

# THE NOTITIA PAROCHIALIS

E. CLIVE ROUSE, F.S.A.

AN interesting manuscript came to light in 1965. It was sent in for a sale of goods in aid of the funds of the Gerrards Cross Community Centre, was noticed by the Rev. Geoffrey Edmonds and purchased by one of the Editors. It will probably be placed in the Muniment Room in due course. It consists of 43 foolscap sheets of varying size roughly sewn together and placed in brown paper covers (shortly to be properly bound), containing notes on 43 churches in the County, listed below.

Mrs. Gerald Elvey kindly examined the MS. and contributes the following description :

In 1705 an anonymous clergyman wished to circularise all the clergy in England. He decided that the best way to do it was to have his notice attached to one of the briefs which were sent to every parish. A brief of February 1704/5 for raising "upwards of £4,800" for rebuilding All Saints' Church, Oxford, was chosen and it went out accompanied by ten questions. In due course the briefs returned and 1,576 replies were detached from them. In 1760 the Lambeth Librarian, Andrew Ducarel bought them for the Library, where they are catalogued as Lambeth Palace Mss. 960-5. For some reason Ducarel had the document copied and this Ms. is the Buckinghamshire part of it with Ducarel's corrections of the scribe's errors. Mr. Neil Ker who used the Mss. for *The Parochial Libraries of the Church of England* has recognised the hand.

Miss M. Barrett is trying to find out who the unknown clergyman was. From notes in the British Museum she thinks she has tracked him down. He lived in Surrey, published a sermon on tithes, and is heard of no more—perhaps he died.

In 1705 when the questions arrived, Browne Willis was living with a well-known antiquary, the Rev. William Wotton, at Milton Keynes. They might well have known the author. It may have given Browne Willis the idea of circularising Buckinghamshire clergy. He might even later on have got possession of the answers and have used them for his account of the benefices of the Church of England.

Mr. and Mrs. Gerald Elvey of Stonewells Farm, Chalfont St. Giles, had a copy of this book in their house recently (1963). When Mr. Hagger, sometime Rector of Chalfont St. Giles, left, they found it in the dustbin and sold it to Weatherhead, the bookseller of Aylesbury, for the benefit of St. Giles' church.

The Bodleian Library, Oxford, has the answers for Cambridge and Essex, and Birmingham Reference Library those for Warwickshire.

The points on which it was desired to gather information appear to have been :

1. Are any of the tithes impropriated?
2. Is the church endowed with the greater or lesser tithes, or both?

3. Has there been any augmentation of the benefice?
4. What is the age of the church (i.e., was it founded before or after the Reformation)?
5. Has the church been united with any other, or part taken away for another parish?
6. Is there a parish library in association with the church?
7. What is the annual income of the benefice?
8. Who owns the advowson (i.e., who presents to the living)?
9. Is there any other parish of the same name?
10. Is it listed in the *Valor Beneficiorum*?

The answers to the ten questions vary greatly in length and usefulness. Some clergy quite clearly either did not know or could not be bothered. For example, the Curate of Princes Risborough, who did not even sign his name, could only reply:

“In answer to this advertisement, the Tithes of this church be impropriated to Esqre. Henry Penton.”

The Rector of Fawley (again unsigned) did little better:

“Willm. ffreeman Esquire Lord of the Manor and Patron of the Church of Fawley in Com. Bucks and in the Deanery of Wycombe.”

Samuel Spence, Rector of Denham, merely contented himself with saying:

“To the 8th querie it is answered that the advowson of Denham Rectory within the County of Bucks belongs to Sir Roger Hill Knt.”

Others were prolix, and prodigal of information, a good deal of it, alas, irrelevant to the good clergyman’s intent, but often interesting to us. For instance, the Rector of Ellesborough, who signs himself

Rev<sup>d</sup>. Sr. yo<sup>r</sup> affectionate Brother and serv<sup>t</sup>  
Cartwright Wilmot, Rect.

covers both sides of his foolscap sheet with small writing, commencing:

“Revd. Sir,

Your design being very laudable, I shall endeavour a true though short answer to your queries. . . .”

He was evidently a painstaking man, and a keen antiquary and historian to judge by his replies, though the accuracy of some of them would not commend itself to modern scholarship.

The human note also occasionally creeps in, as in the case of Linslade, where the letter is perhaps worth quoting in full.

“Linslade cum Sircott, cur.

In answer to the 1st querie the tythes when the Living was conferred on me was impropriated to Sir Vincent Corbett who was then living a Knight in Shropshire, but since his death there is a Controversie not yet ended between the Corbetts and the Kynastons who is the present patron. 2. With the petty tithes only. (3 evidently defeated him as it is left blank.) 4. Linslade church was founded long before the reformation by whom I know not. (5 and 6 likewise he could not answer.) 7. My living is a Donative of the value of £12 pr. ann. 8. The advowson collation or donation did belong to Sr. Vincent Corbett aforesd, when conferred on me but to whom now I know not till the controversie is ended. 9. It is conominal with Sircott a

Hamlett in the same parish with Linslade come Sircott. 10. It cannot be found in the Liber valorum but it is in the Archdeaconery of Bucks. This is a true answer to the 10 queries by me Edw. Hargrave, the poor Curate of Linslade come Sircott, in the County of Bucks.”

Poor indeed; for £12 per annum cannot have been a very great sum even in the early years of Queen Anne’s reign, and this added to a patronal squabble amongst the gentry!

At Bletchley, as might be expected, much is made of the benefactions of Browne Willis (before the time of Cole of Diary fame, and in the incumbency of Matthew Disney, Rector 1693-1715, though he does not sign it) such as the altarpiece, rails and wainscot “of Dantzick oak”, and other things, though these have little to do with answering any of the ten questions!

Other places where interesting or more detailed information is to be found over and above the answers to the specific questions are Adstock, Ellesborough, Great Hampden, Lee, Marsworth, Medmenham, Milton Keynes, Great Missenden, Penn, Radnage, Willen and Wingrave.

It is of interest that it is nearly all the smaller places—some really remote—that took the trouble to answer the clergyman’s circular; only Marlow, Wycombe, Beaconsfield, Great Missenden and Princes Risborough out of the 43 can have been places of any consequence in 1705.

LIST OF PARISHES COVERED BY THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE  
SECTION OF THE NOTITIA PAROCHIALIS, 1705

Adstock	Lillingstone Dayrell
Aston Clinton	Linslade cum Sircott
Beaconsfield	Great Marlow
Bletchley	Marsworth
Bledlow	Medmenham
Broughton	Mentmore cum Ladburn
Chalfont St. Peter	Milton Keynes
Chedington	Great Missenden
Denham	Little Missenden
Dunton	Penn
Edlesborough	Princes Risborough
Ellesborough	Radnage
Fawley	Soulbury
Haddenham	Stone
Haddenham with Cuddington	Tingewick
Great Hampden	Weston Turville
Hartwell	High Wycombe
Great Horwood	Willen
Hedgerley	Wingrave
Great Kimble	Little Woolstone
Kingsey	Wooton Underwood
Lee (Chapelry in Great Missenden)	