

PIETY AND BELIEF IN 15TH-CENTURY LONDON: AN ANALYSIS OF THE 15th-CENTURY CHURCHWARDENS' INVENTORY OF ST NICHOLAS SHAMBLES

Helen Combes

SUMMARY

This paper is based upon a study of the surviving inventory (but not the Churchwardens' Accounts) of the church of St Nicholas Shambles. The inventory, along with the accounts, are currently held in the Archives department of St Bartholomew's Hospital in Smithfield. The inventory gives an interesting insight into the liturgical practices and beliefs of the church and parishioners in the mid 15th century.

THE CHURCH

'Then there was of old times a proper parish church of saint Nicholas, whereof the said flesh market tooke the name, and was called S. Nicholas Shambles. This Church with the tenements and ornaments, was by Henrie the eight given to the maior and communaltie of the Citie, towards the maintenance of the new parish Church, then to be erected in the late dissolved church of the Gray Friars: so was this church dissolved and pulled downe. In place wher of, and of the churchyard, many fayre houses are now builded in a court with a wel, in the midst whereof the church stode.' (Stow 1908, 316)

The parish church of St Nicholas Shambles, mentioned here in the 16th century by John Stow in his *Survey of London*, stood directly to the north of St Paul's Cathedral in an area known as the Flesh Shambles where many of the City's butchers lived. An entry for February 1370 in the Assize of Nuisance suggests that the parish may not always have been the most pleasant place in which to live.

'Brother Robert de Madyngton, guardian of the Friars Minor, complains by Robert de Watlyngton, his attorney, that Richard Bayser, 'bocher' and Emma his wife have built a 'skaldyngghous' in their tenement in Pentecostlane in the parish of St Nicholas Shambles, in which they slaughter pigs and many other animals, and the water mixed with the blood and hair of the slaughtered animals, and with other filth from the washing (lotura) [of the carcasses], flows into the ditch or kennel in the street, through which it is carried into the friar's garden, causing a stench in many places there.' (Chew & Kellaway 1973, 142, no.569)

In addition to the butchers, the area around St Paul's also included a concentration of the City's illuminators (limners), stationers and bookbinders. Analysis of the records of the Wardens of London Bridge in the 15th and 16th centuries reveals 56 book craftsmen leasing shops in Paternoster Row alone. Out of 136 stationers in the area of St Paul's, 119 came from the seven parishes closest to St Paul's: St Faith the Virgin, St Augustine, St Michael le Querne, St Botolph without Aldersgate, St Nicholas Shambles, St Sepulchre without Newgate, and St Bride's, Fleet Street. Many legal scribes also lived within these parishes (Christianson 1990, 33). By the 15th century the London book trade had grown considerably, its pool of talent often fed by men who had trained elsewhere and been subsequently attracted to the City. However, whereas the Butchers' Company, the other trade group to congregate particularly in the parish of St Nicholas Shambles, although not one of the 12

major Companies, could be counted amongst the larger guilds in civic life by the late medieval period, the Stationers' mistery by contrast, remained among the smaller of the guilds and the craft itself was ultimately unable to compete with the arrival of the printing press. As well as being close to St Paul's the parish was neighbour to both St Bartholomew's Hospital and the Franciscan Convent of the Greyfriars in Newgate Street, whose great church and precincts had been built in the 1220s with substantial lay support.

There are now no physical remains above ground of the parish church of St Nicholas Shambles. The history of the church and its congregation must, therefore, be re-created from documentary and archaeological sources. Amongst these are the surviving churchwardens' accounts and a detailed inventory, and it is upon this inventory that this dissertation is based. The churchwardens' accounts run from October 1452 to September 1526.¹ The volume is bound with the inventory first, followed by the account of the hallowing of the bells ceremony, and finally the financial accounts of the churchwardens. Subsequent churchwardens' accounts for St Nicholas Shambles which date from 1526 to 1546/8 (when the parish was combined with that of St Audoen's to make that of Christchurch) are bound at the front of the first Governors' minute book of the re-founded St Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield.² Unfortunately the inventory itself is undated. However, subsequent research has revealed in the main body of the Churchwardens' Accounts an entry recording payment for the writing of the inventory of the church goods dated February 15th 1457.

THE INVENTORY BOOKS

In total, 33 books are listed in the inventory of St Nicholas Shambles for general liturgical and spiritual use: this excludes those held for use in chantries of the church such as that dedicated to Our Lady.³ Approached simplistically in terms of the total number of volumes held, this compares well with the details given in surviving inventories of the period already published (Simpson 1868; Freshfield 1887; Goss 1933). For instance, the total number of books held and listed in the inventory of St Peter Cheap dated 1431, in a parish described as wealthy and having within its boundaries a substantial number

of goldsmiths, was 33; that of St Stephen Coleman Street in 1466 totalled 34. Generally, the types of books listed are similar, there are occasional variations in proportionate numbers, which probably reflects nothing more than the vagaries and whims of the original donors and purchasers of such books as they attempted to meet the church's requirements both under Canon Law and in terms of local preference.

First to be mentioned in the St Nicholas inventory are mass books, of which there were six, including one described as being 'for Seint Thomes auter' and one 'ynoted'; that is with the music needed for the singing of the mass. As seems to have been the case in other inventories, the St Nicholas Shambles books are all identified by the first few lines of text from the second or subsequent leaves. For example, 'In primis a massebook for the hig auter begynneth in the secunde lef. *Et in eodem ympno*'.⁴ It was common practice to identify books from later pages rather than the first which was inevitably more prone to damage which would thus render the book unidentifiable in an age when all books were still of great value. In particular the 'Olde massebook' listed as beginning 'in the thirde lef. *In illo Tempore*'⁵ could well have been subjected to this kind of damage as a result of constant use.

The next listed are the four Antiphoners held by the church. These were the books which contained the music for the anthems, or antiphons, which were sung during Divine Office. The contents of these books could vary enormously and Watkin (1947–8, xxv–xcix) states that most churches had at least one. The inventory of St Peter Cheap lists three and that of St Stephen's seven. The compiler at St Stephen's is the most forthcoming, listing a series of four Antiphoners as 'not Salisbury wrytten' (Freshfield 1887, 36). Against some is the margin note 'nota solde' (it is not possible to tell from the printed source if this is in a different hand) (*ibid*). Presumably they therefore had three in regular use. It is entirely possible that St Nicholas Shambles had owned others which were sold off prior to the drawing up of the inventory, perhaps because they too were not of the standardised Sarum Usage.

