Itchington, appointed as her overseers: Sir Thos Hopkens, vicar, Sir William Odun, priest, and Robert Hopkens.²⁸ The will of William **Smi3cht**, of Sheldon, proven in 1542, constituted as his overseer Sir Henry Rowde, parson of Sheldon, for personal estate assessed at over £42.²⁹ In 1538, Henry Thorleton of Baxterley requested the parson there, Sir George Whetreson, to be his only supervisor.³⁰ William Rachedale, of Leigh, in 1540 desired as his overseer his ghostly father Sir Thos Drackeford, his curate.³¹ At Seighford, Sir Richard Hart jointly supervised the implementation of the will of Hugh Untann.³² In his will of 1537, John Torner, husbandman, selected as joint executor Sir William Banister, clerk, and his widow, who died shortly afterwards, retained Sir William, her ghostly father, as joint overseer.³³ In the same year, William Trubschae of Wolstanton, arranged for his ghostly father, Sir Thomas Turnar, to be joint supervisor.³⁴ Also in that year, William Turlle of Walsall appointed as his overseer Sir Henry Hynkys.³⁵ Turlle's personal estate did not

²⁶ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Walsh, Wolston, 1538.

²⁷ LRO, B/C/11 Joan Farmer, Coventry, 1536.

²⁸ LRO, B/C/11 Joan Rownall, Long Itchington, 1541.

²⁹ LRO, B/C/11 William **Smi3ht**, Sheldon, 1542.

³⁰ LRO, B/C/11 Henry Thorleton, Baxterley, 1538.

³¹ LRO, B/C/11 William Rachdale, Leigh, 1540.

³² LRO, B/C/11 Hugh Untann, Seighford, 1539.

³³ LRO, B/C/11 John and Margaret Torner, Yeton, 1537.

³⁴ LRO, B/C/11 William Trubschae, Wolstanton, 1537.

³⁵ LRO, B/C/11 William Turlle, Walsall, 1537.

quite attain £8, which illustrates how those lower down the social scale could nominate the clerics as their supervisors in return for a small expense. Sir John Bee conducted the supervision of the will of Roger Teylour of Walton on Trent in 1539.³⁶ With personal estate valued at merely £6, Thomas Blake of Duffield assumed that his curate would act as the supervisor of his will.³⁷ In like manner, Ralph Tayler of Wem, with personal estate not quite attaining £11, arranged that his ghostly father would act as sole overseer of his will.³⁸ The local parson, Sir John Nowell, acted for John Snape of Swynnerton, and Thomas Shelley of Stone selected as his overseer his parish priest. In such a manner, local clergy were of particular assistance to widows and unmarried people perhaps lacking local kin.³⁹

Clerical executors or joint executors are not difficult to uncover in the testaments of the laity. The sole executor named in the will of Thomas Wyttemor of Swinnerton was the parson of that parish, although Thomas had merely £6 of goods and chattels.⁴⁰ Sir Richard Tart was retained by John Tyrvyn of Lapley as joint executor in 1539, and this testator also invoked as joint supervisor his vicar, Sir John Sykes.⁴¹ Sir Nicholas Bagshae acted as sole executor of the will of Thomas Turner of Tutbury.⁴² This association is perhaps exemplified by Sir William Clarke, vicar, acting as sole executor for Nicholas Turnour whose personal estate was appraised at £5 15s. 10d. in 1538.⁴³ We might add also that Sir Nicholas Wheelock, vicar of Biddulph, was joint executor for his parishioner, William Salt, and Sir Richard Gorst, curate of Mucklestone, residuary legatee and sole executor for John Symons of his parish.

The appointment of a clerical supervisor or executor was not always associated with beneficence in religious bequests. Thus Roger Webbe of Kinver, although selecting Sir Edward Haws clerk as sole executor, made no religious bequests in his

³⁶ LRO, B/C/11 Roger Teylour, Walton upon Trent, 1539. For the clergy of Derbyshire, A. M. Johnson, 'The Reformation Clergy of Derbyshire', *Derbyshire Archaeological Journal*, 100 (1980), 49–63.

³⁷ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Blake, Duffield, 1542.

