

THE RISE OF A GRADUATE CLERGY IN SUSSEX, 1570–1640

by Peter R. Jenkins, B.A.

Novelists may be as responsible as historians for many of our ideas about the past status of the parish clergy. The image of squire and parson dominating a community is strong in accounts of eighteenth-century rural life, the manor house and the parsonage attending to economic and moral matters respectively. Further, until the arrival of doctor and schoolmaster, the parson was the only educated professional man likely to be encountered by most of the population. But this had not always been so, for it was the Reformation and its associated social upheavals that stimulated the rise of a graduate parish clergy. The result was that by 1640 many parishes, including most of those in Sussex, were served by a scholarly minister instead of a merely literate priest as in medieval times.

Several forces acted toward this change. The newly established protestant church sought educated administrators and divines as well as parish clergy able to spread the new theology. Puritans more simply craved a learned, preaching ministry. Both groups saw that their ambitions could be achieved through the recruitment of university graduates and so aided the great expansion of the universities that followed the Reformation. While this was also a response to the needs of common law and civil administration so that the universities became responsible for the shaping of intellectual groups others than the clergy,¹ their older seminary role remained dominant. At least two new colleges, Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex at Cambridge, were founded with the intention avowed in the statutes of Emmanuel of 'rendering as many persons as possible fit for the sacred ministry of the church and its sacraments'.² These foundations and many smaller gifts and bequests provided the universities with a new wealth and prestige that was reflected in architectural splendour and numerical expansion. Student entries at both Oxford and Cambridge rose from 150 a year in 1500 to between 400 and 500 by 1600.³ There was also a tightening of administration as the universities sought to enforce greater social and intellectual control over their students. In turn, the aspiring clergyman saw university education as a great advantage, both in obtaining a parish living and in seeking advancement within the church. Certainly, in Sussex natives of the county who received livings in it in the early seventeenth century were mostly graduates returning from studies outside the county, whereas in earlier times many local men beneficed can only have attended local schools. As this advantage came to be increasingly a necessity, the universities helped to create a new professional clergy by establishing a uniform standard of qualification where before ordination had been almost entirely at the discretion of individual bishops.

However, the clergy have usually been excluded from studies of the history of the professions because they are not concerned with the 'ordinary business of life' as physician or lawyer might be.⁴ But in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the church was very much engaged in the ordinary business of life. Although its basis was spiritual the church married, buried, and proved wills, its courts could often deliver swifter judgements than the civil courts, as an institution it was a major landowner, while through the system of churchwarden's presentments it attempted to keep a watch on the morals of the community. When historians have seen

professionalism in the English church at this time, it has generally been among the élite who occupied the episcopal bench, the offices and chapters of the cathedrals, and who often possessed political influence. Simple clergy lists do not give an overall picture of the state of the clergy which would reveal an increasing proportion of graduates and help to explain its cause. Such a survey would need to be based on records of the installation of clergy to livings across the whole diocese, and fortunately in Sussex (where county and diocesan boundaries largely coincide) these have been reconstructed by Mr. W. D. Peckham.⁵

TABLE 1
Graduates benefited in the diocese of Chichester, 1601-40

<i>Bishop</i>	<i>Priests benefited</i>	<i>All patronage —of whom graduates of Oxf. & Camb.</i>	<i>Graduates as percentage</i>	<i>Priests benefited</i>	<i>Episcopal patronage —of whom graduates of Oxf. & Camb.</i>	<i>Graduates as percentage</i>
Watson ¹ 1601-5	89	76	85	19	18	95
Andrewes 1605-9	79	74	94	26	25	96
Harsnet 1609-19	190	183	96	44	44	100
Carleton 1619-28	127	104	82	24	21	88
Montague 1628-38	139	130	94	38	38	100
Duppa ¹ 1638-40	78	75	96	15	15	100
Totals	702	642	91	166	161	97

¹Part only of episcopate.

The education of these men was analysed by collating the institutions to livings within the diocese for the years 1601-40 with the published lists of members of the universities of Oxford and Cambridge.⁶ From these institutions which are shown in Table 1, 480 individual clergy were identified, with their date of institution, living, patron, and usually educational qualification. The main problem in tracing them in the *Alumni* is the variety of spelling of names. Sometimes two men of the same name can be distinguished by reference to the fragmentary visitation records. Three hundred and sixty-four of the 480 were traced as graduates in the *Alumni*, although a further 55 were attributed degrees in the institution records, as may be seen from Table 2. The institution records are probably correct in this, for evidence of qualification had to be produced by clergymen before being admitted to a living, while the *Alumni* do not claim to be exhaustive. Records have been lost and many men who

satisfied all the requirements for a degree failed to graduate formally because of sickness or absence.