St Nicholas Shambles had four books described as Portos; one 'olde' and one 'litel'. These were the books often described as a 'Portifory' or 'Breviary' and which would have included the standard services (excluding the mass), the antiphoners and lessons. These were relatively

common by the late Middle Ages: the laity often brought their own copies for personal use during services, a habit much commented upon by foreign visitors to the capital. An Italian visitor to England remarked that 'any who can read tak[e] the Office of Our Lady with them' (Duffy 1992, 212). In fact these Books of Hours were mass produced even before the advent of the printing press, being manufactured by teams of professional copyists and intended for a wider, less aristocratic audience than the highly illuminated costly versions. After the development of the printing press, they became even more widely available, although only in Latin. Possession of a Primer in English could have laid its owner open to a charge of heresy. Again a comparable number of Breviaries were held in the parishes of St Peter Cheap and St Stephen; St Peter's owning five and St Stephen's having six.

The parish seems to have been generously provided with books known as 'Legende', owning three in total.⁶ A *Legende* was generally a collection of lessons read at matins, the sermons and homilies of the Church Fathers and the ever popular stories of the lives of the Saints. All three 'legendes' at St Nicholas are distinctive in their own way. First, and perhaps regarded as the most important, is a volume proudly proclaimed as 'a newe legende of the gifte of Will[ia]m Edwarde'.⁷ This is the first instance of a donor's name appearing in the inventory. Predictably, given the church's dedication, the next is an 'olde legende of Seint Nicholas lif and othe [other] Seints Lifes'.⁸ Of particular significance is the final entry in this section 'a legende in english y cheyned in the qwere of dyus seintis lifes begynnynge in the iijde lef. *for Sara*'.⁹ Neither St Peter Cheap nor St Stephen lists any books in the vernacular; indeed this is the only book in English held at St Nicholas and would no doubt have had popular appeal amongst the increasingly educated population of this period, for whom, it is argued, literacy increasingly meant the ability to read and write in English.¹⁰ Moreover, the book is identified by the third rather than the more customary second page, suggesting that this was a well-used volume which had as a consequence been subject to damage. The occurrence here of a book in English is both a significant reflection of this trend and a portent for the future. The need for readily available books in the vernacular, especially the Bible, was one of the major demands of the later Protestant reformers. The particular volume here would

have catered for the late 15th-century laity's devotion to the Saints and consequent widespread interest in sometimes far-fetched accounts of their lives. It is, however, hard to determine just how readily available this volume was to the average parishioner. It should be noted that it was chained in the choir, that is, beyond the chancel steps and therefore not necessarily accessible to the laity. Does this perhaps suggest instead a need for books in the vernacular on the part of a less than perfectly educated clergy?¹¹

The parish was in possession of three 'Graells', books containing all the music needed by the choir for the celebration of the mass prior to the elevation of the Host. 'Sauters' are referred to three times and this is probably a phonetic rendering on the part of the clerk of the word Psalter, those books which contained the 150 liturgical psalms which would be used during the course of a week's services. They are, in this instance, notable particularly for the recurrence of William Edwarde as the donor of 'another Sauter lynge in the chapell of Seint John ycheyned by the gifte of Will[ia]m Edwarde'.¹² William Edwarde was a grocer whose generosity towards the parish is demonstrated more than once in the inventory. His family came originally from Essex though he himself was born in London. He was first elected alderman in 1464 and served as mayor in 1471.¹³ It may be that, in this instance, a book chained in a side chapel (that of St John) would have been more available to the general congregation, although not in English.

There follows a mixture of items including a 'lettturnall'. This may well have been the *Lectrinall*, a book in which was written the melodies of the Psalms; alternatively, it may have been a lectionary, a book of readings which would have rested on the lectern. There is a 'collectary', which gave the Collects of the Divine Office. There is also a volume referred to as a 'manuell' which probably provided the order for administration of the sacraments and which could be carried by a priest to the sick and the dying, a major part of his pastoral duties. There is also a collection of 'processionals' which would have provided the music for the responses and anthems sung before Sunday mass and on other feast days. These are all books which would have been in common general use. The 'Hugucion' referred to as 'ycheyned in the qwere'¹⁴ was a handbook of Canon Law.

There is a particularly interesting book referred

to as '*Pars oculi*'. The *Pars Oculi* is the first part of a much larger work of the early 14th century, the *Oculus Sacerdotis* written most probably by the priest William of Pagula who came originally from Yorkshire, and who was vicar of Winkfield in Berkshire and penitentiary for the deanery of Reading.¹⁵ He was probably the author of several other works, and is described by Pantin as '... one of the few outstanding canonist writers that later medieval England produced' (Pantin 1955, 196). His interests lay in the combination of Canon Law with the practical pastoral care of souls. The first section of the *Pars Oculi* provides detailed instructions for the parish priest on the right conduct of confession, how the penitent is to be questioned concerning his grasp of the essentials of the Faith and the nature of the seven deadly sins. Various methods are suggested for dealing with specific categories of penitent, although not without apparent understanding of the frailty of the human condition. For example 'And the priest ought to inquire of the penitent, if he was drunk, how he got drunk, whether perchance he did not know the power of the wine, or because of guests, or because of exceeding thirst coming upon him' (Pantin 1955, 197). The *Pars Oculi* found in the St Nicholas inventory would have been the most useful and popular at the parish level and it is therefore not surprising to find it here.¹⁶ St Stephen Coleman Street also owned a copy; St Peter Cheap may also have done so but it is impossible to tell from the printed version since the editor of the text, the Rev Simpson, by his own admission 'condensed this list for the sake of brevity' (Simpson 1868, 159).

There is no Bible listed and this places St Nicholas Shambles firmly in its pre-Reformation social and historical context. Not until Thomas Cromwell's Proclamations of 1538 was it obligatory for curates and parishioners to provide a complete Bible. All the readings necessary for the right conduct of services would have been available in the other books, especially the Breviaries or Portos. Central to the practice of late medieval Catholicism was the celebration of the mass and this is reflected in the list of St Nicholas Shambles's books, the majority of which are tailored to meet this liturgical need. Demands for greater lay access to the Bible, especially in the vernacular, are a feature of later Protestant reform movements. Fifteenth-century lay piety in the context of the parish is here revealed as collective in its approach and orientated towards

the liturgy and the Eucharist in its provision of books. Certainly there were signs in certain sections of society of a desire for a more inward, mystical piety and this can be seen in the work of writers such as Margery Kempe and the mystic Richard Rolle. However at St Nicholas Shambles, as elsewhere, the books available were of an instructional or exemplary nature rather than of a kind which encouraged individualistic thought or inward piety. Finally there is a hint of the cumbersome nature of much of late medieval Church practice. Presumably the Hugucion book of Canon Law was permanently chained in the choir because it needed to be readily available to the parish priest who had to negotiate his way through the complexities of Church regulations. The *Pars Oculi* would have been indispensable for largely similar reasons.