³⁸ LRO, B/C/11 Ralph Tayler, Wem, 1538.

³⁹ LRO, B/C/11 William Salt, Biddulph, 1539; John Symons, Mucklestone, 1539; Thomas Shelley, Stone, 1540; and John Snape, Swynnerton, 1540.

⁴⁰ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Wyttemor, Swinnerton, 1540.

⁴¹ LRO, B/C/11 John Tyrvyn, Lapley, 1539.

⁴² LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Turner, Tutbury, 1540.

⁴³ LRO, B/C/11 Nicholas Turnour, Wolston, 1538.

testament.⁴⁴ With only about £10 of personal estate, James Raynoldes of Birmingham, gave his best towel to the high altar for forgotten tithes, but he nominated as his overseer Sir Hugh Browforde and his will was attested by Sir Thomas Grene, chantry priest, Sir Thomas Cumberbache, priest, and Richard Jones, parochial deacon.⁴⁵ There is a contrast here with most testators who selected a clerical supervisor. When Henry Watkenson of North Wingfield requested that Sir John Full, curate, act as his joint supervisor, he left from his personal estate of just over £13 a hive to maintain a taper before the picture of Our Lord and another one to the services of Our Lady and St Laurence.⁴⁶ Personal devotion was exhibited too in the will of John Wryght of Dovebridge who selected the local priest, Sir Richard Home, as his overseer, reflected in his bequest of nine pounds of wax for three torches to light high mass at sacring on holy days, complemented, indeed, by half a trental for his parents' soul and his own, and 3s. 4d. to the local clergy to intercede for his soul.⁴⁷

In a register of testaments of will-makers mainly within the archdeaconry of Coventry, some ten of the seventy appointed local clergy in a supervisory capacity.⁴⁸ If, however, we examine the proportion of testators in the diocese as a whole who resorted to the local clergy in this way, it is revealed that only a minority of the local laity explicitly elicited their assistance in these roles, as revealed in Table 1. This table depicts the numbers and proportions of testators who invoked the help of the clergy as (joint) overseer or (joint) supervisor (the terms are perhaps synonymous) and executor (whether joint or sole) in more than 2800 testaments. The figures reveal that the proportion of testators who resorted to the clergy was thus fairly minimal. Where clergy were also kin both clerical status and kinship were important, which complicates matters further.

⁴⁴ LRO, B/C/11 Roger Webbe, Kinver, 1540.

⁴⁵ LRO, B/C/11 James Raynoldes, Birmingham, 1543.

⁴⁶ LRO, B/C/11 Henry Watkenson, North Wingfield, 1540.

⁴⁷ LRO, B/C/11 John Wryght, Dovebridge, 1539. Although extensively recited, these are merely illustrative examples of which there are many, many more, such as, again merely by way of illustration: John Wyes, Rugby, 1536 (joint executor Sir Henry Mylner), Robert Wryght, Over Whitacre, 1535 (overseer his ghostly father, Sir John Marpull), Nicholas Wryght, Tamworth, 1538 (overseer the vicar of Kinsbury, Sir John), Richard Wodschawe of Kinsbury (joint overseer Sir John Lysatt), Edmund Walker, Norbury, 1541 (sole overseer Sir Richard Ocley curate of Norbury).

⁴⁸ LRO, B/C/10/II/2.

Table 1: Clergy as Overseers, Supervisors or Executors of Lay Wills in the Diocese of Lichfield, 1528–46

	Overseer	Supervisor	Executor	Total
Number (%)	49 (1.7)	20 (0.7)	29 (1.1)	98 (3.5)