TABLE 2
University background of graduates benefited in Sussex, 1601-40

<i>Degree</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>BD</i>	<i>DD</i>	<i>BCL</i>	<i>DCL</i>	<i>LLB</i>	<i>Total</i>
Oxford	7	34	100	21	15	4	2	—	183
Cambridge	4	22	128	26	11	—	—	1	192
Totals	11	56	228	47	26	4	2	1	375
Not traced in <i>Alumni</i>	— ¹	13	38	3	—	—	—	1	55
Total	11	69	266	50	26	4	2	2	430

¹Matriculations (*m*) have been obtained only from the *Alumni* and it is therefore impossible to ascertain this figure.

That more than 60% of these graduates had proceeded to take a master's degree may seem a high proportion until the nature of a university education at this time is considered. The B.A. was awarded after a student had completed four years of residence, although this was reduced to three years for the sons of peers, knights or esquires. In that time he studied a blend of classical literature and scholastic philosophy, the latter centred on the works of Aristotle. It was only after graduation that more specialized studies of theology, law or medicine were introduced, the student having proved his intellectual worth. The M.A. required a further three years of study, while the degrees of bachelor or doctor of divinity or law entailed further specialized study and were often awarded on special recommendation some years after completing studies at university. In the early seventeenth century most graduates took holy orders, perhaps as many as 80% from some colleges,⁷ and the act of proceeding to a M.A. indicated an intention to enter the church.

The organisation of teaching was almost as important as its content. The universities were made up of colleges which had individual and widely differing characters. At Cambridge, while the university as a whole enjoyed a reputation for fervent puritanism at the opening of the seventeenth century,⁸ feeling was strongest in certain colleges as may be seen from Table 3. Trinity was the largest foundation at either of the universities with 50 undergraduates, and there some tutors apparently held private services in their rooms, while Pembroke had a distinguished protestant tradition.⁹ Although less radical than at Cambridge, puritanism was also a vigorous force at Oxford,¹⁰ as shown in Table 4. The influence of such strongly protestant heads of college as Thomas Sampson at Corpus Christi and Nicholas Bonde at Magdalen was considerable, the latter assisting in the foundation of Sidney Sussex at Cambridge. In addition to those colleges especially known for their puritanism, students worked in a strongly puritan atmosphere at Broadgates Hall which was refounded as Pembroke College in 1624, and puritan sermons were preached at Balliol and Lincoln College. Further, there were influences on the student other than his college. Open lectures were provided by the university to supplement the teaching of the colleges, while the student's relationship with his tutor was undoubtedly vital in forming opinions.¹¹ Puritan tutors were scattered throughout the universities, even within less radical colleges.

TABLE 3
Colleges attended by Cambridge graduates benefited in Sussex, 1601-40

<i>College</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>BD</i>	<i>DD</i>	<i>LLB</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fellows</i> ¹
Trinity ²		3	22	2	2	1	30	8
St. John's	1	5	17	5	2		30	6
Christ's		4	17	1	1		23	1
Pembroke ²		1	14	3	1		19	7
Peterhouse	1		10	2	1		14	2
Clare ²	1		9	2			12	
Queens'		2	5	3	1		11	3
Emmanuel ²		2	8				10	
Sidney Sussex ²		1	7	1	1		10	1
King's		1	3	3	2		9	6
Jesus	1	1	3	1			6	
Caius ²		1	3	1			5	1
Corpus Christi		1	3	1			5	1
Magdalene ²			4	1			5	1
St. Catharine's			2				2	
Totals	4	22	127	26	11	1	191	37

¹Not included in total.

²Colleges noted for puritan sympathies at this period.

m = matriculated.