In conclusion, it would seem that St Nicholas Shambles had a fair cross section of books of the kind that would be expected in a well endowed urban parish of the 15th century. In particular books that aided the performance of services and priestly duties, books that provided the musical accompaniment, and books of a more general spiritual instruction. There are some interesting items, in particular the *Legende* written in English and the *Pars Oculi*. Equally important is what this list reveals both about St Nicholas Shambles in particular and the late medieval Catholic Church in general. For example, in keeping with the general trend towards greater lay literacy at least one parishioner, William Edward, reveals himself as probably literate and, in any case sufficiently interested in books to go to the trouble of providing one on a popular subject for the Church. Another, as has already been noted, is very significant in that it was in English.

THE VESTMENTS

When looked at in comparison with other 15th-century church inventories, it could be said that St Nicholas Shambles was not especially well-endowed with vestments, in particular complete sets intended for '...preste, dekyn and subdekyn.'¹⁷ For instance, St Stephen Coleman Street had 10 sets of vestments made of various rich silks, damasks and baudkins all embroidered with various motifs, flowers, lions or hearts in an array of bright colours. In addition, they had three white vestments for use 'in tyme of Lent' and a

'purpyll chesebyll for gode Fryday' (Freshfield 1887, 38) as well as a number of single items, in particular copes. St Martin Outwich inventory also had at least 12 sets that may, or may not, have been complete (Goss 1933, 68). Most striking of all must have been the officiating priests at St Peter Cheap. The church, already noted as being in a wealthy parish, owned six complete sets in sumptuous materials, two of red cloth of gold, and one each in blue cloth of gold, blue baudkin, black velvet and white silk variously embroidered with 'grenehounds & Kenetts and oder houndes' and images of the Resurrection (Simpson 1868, 38).

The inventories make occasional attempts to specify the purpose of particular items. Both St Stephen's and St Martin's refer to vestments for ferial days. For example 'Item j vestement of yollowe sylke wt a grene crose for fferyall dayes ...' (Freshfield 1887, 38) and 'ix fferyall vestments good and badde of dyvse colors...' (Goss 1933, 68). A ferial day is any day which is not a domanical day (*dies dominica*), that is, a weekday to which no particular feast is assigned. Conversely, the compilers of the inventory of St Nicholas Shambles omit any reference to ferial days but do make one entry thus: 'Item a vestment for Sonedays of rede and blewe...'.¹⁸ This is virtually the only distinction that appears to be made between vestments for specific purposes. The only other St Nicholas Shambles examples refer to 'ij blacke olde copes for mortuaries the orfreis whit bustian embroudrid with garters', and a single vestment 'for lente' with crosses of red ribbon.¹⁹ Surprisingly, none of the vestments belonging to any of the chantries of the church, which existed solely to pray for and commemorate the dead, show any particular restraint in the colours of their vestments. It has to be said however that the idea of black for requiems and mourning owes more to the Victorian medieval revival and Oxford Movement within the Anglican Church than it does to any medieval reality. Clearly here at St Nicholas, as elsewhere in this period, the emphasis was more on a lavish, flamboyant display. Richard Fauconer²⁰ gave to the Brotherhood of St Luke a 'sengil vestiment of russett sathan the offrey of grene',²¹ which probably says more about Fauconer's perception of himself and the impression he wanted to make on others than it does about the nature of the Brotherhood of St Luke.

The church of St Nicholas however did possess eight, apparently complete, vestment sets either sufficient for the officiating priest, deacon and subdeacon or stated in the text as being a vestment with two sets of accessories, presumably intended for deacon and subdeacon.²² What is described as the 'principall vestimente' was made of 'rede cloth of golde veluett uppon damaske' and was made up of a cope, a 'chesipiss' (chasuble), two 'tonycles' (tunics) with 'stolis' (stoles) and 'pallas' (palls), three 'allbis' (albs) and three 'amytis' (amices) with a matching corporas case. The corporas or corporal was a large linen cloth spread over the altar at mass and upon which were placed the Sacred Elements: it was stored in a corporas case, which could be made of any material and was often heavily decorated.

Beyond the occasional adjective to indicate 'olde' or 'newe' it is not generally possible to tell how long the church had owned any particular garment although sometimes an approximate date can be arrived at if the date of death or probate of a particular donor's will is known. With careful storage there is no reason why a vestment should not survive for a considerable period of years and could, therefore, be a hidden representative of the Opus Anglicanum tradition of English church needlework, but sadly it is not possible to know. Certainly the materials and colours (red is the clear favourite) testify to an immense richness and textural variety. Cloth of gold and gold thread were popular, either for applied designs of flowers, branches, birds and crosses or for entire garments. In the inventory these are usually described as being 'rede cloth of golde'²³ or '...vestment of rede clothe of golde the orfrey blewe cloth of golde...',²⁴ meaning gold thread interwoven with silk thread of the stated colour. The most frequently specified material here is baudkin,²⁵ a material very close in appearance to cloth of gold and coming from the East, originally from Baghdad. Velvet and damask²⁶ were also costly imports, as was bordalisaunde which occurs only once in the inventory and was a particularly expensive striped silk manufactured at Alexandria. All of these represent a considerable financial outlay by the parish. Only one humble fabric features, 'fustian' (also referred to as 'bustian') and this probably had a liturgical significance since it was a coarse flaxen material used for the ferial days of Lent. The black mortuary copes referred to earlier in this chapter had orphreys of this fabric embroid-

ered with garters. Similarly another garment is described as a 'vestiment of fustian for lente'.²⁷

There is one final element of the vestments held at St Nicholas that needs to be examined and that is the tradition of the Boy Bishop. This custom represents one of those aspects of the medieval church which seem, sometimes, to border on the pagan and to have about them an element of anarchistic misrule and underlying chaos. The Boy Bishop celebrations began on the 6th December, St Nicholas's day and were therefore of particular importance to this church, whose Patronal Feast day it would have been. The festivities, which continued until the feast of the Holy Innocents on the 28th December, involved a kind of masquerade whereby a child and his attendants were dressed up and effectively took precedence over their elders for at least part of several services including vespers, matins and mass. At St Paul's, London, the Boy Bishop also traditionally preached a sermon and presided over a large feast on the eve of Holy Innocents. The Boy Bishop celebrations have been related to the earlier medieval traditions of misrule and the Feast of Fools.²⁸ No doubt there was an element of a '...ludic and parodying observance which was always problematic for the sternly orthodox' (Duffy 1992, 13). This was a situation which clearly had the potential, on an annual basis, to get out of hand, and the Boy Bishop celebrations were finally banned by Henry VIII in May 1541. Duffy quotes from Henry's proclamation which sums up both the atmosphere of these feasts and the attitude of the authorities to them, '...children be strangely decked and appareled to counterfeit priests, and so be led with songs and dances from house to house... and boys do sing mass and preach in the pulpit... rather to the derision than to the glory of God, or honor of his Saints' (*ibid* 430). No doubt there were instances of misbehaviour but the tradition itself may well have had, in the minds of many, a serious Christian element and it would be wrong to see the issue in terms of an excuse simply to have a party. In fact orthodox biblical justification could be found for this setting of children over adults in verses like St Luke's '... for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light' (Luke, 16.8.) and no doubt many saw a serious, pious purpose in the whole event.