Sir Henry Northege was appointed to be joint supervisor of the will of John Northege of Ashover in 1544, both clerical and kin.⁴⁹ We have the complication of clergy who performed a social role for testators, but who were also relations. That combination was repeated when William Tunstall of Wolstanton appointed his son, Sir Thomas, as joint executor of his will; William's personal estate was appraised at merely £7 6s. 8d.⁵⁰ So also John Turmer of Cheddleton in Stoke-on-Trent, whose personal estate was accounted as £14 16s. 1d., including a lease of part of a coalmine in Handley, required his son Sir John Turmer to act as joint executor.⁵¹ The brother of John Trennant of Upton, Sir William, acted as joint executor of the former's will and the testator's curate, Sir John More, as supervisor.⁵² Another joint executor was Sir Thomas Thomkynson, vicar of Dilthorne, requested by the will-maker John Tumkynson of Standley in Leek parish, perhaps a relative.⁵³ Perhaps Sir John Tomsone who supervised the will of William Tomsone of Polesworth was also related to the testator.⁵⁴ The joint executor of Thomas Howlle of Shifnal under his will of 1540 was Sir Michael Howle.⁵⁵ These kin relationships are explored further below.

This role of the clergy has been categorized as 'neighbourliness', but, although it presumably did involve a kindness, there were other perspectives.⁵⁶ As well as the inclusion of kin who were clergy, clergy who acted as overseer, supervisor, or executor were invariably remunerated, as were some (but not all) lay executors,

⁴⁹ LRO, B/C/11 John Northege, Ashover, 1544

⁵⁰ LRO, B/C/11 William Tunstall, Wolstanton, 1536.

⁵¹ LRO, B/C/11 John Turmer, Cheddleton, 1537.

⁵² LRO, B/C/11 John Trennant, Upton, 1542.

⁵³ LRO, B/C/11 John Tumkynson, Standley, 1540.

⁵⁴ LRO, B/C/11 William Tomsone, Polesworth, 1543.

⁵⁵ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Howlle, Shifnal, 1540 (inventory valuation £78 19s. 0d.).

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, 194–210.

most frequently with cash, sometimes in kind. In a sense, therefore, the position was the extension of a 'professional' service, by those who had the faculty of literacy. No doubt, trust was also a considerable influence: in the person of the cleric, the clerical office, and the expertise or competence which ensued equally from the person and the clerical status. We should not, however, assume that the element of neighbourliness was paramount nor that it necessarily distinguished the clergy from other neighbours. We might come to the same conclusion about clerical composition of wills. In one sense, their writing wills for their parishioners was a 'neighbourly' act, but again it was tinged with more contractual elements. The clergy still retained a considerable advantage in literacy, particularly the ability to write. There is no doubt, furthermore, that the clergy were remunerated just as any scrivener for composing the wills. Richard Patryke of Walsall bequeathed 6d. to his ghostly father for having written his testament.⁵⁷ Only a very small number of testaments, moreover, were explicitly compiled by local clergy: eleven, five of which were written by the same curate of Stoke-on-Trent and Worfield who made a feature of subscribing the testaments that he composed.⁵⁸ In most cases, it is impossible to identify the writers of wills. More is known about the scribes of wills in the late sixteenth century than earlier.⁵⁹ It is possible that clerks in minor orders were involved in the writing of wills, clergy who had not advanced to the priesthood.

In all of these roles (overseer, supervisor, executor, scrivener), the clergy might be described as acting in a neighbourly fashion, out of charitable concern in a sense. On the other hand, their relative monopoly of literacy meant that they would be an obvious recourse.⁶⁰ The clergy received remuneration in return, so that, although they offered a service, they were also able to supplement their income through these roles, which might have been important for those in the

⁵⁷ LRO, B/C/11 Richard Patryke, Walsall, 1545.

⁵⁸ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Hyll, Stoke-on-Trent, 1534; Robert Morr, Barley, 1537; Henry Meyre, Stoke-on-Trent, 1538; Richard Glover, Wolstanton, 1538; Robert Kynder, Ashbourne, 1539; Elizabeth Pollson, Stoke-on-Trent, 1540; John Pytt, Albrighton, 1540; Thomas Smythe, Audley, 1542; Margaret Bryggend, Worfield, 1543; Patryke as above; John Barret, Worfield, 1546.

⁵⁹ Nigel Goose and Nesta Evans, 'Wills as an Historical Source', in *When Death Do Us Part: Understanding and Interpreting the Probate Records of Early Modern England*, ed. by Tom Arkell, Nesta Evans, and Nigel Goose (Oxford: Leopard's Head Press, 2000), 49–50.