By the end of the sixteenth century the universities were able for the first time to supply sufficient educated and zealous men to fill the ranks of the parish clergy. However, it was estimated that £30 a year was the minimum income needed to attract an educated man to a parish living and in Sussex there may have been as few as four livings that met this standard. A survey of 1603 included in a petition from the Sussex gentry to James I found that a third of the parish livings were impropriated and many more poor, 23 being worth less than £16 and some as little as £5. As a result, 50 men held two or more parishes to supplement their incomes and a further six were not resident on their livings.¹² Impropriations, by which the major part of the tithe income of a living had been assigned away from the parson into lay hands, to support the incomes of diocesan officials, or university or charitable endowments, were responsible for much of this poverty. It is perhaps surprising then that another survey of 1603 should have been able to record the following graduates among the clergy of the diocese: D.D., 11; B.D., 15; M.A., 87; B.A., 39.¹³ These 152 graduates represented half of the clergy and included most of those holding posts within the diocesan administration. Although this was an official survey and the figures may have been adjusted to advantage by the authorities, the proportion of graduates varied greatly between dioceses. In 1603 some 67% were graduates in Ely diocese, where Cambridge colleges held a number of livings, while in York diocese the figure was as low as 31%, due largely to poverty and remoteness. But in Sussex factors other than economics had been at work to raise the standard of education among the clergy, principally the early reforming energy of Bishop Richard Curteys and the influence of puritanism among the lay patrons of livings.

TABLE 4
Colleges attended by Oxford graduates beneficed in Sussex, 1601-40

<i>College</i>	<i>m</i>	<i>BA</i>	<i>MA</i>	<i>BD</i>	<i>DD</i>	<i>BCL</i>	<i>DCL</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Fellows</i> ¹
Magdalen ²		9	11	7	2			29	11
Magdalen Hall ²	1	8	10		1			20	
New College		1	11	1	3	1	1	18	5
Christ Church ²	1	1	8	3	1	1		15	
Brasenose ²	1	2	10	1				14	
Queen's ²	2	3	5	3	1			14	2
Hart Hall	1	2	5	1				9	
Trinity		1	2	4	1	1		9	2
Merton		1	6		1			8	2
St. John's		1	2		2		1	6	2
St. Alban Hall			3		1			4	
All Souls	1		1		2			4	2
Balliol			4					4	
Corpus Christi			3	1				4	1
St. Edmund Hall		1	3					4	
St. Mary Hall			4					4	
Pembroke		3	1					4	
Lincoln			3					3	
New Inn Hall			1			1		3	
Gloucester Hall			2					2	
Oriel			2					2	
University			2					2	
Exeter ²			1					1	
Totals	7	34	100	21	15	4	2	183	27

¹Not included in total.

²Colleges noted for puritan sympathies at this period.

m = matriculated.

Curteys was elected bishop of Chichester in 1570 and during the twelve years of his episcopacy he made a determined attempt to spread the new reformed religion throughout Sussex. He was a graduate and senior fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, where he had been university proctor in 1563 and president of St. John's for a short time in 1565 until driven out by opponents of his attempts to reform the college. Curteys had been supported in these reforms by Sir William Cecil, secretary of state and chancellor of the university, and when Curteys failed, Cecil was influential in obtaining his preferment to the deanery of Chichester from which post he was elevated. A popular preacher at Cambridge, whose theology was a moderate Calvinism, Curteys believed that preaching was the central duty of the clergy but supported the hierarchial structure of the church and was thus no presbyterian. He was a puritan to the extent of wanting to reform the church from within and to this end brought enthusiasm for the preaching of the word to Sussex, in particular by appointing Cambridge

graduates to livings within his gift. It was said in 1577 that 'whereas it was a rare thing before his time to heare a learned sermon in Sussex, now the pulpittes in most places sound contynually with the voyce of learned and Godly preachers'. Certainly, in the previous six years Curteys had preferred or helped in the preferment of some twenty clergymen who were 'well able to preache in any learned audience in this realme'.¹⁴

He tackled the problems of poverty by augmenting and amalgamating livings, but in doing so frequently angered the cathedral chapter and county gentry, and the price of his reforms was considerable pluralism and non-residence among the educated clergy. In 1579 the 127 parishes of Chichester archdeaconry contained as many as 25 non-resident clergy and 41 pluralists.¹⁵ Further, his hopes of raising the values of livings by returning impropriated tithes met with negligible success, as the policy was also to do on a national scale. This was in part due to the reliance of the bishop and his officials on income derived from such impropriations. The precentorship of the cathedral was accompanied by the rectories of Oving and West Dean, while the chancellor held Chiddingly and Pevensy. In these practical terms a benefice was a piece of freehold property whose owner derived income from tithes and rents, rather than a cure of souls. It was a distinction that was upheld by the courts of common law, while a healthy profit could be derived from leasing the right of presentation at a vacancy.