There are two specific items in the St Nicholas Shambles inventory which reveal both the parishioners' active participation in these events

and the importance placed upon them. The first is a straightforward reference to a vestment of red cloth of gold embroidered with 'salutations of Our Lady' for 'the childe bishop'.²⁹ The second reads 'item a mytre for Seint Nicholas Bissshop with a N and a T on eu[er]ly side thereof of the gifte of John Leche and sette with dyuers stones'.³⁰ We are not told what the mitre was made of nor what the 'dyuers stones' were, but clearly this was no cheap trinket but an item of sufficient importance to have been given specifically by a donor (whose only other recorded gift is of a candlestick unrelated to the Boy Bishop ceremonies) because he clearly believed it to have a special significance both for himself personally and for his parish community generally. What did he hope to gain? All gifts to the church were seen in the light of helping to ease the pains of purgatory after death, but a mitre for a Boy Bishop might seem a little odd in this context. Perhaps he hoped to impress his fellow parishioners with his generosity and wealth? The most likely explanation of this particular gift is that, once a year, for the period of the Boy Bishop festivities he no doubt hoped that the sight of the mitre would remind the congregation of him, and they would then feel prompted to pray for the repose of his soul. Whatever John Leche's personal motivation, this was obviously an important and presumably expensive item, an essential element of an annual ritual.

THE CHURCH FURNISHINGS

As might be expected, the 'soft furnishings' listed in the inventory of St Nicholas Shambles were as richly textured, as colourful and as varied as the vestments. Indeed the main altarcloth seems to have been intended to match the best suit of vestments: 'Item an autercloth for the hig auter [above a red border (*inserted in another hand*)] beten with golde like to the beste vestiment with ii curteynis of rede double tartron yfrenge with silke'.³¹ Other materials specified include velvet, damask and cloth of gold. The inventory also provides further information about side altars in the church: two altarcloths are listed for the altar of St James and 'item for the iiij auters benethe w'oute the qere viii auterclothes and viii curteynes of whitte...'.³² These may well have been used at the altars of the Blessed Virgin, St Katherine and the Trinity where commemorative chantries

were established.³³ Altarcloths were popular vehicles for decoration and pictorial representations of various aspects of the Faith. Those at St Nicholas featured crosses, images of Saints and some described simply as 'steined'. One is described in detail as having a 'pite' in the middle and 'signs of the passion'.³⁴ The 'pite' would have been a Pieta or Image of Pity: a graphic representation of Christ crucified and one of the most popular of medieval pious images. In addition, meditation upon Christ's Passion had long been a tool of private devotion. This altarcloth which depicted both the Passion and the Pity would thus have held in picture form before the eyes of the congregation during mass, potent symbols that acted both as a reproach to sinners and call to repentance as well as a symbol of comfort extending to the truly penitent the hope of grace and salvation: a powerful, pictorial message specifically upon Lenten themes in an age when literacy was by no means universal. Inserted into the text of the inventory is the note that this altarcloth also depicted the flagellation, Christ's scourging before the Cross and was specifically for use in Lent.

A large number of the textile furnishings listed in the inventory are marked as being for use in the Lent and Easter periods and as such are deeply revealing of late medieval custom and practice. One such was 'a veyle for lente afere the hīȝ auter palid with whitt and blewē with an ymage in the middes holdynge a vernacle'.³⁵ During the period of Lent it was customary to hang a veil reaching almost to the ground across the sanctuary area which completely obscured the laity's view of the mass and thus '... heightened the value of the spectacle it temporarily concealed' (Duffy 1992, 111). The vernicle or veil here referred to is a typical manifestation of late medieval piety and relates to the legend of the veil used by St Veronica to wipe the face of Christ on His journey to Calvary. A supposed relic of this veil was preserved in St Peter's, Rome and became an object of much devotion in the 15th century in keeping with the period's almost obsessive interest in the incarnate humanity of Christ.

Other aspects of Lenten practice are also illuminated by the inventory; a cloth listed 'to coverē up the rede in Lenten', that is, the Rood-screen which separated the high altar from the nave and which carried upon it the images of the crucified Christ, the Virgin Mary and St John and which, like the chancel, it was

customary to veil during Lent. A little later, the inventory lists 'ij ladders in the churche yerde with locke and cheyne'.³⁶ At first sight this seems a little odd given that the function of the churchwardens was to maintain only those items necessary for the proper celebration of the mass but perhaps these ladders were needed at Lent to put up and take down the complicated veiling!

Much of the late medieval liturgy was highly dramatic both in content and form and this was especially so at Easter. One such drama was the annual re-enactment of Christ's entombment and resurrection. This really began on Maundy Thursday when, after a solemn mass, all the altars of the church were stripped bare. Good Friday was then passed without the celebration of mass, and in mourning for Christ. After the ceremony of creeping to the Cross, the priest brought in a previously consecrated Host contained in a Pyx, which was then installed in a temporary, usually wooden, sepulchre which would have been built in the north side of the chancel. This sepulchre would have been covered with a cloth or cloths. St Nicholas Shambles had four described as 'ysteyned' and a rich covering of cloth of gold is also listed. The sepulchre was watched over continually until the beginning of Easter Day when the sacrament was duly removed with much ceremony to symbolise the resurrection, and the celebration of Easter was begun.

What could be termed 'soft furnishings' seem to have been popular items among donors to the church, five of whom are mentioned by name in the St Nicholas Shambles inventory. William Abell, the limner and stationer, gave the special Lenten altarcloth which has already been mentioned. He also gave, in company with John Fauconer, a bannercloth. Thomas of London, a chaplain, gave a black altarcloth for All Souls Day, and John Kette, a former parson of St Nicholas Shambles (1438–1455) had given a stained cloth with an image of St Nicholas, and Richard Salle gave eight altarcloths with matching curtains. Richard Salle's will does not survive but that of his wife, Denise, does and is dated 1452. In it, she is described as the relict of Richard Salle of the parish of St Nicholas Shambles, citizen and haberdasher (Fitch 1969, 160). The church owned a substantial number of plain altarcloths and towels, all carefully itemised and measured. Agnes Goodhew gave one measuring in length eight ells and a half yard. Other parishioners of St Nicholas Shambles

made modest gifts, for example, John Snell gave 'iij rochetts [gowns] for the quere',³⁷ and Alice Hunte a 'clothe of grene worstede for Palme Sunday'.³⁸ The church owned a 'newe rede tapitt clothe of tapsters werke' and two tapestries described as old, one of which was also torn. Two cushions of carpet work in the choir were given by another member of the congregation, William Gace. The great attraction for the donors of these comparatively small gifts was that their size and magnificence could be easily tailored to the individual's means. Textiles seem to have been especially popular among female donors to the church. One, who is never named except as 'Robert Hornes wif the elder',³⁹ gave altarcloths for both the High and Lady altars and three rochetts and 'a towayll of werke for a houslynge towail'.⁴⁰ This houseling towel is a more significant gift than might at first appear when set against the more visually flamboyant gifts; it is both practical and essential. A houseling towel was held under the hands of the laity when they took communion in order to ensure that no scraps of the consecrated Host fell to the ground. Such small gifts, so intimately connected with the celebration of the mass made certain that the donor was kept, even after death, close to the central act of communal worship around which the life of the church revolved. One member of the congregation, John Rogerson, described as a 'plomer' attempted to have himself identified with as many celebrations of the sacrament as possible. He gave altarcloths to each of the altars dedicated to the Saints James and Thomas,⁴¹ the Holy Trinity and to St Katherine. He also gave a houseling towel to be used on Easter Day in memory of himself and his wife Elinor, thus ensuring that he was permanently associated with the major eucharistic celebration of the Church's year.