⁶⁰ For a testament composed by the testator himself: LRO, B/C/11 Robert Temple, Barton (Staffs.), 1534: at the foot: 'Be me Rob[ert] tempull'.

poorest livings. We should accordingly be a little circumspect about according their motives to pure neighbourliness or in defining the act as neighbourliness in however wide a notion. There was a reciprocal relationship, such as might be inherent in neighbourly exchange, but there were other elements involved too.

Clergy as Kin

A small proportion of lay testators had clergy among their close kin. Cooper, examining clerical wills, remarked upon this relationship, which is just as evident in the wills of the laity.⁶¹

Table 2: Clerical Connections Revealed in Lay Wills in the Diocese of Lichfield

Cohort	Testators with clerical sons	Testators with clerical brothers	Testators with other clerical kin	Total number of wills
1529–36 original wills	8	4	0	539
1527–36 registered wills	1	1	1	70
1537–40 original wills	31 [∞]	5*	2	941
1541–46 original wills	13	7	2	1382

*The will of Thomas Lovat of Edmond reveals that he had two clerical brothers, Sir Robert and Sir William.

[∞]Four acted as supervisors and five as executors.

Given the relative localization of the clergy, acquiring livings or stipends not too distant from their native settlement, this phenomenon is not surprising.⁶² The numbers might be an underestimate since we do not know enough about the life-course stage of the testator. Possibly some testators died before their sons had proceeded far towards ordination as clergy. On the other hand, the proportions in Table 2 are so small that this life-course factor is not likely to make a significant impact. Although in 1541 John Rogers of Aston near Birmingham appointed his

⁶¹ Cooper, *Last Generation*, pp. 156–58.

⁶² Cooper, *Last Generation*, pp. 33–36, 104, 109, 127.

son, Sir John, priest, to be joint overseer if he came to these parts, most clerical kin were more proximate.⁶³ It is not surprising that the brother of John Collumbell of Marston-on-Dove (Derbyshire) was vicar of that parish, for John's personal estate was valued at over £80 and he belonged to the gentry, and was no doubt in a position to influence the patron of the living, Tutbury Priory, to whom he left 10s., although he made bequests of the same amount to the friars of Derby, 20s. to Beauvale Priory, and 40s. to the Charterhouse in the Isle of Axholme.⁶⁴ Of lesser status, but still wealthy enough with over £50 of personalty, Henry Porter of Sudbury had a son John who was vicar of Hinckley and whom he appointed as joint supervisor.⁶⁵ Of lower position too was the husbandman Richard Rycroft of Hodnet, who in 1540 designated his son Sir John as joint executor.⁶⁶ Another joint executor was Sir Thomas Renscha, son of the testator Henry Renscha of Chesterfield under his father's testament of 1538, receiving also his father's best gown and 6s. 8d.⁶⁷ Amongst the many bequests concerned with the salvation of his soul, Thomas Hosyer of Shrewsbury, bequeathed ten marks (£6 13s. 4d.) to his son, Sir John, to pray for his soul, along with other bequests to him of a silver cup and spoon as a gesture symbolic of the relationship between parent and child.⁶⁸ So too James Tunstall of Wolstanton in 1539 bequeathed 6s. 8d. to his brother, Sir Thomas, to pray for his soul and also requested that he act as joint executor.⁶⁹ Household stuff was bequeathed by William Typpyng of Newport (Shropshire) to his brother Sir Hugh.⁷⁰ Another cleric deriving from fairly humble status was Sir Harry Randall, beneficiary of household stuff by the will of his father, Nicholas Randall, of Coventry, whose inventory only attained a valuation of £8 3s. 4d.⁷¹ We might surmise too that Sir William Whyt had fairly humble origins, for when he was appointed as sole executor by his mother, the widow Elizabeth Whyt of Dronfield, her personal estate was evaluated at merely £1 0s. 2d. and he, indeed,

⁶³ LRO, B/C/11 John Rogers, Aston, 1541.

⁶⁴ LRO, B/C/11 John Collumbell, Marston, 1536.

⁶⁵ LRO, B/C/11 Henry Porter, Sudbury, 1540.