The rights of many laymen to present clergy to livings also helped to raise educational standards. While men such as Curteys sought reform within the church, many puritans were active among the laity, particularly in the east of the county.¹⁶ Their demands for a learned, preaching ministry were based on the premise that the duty of the clergyman was to explain, interpret and teach the scriptures to the souls of his cure rather than simply to perform ceremonial. At Rye a tradesman was accused of puritanism in 1591 for saying that 'my lord of Cantabury is but the Pope of England, and the Booke of Common Prayer which he alloweth to be sayde in the Church is but the masse translated and dumbdogs do reade it, for those that do not preache they call them dumbdogs'.¹⁷ The strength of feeling at Rye had been demonstrated as early as the 1570s when the corporation paid a yearly stipend to augment the value of the living. Further, a strong group of clerical puritans was established at Lewes by the 1590s and by 1600 puritanism had spread to many of the market towns, manor houses and farmsteads in east Sussex.¹⁸ Puritanism was especially strong among the gentry families, the Morleys, Bowyers, Mays and Pelhams being singled out by Bishop Curteys for their protestantism and independence,¹⁹ and all held advowsons of livings as part of their estates. It was a natural extension of puritan belief to present university trained preachers to these livings when vacant, and in the east of the county more advowsons were held by lay patrons than by the bishop.

Despite this activity, the puritans sought more radical reform. Of the many petitions addressed to King James I on his accession in 1603 two came from Sussex, one signed by 26 members of the gentry, the other by 2,285 of those of lesser status including 40 of the clergy.²⁰ Both groups called for the establishment of a 'learned, godly, and resident ministry, with sufficient maintenance'.²¹ Of these demands the first at least, that of education, was largely met by 1640 through the recruitment of a very high proportion of graduates into the clergy of Chichester diocese. Table 1 shows that the bishops of Chichester almost exclusively selected graduates for their patronage. The Crown was also a major patron, both holding advowsons itself and having the right to present when a vacancy remained unfilled for more than eighteen months. The Lord Keeper of the Great Seal administered Crown patronage and graduates were favoured, for out of 107 Crown presentations to Sussex livings between 1601 and 1640, no more than eleven were not of graduates.

TABLE 5
Presentations to Sussex livings by Magdalen College, Oxford, 1601–40

<i>Date</i>	<i>Name and Degree</i>		<i>Rector/Vicar—living</i>	<i>Fellow</i>
1602	Thomas Phippes	BD	R. Bramber & Botolphs	1585–1607
1603	Stephen Gough ¹	MA	R. Bramber & Botolphs	1598–1603
1603	Isaac Pocock	MA	V. Sele (Upper Beeding)	1597–1608
1605	Nathanial Vertue ²	BD	R. Bramber & Botolphs	1588–1608
1607	Richard Boughton	BD	V. Findon	1573–1606
1608	James Wrench	MA	V. Old Shoreham	g
1609	James Wrench	MA	R. Bramber & Botolphs	g
1610	John Fowkes	MA	V. Old Shoreham	g
1613	Edmund Carpenter	BD	V. Findon	1582–1613
1615	William Greenhill	MA	R. New Shoreham	g
1619	Toby Garbrand ³	BD	V. Findon	1605–1619
1623	Laurence Davenport	MA	R. Bramber & Botolphs	1619–1623
1633	John Nurth	BA	R. New Shoreham	g
1636	Robert Williamson ⁴	BD	V. Sele	1617–1652
1638	Nicholas Garbrand ³	BD	V. Washington	1619–1639
1639	William Franklin	MA	V. Findon	g

g Graduate of Magdalen College or Hall.

¹ Deprived 1605, a puritan.

² Vice-president of the college, 1606.

³ The Garbrands were brothers, sons of a Dutch protestant refugee and bookseller of Oxford.

⁴ Proctor 1628, vice-president 1632.

But there was one significant patron who presented only graduates. This was Magdalen College at Oxford, and the men presented are listed in Table 5. Relationships between a college and a particular part of the country were common; at Oxford, Exeter had been founded to accommodate scholars from Devon and Cornwall, while Merton gave preference to candidates from Winchester diocese where the college held estates. Such a relationship existed between Magdalen and the county of Sussex. The college was founded by William of Waynflete in 1458 and he gave as part of its endowment the estates of Sele Priory which included the advowsons of Bramber and Botolphs, Upper Beeding, Old and New Shoreham, Findon, and Washington. Waynflete decreed in consequence that a number of rooms at the college were to be reserved for natives of Sussex, but none of the men presented to college livings has been identified as originating from the county. They were commonly fellows of the college, and those who retained their fellowships are unlikely to have been resident on their livings as they were required to live in college, the parishes being held to augment a modest university income while the church was left in care of a curate. This is almost certainly true of Thomas Phippes who received Bramber in 1602 and the rectory of Shawell in Leicestershire in 1605. However, in 1607 he resigned his fellowship when presented by the college to the living of Selborne in Hampshire, and probably took up residence there. Stephen Gough gave up his fellowship on receiving Bramber, and he was certainly resident there. Gough was a puritan whose energy in helping to organise the petitions to James I led to his deprivation from the living in 1605.