All of these items examined here are, when compared with the inventories of St Stephen Coleman Street, St Peter Cheap and St Martin Outwich, commonplace. These other churches also had substantial numbers of similar altarcloths, towels, cushions, and items specifically intended for use during Lent. As at St Nicholas these small items were especially popular among the laity as gifts to the church. However, more substantial and valuable gifts were also made, usually, but not invariably, by men. For example William Edward gave a 'newe crosse of silver and gilte'⁴² and the butcher John Godbehere, 'on whos soule god have m[er]cy', as the

compiler of the inventory somewhat cryptically remarks, gave a silver and gilt chalice specifically to the altar of St James. The will of John Godbehere, under the name of Goddebere, survives and was dated 1460. In it he asks to be buried before the altar dedicated to St James in his parish church of St Nicholas Shambles.⁴³ On only two occasions is a female donor associated with a valuable gift. However, on each occasion she is not specifically named and was, in all probability, acting simply as the executor of a male relative. The sister of another parishioner, John Hawk, for example gave a pressed silver chalice and the wife of John Locke is recorded as having given a three branched candlestick to the Lady altar. Sometimes a corporate gift was made as in the case of '...a peyre of laton candelsticks standares of the gifte of the yongmen of the parish'.⁴⁴ These 'young men' are not mentioned elsewhere in the inventory and were probably not, therefore, a guild or fraternity owning goods in the strict sense but more likely to have been a loose social grouping of unmarried men within the parish. Duffy cites several other examples, primarily from the West Country, and observes that 'such groups often sought permanent and formal recognition by inscribed gifts of vestments, vessels or furnishings to the church' (Duffy 1992, 150). St Nicholas Shambles, in common with other churches was also in possession of some substantial pieces of silver and gilt as well as items of laton and brass, including cups, chalices, censers, a monstrance (used to display the Host to the assembled congregation) and a crismatory used to hold sacramental oils. The inventory of St Peter Cheap makes reference to 'j Relike stondynge on j foote and j lytell box of silver' (Simpson 1868, 160), however not every parish church would have owned a relic and none is mentioned at St Nicholas. The parish clearly observed the festival of Corpus Christi as the inventory records a '...a coupe of copper and gilte for Corp[us] xpi[Christi] day'.⁴⁵ This feast, which had its origins in the affective, eucharistic piety of the Beguines order at Liège in the 13th century, had been celebrated in England since the early 14th century. It had become closely associated, in towns such as Leicester and Coventry, with official civic processions and pageants. No such official occasion was observed in London but the Skinners guild had held a Corpus Christi procession from Dowgate Hill to St Antholin's, Watling Street since 1393 (Rubin 1991, 238). Parishes such as St Nicholas whilst

not necessarily taking part in this procession would have held their own Corpus Christi celebrations.

In many respects, St Nicholas Shambles, when compared with other parishes such as St Peter Cheap, St Martin Outwich and St Stephen Coleman Street, appears like them to be orthodox and commonplace in mid 15th-century London. Its books, plates, vestments and liturgical practices were similar to what would have been found in many other City churches. There is one respect, however, in which St Nicholas Shambles emerges from the shadows as distinctive and this is largely as a result of the presence among the parishioners (at least twice as churchwarden) of one notable personality; that of William Abell the limner and stationer. Described as 'a distinguished artist whose shop in Paternoster Row now received frequent commissions' (Christianson 1990, 40), he is known to have been responsible for the Eton College founders' confirmation charter of March 1446,⁴⁶ the ordinances of the almshouse founded by Richard Whittington (d.1424), the Beauchamp Hours of the Duke of Somerset (d.1444) and the Abingdon Missal of 1461.⁴⁷ A total of 21 surviving works can possibly be attributed to William Abell. Christianson in his study of the London Stationers (Christianson 1990, 32–3) found that the craftsmen illuminators or limners (of whose Mystery few records remain) were concentrated in the parishes around St Paul's Cathedral of which St Nicholas Shambles was one. Very little is known of William Abell himself, he features in a few scattered records from c.1447 (the payment for the Eton College manuscript) till his death in c.1474. He is known from the annual rent rolls of the London Bridge property holdings to have been the tenant of various shops in Paternoster Row on which, for two years after his death, his widow continued to pay rent. He was also named as a supervisor in the will of Thomas Fysshe the limner and stationer who is recorded as holding the tenancy of a shop in Paternoster Row in the early years of the 15th century and whose apprentice William Abell had probably been (Christianson 1990, 29). He was also witness to the will of Richard Fauconer.⁴⁸ On more than one occasion he was churchwarden of St Nicholas Shambles in the mid 15th century. In all probability the inventory of the goods at St Nicholas Shambles was drawn up in his lifetime. It is as both churchwarden and benefactor of the parish that William Abell features in the St Nicholas

Shambles church inventory. He first occurs as the donor of a Lenten altarcloth and, most significantly as the creator of '...ii banerclottes the grounde whitt diaper werk and the signes of the passion in hem which said baners John Fauconere and Will[ia]m Abell dide do make hem for the passion tyme in lentyn'.⁴⁹ Since the only traceable John Fauconers of the 15th century are described variously as butchers and grocers it is seems unlikely that they actually made the banners themselves, but it is tempting to speculate that an item of Abell's handiwork did actually hang in the church of St Nicholas Shambles.