⁶⁶ LRO, B/C/11 Richard Rycroft, Hognet, 1540.

⁶⁷ LRO, B/C/11 Henry Renscha, Chesterfield, 1538.

⁶⁸ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Hosyer, Shrewsbury, 1538.

⁶⁹ LRO, B/C/11 James Tunstall, Wolstanton, 1539.

⁷⁰ LRO, B/C/11 William Typpyng, Newport, 1540.

⁷¹ LRO, B/C/11 Nicholas Randall, Coventry, 1538.

was her principal creditor in her list of debts.⁷² She made no bequests to religious purposes, but that failure might well have resulted from her ostensible poverty. The joint executor of the will of Edmund Whytmor of Madeley was his brother Sir Thomas, although that did not induce Edmund to expend his personal estate (valued at £15 3s. 0d) on religious causes.⁷³ Nor did the husbandman Roger Wycherley of Eyton feel compelled to make such bequests although his son Sir Richard, priest of Baschurch, was his joint executor.⁷⁴ Although his brother belonged to the lower clergy, William Hancock of Dronfield did not make religious bequests in his will, but his limited personal estate of £5 13s. 6d. might have been a contributory factor.⁷⁵ We have, consequently, the prospect both of humble clerical origins and the omission of religious bequests from wills of some poorer testators with clerical connections.⁷⁶ We might even suspect that some testators of this kind had uncertain religious sentiment. For example, John Beche of Wolstanton made his son, Sir John, supervisor of his will, yet made no religious bequests, such as for special services at burial or for altars in the parish church, and commended his soul only to God his maker and redeemer, which might indicate an attachment to reformed religion.⁷⁷ It was, of course, possible that some testators had already made provisions in their lifetimes, but we might expect them to make further bequests in their wills.

It was quite otherwise, and the norm, with the testators David Walker alias apHowell and Roger Wodward, of respectively Rodington and Derby. Both had clerical brothers (Sir John ApHowell and Sir Ralph Wodward) and both concomitantly made elaborate arrangements for the health of their souls. As well as wax for lights, dirige, and mass, Walker desired his cloth and kerchief to be employed to cover the pyx of the high altar and Wodward left 3s. 4d. to his

⁷² LRO, B/C/11 Elizabeth Whyt, Dronfield, 1538.

⁷³ LRO, B/C/11 Edmund Whytmor, Madeley, 1540.

⁷⁴ LRO, B/C/11 Roger Wycherley, Eyton, 1537.

⁷⁵ LRO, B/C/11 William Hancock, Dronfield, 1539.

⁷⁶ At the other extreme, the will of Anne Luson, of Sutton Coldfield (1540), contained no religious bequests; her son was Chancellor of Exeter diocese and the bishop of Exeter her supervisor; her commendation was simply to God 'my Creatour'. LRO, B/C/11 Anne Luson, Sutton Coldfield, 1540. For another example of testators with clerical connections who included no religious bequests in their wills: Agnes Cook, Dronfield, 1537 (son).

⁷⁷ LRO, B/C/11 John Beche, Wolstanton, 1539. I intend to examine elsewhere the possibility of some adherents to reformed positions.

mother to buy a kerchief to remind her to pray daily for his soul.⁷⁸ Thomas Baker of Solihull invested heavily in religious bequests for the salvation of his soul: bequests to three altars; obit; month's and year's mind; and bequests to the clergy for prayer. His brother was one, Sir John.⁷⁹ Occasionally, the association between testator and clergy amounted to nepotism, in that the testator made religious bequests which sponsored the career of the clerical kin. When Edmund Washynton of Leek exhibited great largesse in his bequest of £26 13s. 4d. to the stock of the new chapel of St Catherine to find a priest, he expected his son, Sir William, to be appointed to sing the office. The bequest was assured too, perhaps, by his appointment of Sir William as his joint executor. The arrangement considerably depleted the personal estate, for, after this payment, only £9 remained.⁸⁰ On a smaller scale, John Wodwarde of Allestree bequeathed 10s. for a trental by his son, Sir Harry.⁸¹ So also the Atherstone widow, Helen Eton, arranged for her two sons, Sir Christopher, and the friar, William, to sing trentals.⁸²