This small group serve to illustrate many of the problems encountered in studying the rise of a graduate ministry. While it is clear that many more graduates were finding employment in the ranks of the parish clergy during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, it is too simple to ascribe this solely to the fulfilment of puritan ambitions. A university education was becoming a necessity in many walks of life. The sons of the gentry attended university to seek a liberal education, while a degree offered wide new opportunities to those of more humble origins such as before the church alone had done. Entry to the professions became the key to social mobility after the Reformation, and while common law offered the chance of wealth to its practitioners, the church could at least offer some security and social status, and to the pious the opportunity to preach and write. A degree came to be a prerequisite rather than a guarantee of finding a parish living in Sussex, but although better qualified on paper these graduates were not necessarily more vocationally suitable than their predecessors.²² Further, the practices of pluralism and non-residence continued so that some parishes in which a graduate held the living were in fact served by a curate and the immediate cure of souls in the county might not have been in the charge of such highly educated men as the statistics suggest. But pluralism never affected more than a third of the parishes of Sussex at one time and by the early seventeenth century many curates were themselves university men seeking a parish of their own or hoping to finance further periods of study. Many graduates did hold relatively poor parish livings and served their parishioners well, carrying out their duties with diligence and the benefit of education.

The increasingly common shared experience of many clergy and gentry in attending university tended to bring the parson socially closer to the squire while separating him further from the community than did his office alone. Higher standards of education helped to give the parson greater status, wider contacts with fellow students through the university and among the local clergy, and possibly a greater sense of self-importance. As such it was an important part of the process and perhaps the price of creating a profession from a looser vocational grouping. It was a complex process, one stimulated by forces from within the church, from the laity, the universities, the Crown and from among the clergy themselves. Yet it was a process characteristic of its age, as characteristic as the image of the country parson it bequeathed to later centuries.

Author: Peter R. Jenkins, Sandcott, Rectory Lane, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 2AD.

Notes

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¹M. H. Curtis, *Oxford and Cambridge in transition 1558-1652* (1959), 261.

²R. O'Day, *The English clergy* (Leicester, 1979), 134.

³H. Kearney, *Scholars and gentlemen* (1970), 28.

⁴A. M. Carr-Saunders and P. A. Wilson, *The professions* (Oxford, 1935), 3.

⁵West Sussex Record Office, Add. MS. 10, 908.

⁶J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses* (Oxford, 1892); J & J. A. Venn, *Alumni Cantabrigienses* (Cambridge, 1922-7).

⁷M. H. Curtis, 'The alienated intellectuals of early Stuart England', *Past and Present*, 23 (1962), 42.

⁸P. A. Welsby, *Lancelot Andrewes 1555-1626* (1958), 17.

⁹Welsby, 17-18.

¹⁰V. H. H. Green, *The history of Oxford University* (1974), 57.

¹¹W. A. Pantin, *Oxford life in Oxford archives* (Oxford, 1972), 9.

¹²S. B. Babbage, *Puritanism and Richard Bancroft* (1962), 191.

¹³British Library, Harleian MS. 280, f. 158r.

¹⁴R. B. Manning, *Religion and society in Elizabethan Sussex* (Leicester, 1969), 71, 63-4.

¹⁵Manning, 175.

¹⁶W. J. Sheils, *The Puritans in the Diocese of*

Peterborough, 1558-1610, Northamptonshire Record Society, 30 (1979), 9.

¹⁷C. Thomas-Stanford, *Sussex in the Great Civil War and the Interregnum, 1642-1660* (1910), 23.

¹⁸A. Fletcher, *A county community in peace and war: Sussex 1600-1660* (1975), 62.

¹⁹Fletcher, 24.

²⁰Babbage, 192.

²¹Babbage, 191.

²²R. O'Day, 'Ecclesiastical patronage', in *Church and society in England Henry VIII to James I* (1977), 146.