Generally speaking the large number of banners listed in the St Nicholas Shambles inventory present something of a puzzle. Banners in churches of themselves are not that unusual; they were commonly carried in processions and were used to drape the sepulchre at Easter. St Stephen Coleman Street had 23 with various pictures painted on them, in particular Saints' images and events in the life of Christ. St Peter Cheap also had several including one with the arms of St George and of the King. Personal coats of arms also featured at St Peter's as in 'It'm ij clothes steynede w^t...the armes of Rob^t Walton and his ij wyves and his sonnes...' (Simpson 1868, 158). Likewise another cloth featured the arms of the goldsmith Robert Walter. The banners at St Nicholas bearing coats of arms are less straightforward. They include two bearing '...the Duke of Gloucesters armys and the Duchesse of Holande',⁵⁰ a further two bear the king's arms (which king is not specified), one for the sepulchre bears the arms of the Beauchamps and one for the rood loft those of the Staffords. In addition there are seven old banners described as being 'of dyvers lordes armys'.⁵¹ There seems to be no immediately logical or obvious explanation for the presence of these particular aristocratic coats of arms in a relatively small, apparently insignificant parish church in the vicinity of St Paul's whose congregation was made up largely of stationers, whose craft guild was among the most minor, and of butchers whose trade was regarded as one of the more noisome of medieval callings. The editor of the St Martin Outwich church records notes that several medieval stained glass windows in that church commemorated the arms of past donors or patrons, for example those of Richard Naylor [Nailer] (d.1483) an Alderman and Master of the Merchant Taylors. Likewise those of John de Warenne, Earl of Surrey, Earl

Warrenne (d.1347) were also featured (Goss 1933, 30) but there is no immediate reason to associate the Gloucesters, Staffords, or Beauchamps with St Nicholas Shambles. Could they have been surplus banners left over from some procession at nearby St Paul's, perhaps after Henry V's triumphal entry into London after Agincourt in 1415? This would not, however, explain the presence of the Duke of Gloucester's arms quartered with those of the Duchess of Holland; the Duke's strange short-lived marriage to Jacqueline of Bavaria, heiress of Hainault, Holland and Zealand did not occur till c.1421. William Abell may here be the missing link; if the attribution of the Beauchamp and Warwick Hours to him is correct then that could well provide a tenuous link between the church of St Nicholas Shambles, William Abell its churchwarden and noted artist, and the Beauchamp family for whom he produced work. Similarly Humphrey Duke of Gloucester and the Staffords may have employed Abell, especially since Gloucester is known to have spent lavishly on books. Details of the now lost heraldic glass from the church of St Bartholomew's hospital are recorded in the Lansdowne manuscript in the British Library and the description of the arms it portrayed seems to correspond, at least superficially, with the arms depicted in the banners in the church of St Nicholas Shambles⁵² and could well turn out to commemorate William Abell and his wealthy patrons in some way. Certainly the presence of a number of limners and stationers living in and working within the parish increases the possibility that the church banners were distinctive in some way.

THE CHANTRIES AND THE BROTHERHOOD

'Throughout the late Middle Ages, the primary motive behind the founding of the Chantries and their related institutions had been manifestly clear; by means of prayers, to secure relief for the souls of the founder and others whom he might name, who were suffering in purgatory.' (Kreider 1979, 40). There can be no doubt that the Church's teaching on penance and purgatory was a central facet of late medieval piety. Dr Clive Burgess's extensive work on parish records in both London and Bristol has shown that the doctrine prompted the laity into generous acts of giving. These provided their parish churches

with liturgical equipment, buildings, endowments of land and stipends for chantry chaplains whose presence, in most cases, would have enhanced both the liturgy and music of the parish church (Burgess 1985, 46–65; Burgess 1987). Despite the fact that the Catholic Church did not fully define its teaching on purgatory until the Council of Trent in 1545, most people in this period would have had a vivid picture of what awaited them after death and a strong desire to ameliorate the suffering as much as possible and to hasten the soul's progress to Heaven.

There were several methods whereby the pious layman could ensure that after his death his soul would be prayed for and his sojourn in purgatory thus shortened. These ranged from obits and requiem masses said in the days immediately following death to yearly anniversary masses and the founding of Chantries to ensure a continual round of prayers and masses for the testator's soul. Chantries fell into one of two categories; those established for a relatively short term, with a specified number of years and those intended to last in perpetuity and which were consequently more expensive and generally funded by landed endowment. Usually, part of the aisle of the church would be enclosed with screens of wood and the chantry altar installed inside. Only the wealthy could afford to construct a whole new chapel for a chantry and provide the necessary endowment for a priest.

The inventory of St Nicholas Shambles refers to three chantries; one dedicated to 'our lady', and two at altars associated with St Katherine and the Holy Trinity. Not surprisingly, given the widespread devotion to the Virgin Mary in England at this period, the most flourishing (in terms of goods listed) was that devoted to Mary whose '...cult came second only to that of Christ himself, and towered over that of all other Saints' (Duffy 1992, 142). She was believed to hold a particular sympathy for sinners and to act as a protectress against both danger and disease, and could therefore be called upon in a number of different situations. The chantry dedicated to 'Our Lady' at St Nicholas Shambles was in receipt of several donations, most probably over a period of years and from a wide cross section of donors, including one Richard Fauconer (d.1463) who described himself in his will as a gentleman.⁵³ In addition to the carefully written, professional scribe's hand there are 14 extra items added to the inventory in a more cramped and probably later hand. The original list

contains a mass book, two 'pressionaries', a Dirige book and two books described as 'a quayer' containing placebo, dirge and commemorations of the Blessed Virgin and St Nicholas. The dirge (dirige) is the term for the Office of the Dead and, together with the mass book, would have been essential for the proper functioning of the chantry. The Office of the Dead was divided into vespers, known as 'placebo' and said on the night before the funeral and a combined matins and lauds, the 'dirge', which was said the following morning before the requiem mass. 'Given the centrality of intercession for the dead in the piety of late medieval men and women, these were the most commonly used of all prayers...' (Duffy 1992, 257). Two of these books, a Pressionare and a Dirige were given by parishioners Matthew Glover and John Snell respectively. The will of Matthew Glover does not seem to have survived but that of John Snell, freeman of the City and paviour who died in 1459, does (Fitch 1969, 170). He was also a generous benefactor to the church: he gave not only the book of Dirige, but also three rochettes (sleeves) and an 'old surplice' noted in the inventory as having been given to the church by his executors. It is noteworthy that where a donor's name is recorded in the inventory it is usually that of someone, as in the case of John Snell, who had died quite recently. This suggests that, in fact, despite their best efforts, a personal name only really remained fresh in the collective mind for one generation. The population of London at this period was made up of a constantly shifting immigrant community with families arriving and moving away again within the space of two or three generations, and the inventory reinforces this impression.