Several implications follow from these associations. We may be confronting the possibility that a proportion of testators had clerical connections and kin and thus perhaps a predilection for the traditional religion. Certainly, almost all the testators above made corresponding bequests. Testators who selected local clergy as executors or testators were also likely to have been predisposed to traditional observances, which is borne out by the benefactions. Perhaps this allegiance is exemplified by Anne Ryland, of Shrewsbury, widow, who in 1539 bequeathed to her son, Sir William, household stuff and also made him overseer; not surprisingly she allocated £4 for her burial when, in fact, the costs of her funeral in lights, tapers, torches, priests, clerks, and bread amounted to £5 2s. 4d.⁸³ We can confirm

⁷⁸ LRO, B/C/11 David Walker alias ApHowell, Rodington, 1539, and Roger Wodward, Derby, 1538.

⁷⁹ LRO, B/C/11 Thomas Baker, Solihull, 1545 (inventory total £19 18s. 8d.).

⁸⁰ LRO, B/C/11 Edmund Washynton, Leek, 1537.

⁸¹ LRO, B/C/11 John Wodwarde, Allestree, 1535.

⁸² LRO, B/C/11 Christopher Eton, Atherstone, 1534; LRO, B/C/11 Helen Eton, Atherstone, 1535. William was undoubtedly one of the mendicants at the Austin friary in Atherstone where Helen elected to be interred next to her husband, Christopher, before the image of our Lady. Christopher's inventory total had amounted to just over £16, but by Helen's death in the following year she had no more than £9 5s. 0d. of personal estate. Her will was composed 'per me fratrem Johannem Goodwyn priorem'.

⁸³ LRO, B/C/11 Anne Ryland, Shrewsbury, 1539.

this association too by the will of John Wodwarde, alluded to above. Wodwarde's will was written by his curate, Sir Anthony Downs, and his son, Sir Harry, as mentioned above, was a beneficiary of a spiritual bequest. In addition, the testator made bequests from his personal estate of about £13 for torches and in money to his own parish church and those of Tamworth, Chorley, Overton, and Norton, financed a trental by his son, and allocated 1s. each to the friars in Coventry, Lichfield and Atherstone.⁸⁴ Even so, it is not without some risk to extrapolate from these connections a widespread affection for the clergy through intimacy and neighbourliness. Some parents may perhaps have encouraged a son to enter a clerical career just as working-class parents in the 1960s desired their children to progress to white-collar jobs, for social mobility, without any profound esteem for those positions.

Clergy as Beneficiaries in Testaments

Table 3: Lay Legacies in Cash to the Clergy

Jurisdiction/date	Total N of testators	N (%) of testators leaving cash legacies to clergy	Mean amount of legacy (d.)	Standard deviation
Archdeaconry of Leicester, 1522–46	1139	98* (9)	34	52.34
Lichfield diocese, 1528–46	2862♦	180 (6.3)	43	59.65
Lincolnshire, 1520–34	1271	97 (7.6)	48‡	103.759‡

*4d.-16d. = 52 testators

♦ 3352 individuals, but many had inventories without an extant will

‡ if the highest amount (960d.) is omitted, mean = 38d., std dev = 45.057

Bequests are a potential indicator of affection for the secular clergy. In this context, only ostensibly unconditional legacies have been included, which means that amounts of money designated in wills for the clergy for prayers or masses have been excluded. The rationale is that these legacies exacted services as a counter-

⁸⁴ LRO, B/C/11 John Wodwarde, Allestree, 1535.

gift. Legacies without conditions explicitly attached might be a better indicator of fondness. Even that inference is not entirely certain, for an implicit gift-exchange might still have obtained, even though no reciprocal action was specified.⁸⁵ Here, we might also comment on another aspect of remembrance in testaments. It has been remarked that a preponderance of testators stipulated a payment (in cash or in kind) for tithes forgotten.⁸⁶ We should, nonetheless, be aware that the vast proportion of testators allocated this payment specifically to the high altar, not to the incumbent (although that may have been the effect), which may also have resonances for a difference between affection for the liturgy and for the clergy.⁸⁷ Table 3 presents details of legacies in cash to the clergy in more than 5000 wills in the Midlands. What is evident is the very low proportion of testators who made such a commitment. Merely 6 to 9 per cent of will-makers proffered an unconditional cash legacy to the clergy. Bequests to the clergy did not always consist of cash legacies, of course, and innumerable small remembrances in kind were offered in Lichfield diocese: sheets (often flaxen) (sixteen will-makers); household stuff in general (five testators); sheep (four); ewes (two); lambs (two); cows (two); calves (two); hives (two); a quarter of wheat; half a quarter of malt; corn; a horse; a colt; a napkin; a gown; a coffer; a petticoat; a cramp ring; a cloth; a tin bottle; a bonnet and tippet; a jerkin; a kerchief; and a jacket.⁸⁸ The proportion of testators in Lichfield diocese making a bequest in cash or in kind is thus increased to about 8 per cent. A substantial number of the Lincolnshire testators making bequests to the clergy did so in kind rather than (or as well as) in cash: wethers, ewes, hogs, and lambs; a white horse; a horse; a calf; a bushel of

⁸⁵ The whole concept of Maussian gift-exchange has now been described for early modern England: Ilana K. Ben-Amos, *The Culture of Giving: Informal Support and Gift-Exchange in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); immense insights are contained in Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World*, rev. edn (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2006), particularly for the circulation of gifts and deferred and implicit counter-gifts.

⁸⁶ For example, but there are multitudinous in Yorkshire and Lincolnshire wills, LRO, B/C/11 Agnes Columbell, Darley, widow, 1540: 10s. to the sacrament of the high altar for tithes forgotten.

⁸⁷ Marshall, *Catholic Priesthood*, p. 231.

⁸⁸ LRO, B/C/11 James Holyshed, Shifnal, 1534: a hive of bees to the clergy; Elizabeth Penyfather, Barton under Needwood, widow, 1534: two sheets and a blanket to the clergy; Emmot Tayler, Rushall, widow: a flaxen sheet to the clergy; Thomas Baker, Solihull, 1545: a flaxen sheet to the curate for prayers; Richard Hearinge, Coventry, 1544: a black gown to the clergy.

barley; one and a half quarters of malt and half a quarter of rye; a cow and four yards of violet (cloth); a brown cow; pairs of linen sheets; a trotting black foal and half a quarter of wheat; a pair of beads; a nag, bow, and arrows; and so on.⁸⁹ Perhaps 9 per cent of Lincolnshire testators thus remembered the clergy.

In Lichfield diocese, it is possible to examine the level of personal estate of individuals who made bequests to the clergy. The mean valuation of their personal estate amounted to about £20 (standard deviation 23.69), but 70 per cent of inventory totals fell below that amount, and, indeed, 39 per cent below £10. Extending further, it is possible to correlate the amount bequeathed to the clergy in the testament with the valuation of personal estate in the inventory. The Spearman rank correlation coefficient produced is 0.564, a positive correlation generally (but not overwhelmingly) between wealth (as represented by personal estate) and the amount of the legacy.⁹⁰ Some seventy-eight of the Lichfield testators made reference to their ghostly father, an affective, spiritual term, either exhorting prayers or appointing a supervisor of the will.⁹¹ This appellation reflected affection or respect for the person and office of the priest or curate. The proportion was equally low in the wills of Lincolnshire testators between 1532 and 1534.⁹² What is striking is the low level of bequests to the local clergy in the testaments of the laity. Legacies in wills remained, nonetheless, somewhat speculative and contingent. Their nature is indicated by the bequest of John Basseth, a singleman of Barrowby in Lincolnshire, in 1530: 'I will that the parson haue vjs. viijd. yff it may be sparyd.'⁹³

⁸⁹ Foster, *Lincoln Wills*, III, 34, 137, 145, 184; Hickman, *Lincoln Wills* pp. 136 (195), 146 (212), 157 (227), 188 (273), 248 (362), 287 (422), 298 (439), 322 (477), 367 (550), 374 (559), 375 (560), 380 (568).