The vestments available to the Lady Chantry priest must have been magnificent and he seems to have been well provided for; there are six vestments in the original list and a further two added in the supplementary hand.⁵⁴ In addition, there were six corporals with cases and a gilt chalice decorated with a scene of the crucifixion and with the Virgin and St John⁵⁵ described in the inventory as 'amellid' (*ie* enamelled) in the foot, for use in the celebration of mass in the chantry. The materials used for vestments and corporals were both colourful and expensive with vivid embroidery. Red, gold and white predominate with embroideries of unspecified coats of arms, birds, portcullis, flowers and crosses. One corporal is described as having 'ymages and a

dragon'.⁵⁶ Altar cloths, curtains and towels are all listed. For example, Julian Dey had given a towel with 'horsis of gold' stitched on it.⁵⁷ A remarkable item was '...a peire of auterclothis steyned w^t ij curteynes of the v^{de} ioyes of our Lady of the gifte of Master John Kette, person'.⁵⁸ John Kette was a parson of the church from 1438 until his death in 1455 (Hennessy 1898, 352). Meditation on the 'Five Joys of Mary', often with their corresponding 'Five Sorrows' was an especially common form of late medieval piety. The celebration of the 'Five Sorrows' was the more popular but both are in keeping with the affective, emotionally charged piety of the late Middle Ages and were linked with the desire to identify with the sufferings of Christ through the grief of His mother. The liturgical celebration of the Compassion of the Virgin is seen by Pfaff as an 'incipient' feast coming into use in the years immediately prior to the Reformation (Pfaff 1970, 97–103). He first identifies it as occurring in written liturgical form in a printed Sarum missal of Rouen in 1497: *Missa Compassionis sive Lamentationis B. Mariae*. This is certainly later than the likely date of the St Nicholas inventory. The altar cloth here listed represents the more private, personal pietistic devotion to the 'Joys' and 'Sorrows' of the Virgin which clearly preceded its official inclusion in the liturgy. The altar cloth and curtains mentioned here would have had pictorial representations of the Virgin's 'Five Joys', the Annunciation, Nativity, Resurrection, Ascension, and Coronation in Heaven; a series of scenes very familiar to the congregation.

The goods of two further chantries are listed in the inventory, one described as 'a chantrye founded in the seid church at the Trinite auter'⁵⁹ and one '...the chaunt[r]e founded in the seid church at the Auter of Seint Katherine'.⁶⁰ The attribution of the Trinity Chantry is straightforward, dedicated as it was to God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Ghost; a powerful trio to intercede on behalf of the penitent sinner. The Saint Katherine chantry may be dedicated to Saint Katherine of Alexandria, a highly popular 4th-century saint who was tortured on a wheel and later beheaded for her faith. She was seen as a protectress of the dying and was therefore a propitious choice for an intercessory chantry in an age when dying unshriven was greatly feared. Representations of her in murals, glass, manuscripts and embroideries were common throughout Europe in this period. The goods of these two chantries were

fewer in number than those of the chantry dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary. The Trinity altar had a chalice and several vestments although there was nothing outstanding and no books were listed.⁶¹ Likewise the Saint Katherine altar had only a small collection of goods and vestments, including one mass book and a gift from Julian Dey of an 'Autercloth of werke and also a playn[e] cloth...'.⁶²

Most people would not have been able to afford to establish a fully endowed chantry for the welfare of their individual soul and for them an alternative existed in the corporate chantry of a religious guild or fraternity. Such fraternities had steadily gained in popularity from the late 14th century and continued to do so right up to the eve of the Reformation in the 1530s. It has been estimated that there were, in the parishes of London, somewhere between 150 and 200 such fraternities in the period 1350 to 1550 (Barron & Harper-Bill 1985, 20). A fraternity consisted of a group of friends, relatives or neighbours, often sharing the same craft or trade, who banded together to fund some kind of communal post-mortem commemoration for the good of their own souls and those of their fellow members. Such commemorations could range from the simple maintenance of a light before an especially favoured saint's image or altar, to the full scale and expensive employment of a chaplain to pray for deceased members' souls on a continuous basis. Whatever their scale, all fraternities seemed to have had three main aspects; the maintenance of lights, the attendance of guild members at their fellows' funerals and social feasting on the favoured saint's day. It has been suggested that after the horrors of the Black Death, the popularity of religious fraternities greatly increased as the result of a desire on the part of members to ensure that they had a decent burial and that the proper funerary rites were observed. By the time of the St Nicholas inventory this sense of urgency may have abated somewhat and their function and emphasis had a more strongly social slant.

It has been observed that '...much of our information about the London parish guilds must be tangential' (Barron & Harper-Bill 1985, 20) and the fraternity which existed at St Nicholas Shambles falls into this category, since it is revealed largely through the list of its goods in the inventory. It does not figure in the Chantry Certificate returns of 1546/8, as a result of the church itself having been abandoned before this

date. The dedication of the fraternity, to St Luke, is especially interesting. One of the Evangelists and a disciple of Paul, Luke was a physician and hence was the special saint of doctors and surgeons which may have had some significance for a church situated quite close to St Bartholomew's hospital. More significantly perhaps it was St Luke who by tradition painted an icon of the Virgin Mary and was thus regarded as the patron saint of artists and illuminators. As well as being the 'Fleishshambelis' or butchery, the area around St Nicholas, as has been noted, was also a focal point for illuminators and scriptwriters (Christianson 1990, 32–3). One of the churchwardens of this period was William Abell, a well-known limner, so it is not surprising that the church's only recorded fraternity was dedicated to St Luke. Furthermore this was a rather unusual dedication, since only one other guild of St Luke was recorded in London, in the parish of St Giles Cripplegate. This fraternity was dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary and St Luke, where in 1388/9, a guild for painters maintained a light before the images of St Mary and St Luke (Westlake 1919). There is, however, a third possible explanation for this dedication to St Luke. The historian of the Butchers' Company states that they had long had associations with the parish of St Nicholas Shambles and that they had there 'attended an anniversary service on St Luke's day, where they had founded a fraternity of St Luke prior to 1484, and where in St Luke's Chapel they had stored the Company's chests and hearse cloth' (Jones 1976, 48). The page of the inventory dealing with the Brotherhood is slightly confused with details added in a later hand running into a subsequent list of gifts to subsidiary altars. There are, however, two identifiable donors to the fraternity; Richard Fauconer who gave a 'sengil vestiment of russett sathan the orfrey of grene clothe of goolde... w^t a corporas cace of the same orfrey' and William Knyght, described as a butcher, who also gave a single vestment embroidered with an owl.⁶³