⁹⁰ Spearman's rank correlation is used to assess the relationship between two variables when the constituent numbers are not normally distributed (a normal distribution features a mirror image around the mean when the numbers are graphed). Correlation coefficients are usually taken to be significant when they exceed +/- 0.5.

⁹¹ For example, LRO, Oliver Feyrechyld 1543: 3s. 4d. to his ghostly father for prayer; Richard Fox 1545: 10s. to his ghostly father for prayer.

⁹² Hickman, *Lincoln Wills* Marshall suspects that ghostly father may be more appropriately considered as a reference in a quasi-technical sense to a parishioner's confessor rather than a 'broad term of endearment': pers. comm.

⁹³ Foster, *Lincoln Wills*, III, 30.

Conclusion

Many ambiguities will remain in any discussion of the relationship between the local laity and their parochial clergy in the early sixteenth century and during the vicissitudes of the Henrician polity. To rely upon a single source, such as testaments, is not entirely satisfactory. On the other hand, if we wish to explore deeply the lay–clerical association, a detailed analysis of lay testaments is absolutely necessary. The process of testamentary bequests contains many caveats too. There is the strong possibility that testaments were vetted or policed when they reached the ecclesiastical forum, although there has been some mitigation of this suspicion.⁹⁴ Since livings were at a premium, the clergy in the diocese of Lichfield tended to remain in a parish over long periods of time.⁹⁵ Their persistence in local society was an opportunity for the lay–clerical relationship to develop and flourish. The evidence of testamentary bequests, nonetheless, suggests that the relationship was not a deeply defined one. Quantitative evidence is not, of course, entirely satisfactory. It is difficult to move from a relative paucity of bequests to a wider sentiment. Conversely, however, we should not just assume a firm association from anecdotal evidence of bequests and the occupation of roles of overseer, supervisor, and executor. Overall, the evidence from the Lichfield testamentary material suggests that a deep association may have been confined here to a relatively small proportion of local society and that only a much shallower connection existed between the preponderant part of parishioners and the local clergy in this locality.

England remained a complex of regional and local societies, as important for religious affiliations as for other aspects of society. What obtained in the diocese of Lichfield was not representative of some locations where a much stronger appreciation of ‘traditional’ religion persisted.⁹⁶ In these parts of the Midlands, nonetheless, the affective relationship between the local laity and the parochial clergy seems on the basis of this evidence to have been fairly weak by the 1530s

⁹⁴ This issue is now succinctly covered from the wider literature by Goose and Evans, ‘Wills as an historical source’, pp. 54–57.

⁹⁵ Cooper, *Last Generation*, pp. 56–57.

⁹⁶ For the regional and social differences in religious observance, Whiting, *Local Responses*; Rob Lutton, ‘Geographies and Materialities of Piety: Reconciling Competing Narratives of Religious Change in Pre-Reformation and Reformation England’, in *Pieties in Transition. Religious Practices and Experiences, c. 1400–1640*, ed. by Lutton and Elizabeth Salter (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 11–40.

and 1540s. So, in this sense, the Lichfield material supports the notion of regional differences in devotion, to the extent that here and also in the archdeaconry of Leicester the wills of the laity did not exhibit that deeper affection for the parochial clergy in evidence in some other regions. The further difficulty, however, is that we have little sense of the extent of individual lay piety and affection for the clergy before the 1520s. It is unlikely that this problem can be resolved in the light of the deficiency of probate material before the late 1520s. An alternative interpretation might be that there was a decline within benefactions to the clergy during the late 1520s to 1546, as the laity took advantage of a perceived licence under royal policy to withdraw support from the clergy, higher and lower: the 'popular politics' identified by Shagan.⁹⁷ What is evident is that in the diocese of Lichfield the laity did not exhibit a high level of practical allegiance to the clergy in this time of uncertain religious policy. We can agree to rule out a notion of anticlericalism, a vituperation against the late-medieval clergy. On the other hand, the coolness of support for the lower and local clergy must have ensued from some dissatisfaction or indifference.

⁹⁷ Shagan, 'Anticlericalism, Popular Politics and the English Reformation'.