The Fauconer family (there appear to be several variant spellings) are an interesting and apparently wealthy family. Three probable members, all described as of the parish of St Nicholas Shambles, have wills registered in the Commissary Court. The first is John 'Fawkoner' (d.1407), a grocer.⁶⁴ The second is another John 'Fauconner' described as '*civis et carnifex*' (d.1462) who left to the Church of St Nicholas Shambles the customary forgotten tithes and 20/- to the

fabric of the nave of the church.⁶⁵ Most interesting is the Richard 'Fawkener' (d. 1463) mentioned in the inventory. His will is long, and in English⁶⁶ which was still quite unusual at this period. In it he describes himself as 'Richard Fawkener of London, Gentilma[ne]'. In the space of at most two or three generations, a social progression has taken place from citizen and grocer in 1407 to gentleman with no specified trade or expressly declared civic status by 1463. The introductory rubric to Richard Fawkener's will is standardised and completely orthodox. He commended his soul to God 'my maker and my saviour', to the Virgin Mary and to all the Company of Heaven. More personally he requests '...my body to be beried in the Church of Seint Nicholas atte Bocherie of London in the chapell of oure Lady there in the same sepulture where is the body of Juliane late my wiff here yburied under the marble stone...'. However, he does not make any specific bequests either to the Lady Chapel or its chantry. There is a long list of legacies both to family (his sons John and Nicholas) and friends (John Peche, Margaret Barnam, John Woddesdon) of goods that reveal him to have been a wealthy man; items of silver (some decorated with falcons), brass, bed linen and tapestries. He concludes with a classic, late medieval exposition of purgatory and the motivation for charitable giving which underpinned the whole structure of post-mortem commemoration, chantries, and almsgiving: 'I geve and bequeth unto my executores therunto to do and dispose for my soule and the soule of the said Julian[ne] and all those soules that I am bounde and beholde unto and all cristen soules in werkes and dedes of charitee and pitee att their best districion and as they can be sene and think best to please god and most profit unto my soule'.⁶⁷ The executors and witnesses hint at the social ties which bound what was, in all probability, a closely knit community. Of the executors there were 'Elizabeth my wyff and Richard Chawvy citizen and salter of the cite of London' and one of the witnesses was 'Will[ia]m Abell, stationer' who had, of course, been churchwarden of St Nicholas Shambles.

There follows in the inventory a list of other gifts which had been made to specific altars rather than to the chantries which reveal, almost incidentally, the presence of other side altars within the main body of the church. It has already been noted that the inventory of books referred to items in the chapel of St John and at

the altar of St Thomas. In addition, reference is also made here to an altar dedicated to St James the apostle and martyr, another favourite saint in this period. Pilgrimages to his shrine at Compostela in Spain were especially popular.

In conclusion therefore, the inventory of the parish church of St Nicholas Shambles provides good evidence for the active involvement by the laity in the local parish, especially in those areas over which the laity had substantial independent control; in the founding of chantries and the running of religious fraternities. St Nicholas had three chantries dedicated to Our Lady, to St Katherine and to the Holy Trinity. In addition, there was a Brotherhood dedicated to St Luke and there were side altars to St Thomas and St James, and also a chapel dedicated to St John. All these chantries, chapels and altars were in receipt of gifts from the pious, some simple, some costly. The existence of the chantries and fraternities reveals an active and lively parochial life, however fleeting or ill-run some of the parish fraternities might be '...with few exceptions, most fraternities drew their membership from the parishes themselves. They are an expression of an active corporate life' (Barron & Harper-Bill 1985, 30).

CONCLUSION

In many ways an analysis of the inventory from the churchwardens' accounts of St Nicholas Shambles represents a microcosm of the practices and beliefs of the late medieval Church in the century prior to the Protestant Reformation. A large range of books, plate and vestments is revealed as listed in the inventory, far in excess of the number legally required and comparing favourably with those held at other City churches such as St Peter Cheap, St Stephen Coleman Street and St Martin Outwich. Many of the vestments at St Nicholas Shambles were of exotic materials and much of the plate was of silver and gilt. The orthodox practices of the Catholic Church were adhered to in the Lenten and Easter observances, in the relatively new Corpus Christi mass for which the church owned a processional cross, and in the potentially anarchic Boy Bishop celebrations for which the church was equipped with red cope, mitre and staff. The affective piety of the age and its identification with the suffering and humanity of Christ and His family is reflected in the popularity of

pictorial representations of Christ's Passion and Flagellation and of the Joys and Sufferings of the Virgin Mary which were depicted on banners and altarcloths within the church. A good range of standard books providing the order of the mass, Psalms, readings, and music were kept in the church. A pricksong book was added to the list in a different hand, suggesting that this form of polyphonic music was in use at St Nicholas by the late 15th century. Most significantly, a book of saints' lives written in English was kept in the choir and catered not only for the widespread popular interest in the saints but also for the increasing vernacular literacy of the period.

The presence in the church of several chantries dedicated respectively to the Blessed Virgin Mary, St Katherine and the Holy Trinity testifies to the strength of the doctrinal system of penance, remission of sins and commemoration of the dead in the 15th century. Information about the physical appearance and layout of the church is sparse and inconclusive but throughout the inventory there are references to side altars within the church, most notably to St James, St Thomas and to a chapel dedicated to St John. The recorded ceremony of the hallowing of the bells presumes that there must have been a bell tower of some sort but the inventory provides no clue about its appearance or location. The laity were clearly interested in, and committed to, their church. A fraternity, referred to in the inventory as a brotherhood, dedicated to St Luke flourished amongst the congregation. Several individuals' names occur in the inventory as the donors of gifts by which they hoped presumably to gain remission from purgatory for their souls after their deaths and to invoke the prayers of their fellow parishioners on their behalf. The range of objects given is wide and ranges from expensive vestments and plate to humble towels and plain cloths. A gender bias is revealed since men tended to give the more valuable items, although women gave expensive gifts on behalf of their husbands, presumably when acting as executors to their wills. Very often within the inventory a woman is designated only as the wife or other relative of a named, male donor.

The wills (where they exist) of the parishioners named in the inventory are sometimes disappointingly short of references to St Nicholas beyond standard requests to be buried there and for the payment of forgotten tithes, yet clearly they were generous donors to the parish as their names are listed in the inventory beside their

gifts. The limitations of using wills as an indicator of popular religious feeling is a problem that has been encountered by other historians and is best summed up thus: 'It must be remembered that wills reveal nothing of the pious provision that testators undoubtedly made during their lifetimes for their own benefit' (Burgess 1985, 55; Burgess 1987, 837–858). What these wills do reveal, however, is a possible network of social ties and family relationships amongst people named as witnesses and executors. For example, the talented limner and churchwarden, William Abell, was one of the witnesses to the will of Richard Fauconer and, in the custom of the time, therefore, was probably present at the deathbed. Lists of purely secular bequests in these wills give some insight into the social standing and living standards of some of the parishioners. Richard Fauconer (described as a gentleman) for example clearly lived comfortably, his will lists several items of silver as well as beds, bedding and tapestries. In many respects the inventory records much that was to be disdained and swept away by the Protestant Reformers of the next century; the cult of the Saints, the adoration of the Virgin, the doctrine of purgatory and the intercession for the dead, the feast of Corpus Christi and the Boy Bishop celebrations. With its chantries, side altars and fraternity, its veneration of the Saints and its books of Placebo and Dirige, and in the absence of a Bible, St Nicholas Shambles can be firmly placed in its time and context of the Late Medieval Church.

NOTES

¹ St Bartholomew's Hospital Archives SNC/1

² St Bartholomew's Hospital Archives HA 1/1

³ See **The Chantries and the Brotherhood** below

⁴ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁶ St Peter Cheap also lists in addition to a *legende*, a broadly similar book, presumably on the lives of the martyrs '*i. mart' loge*' see Simpson (1868, 159)

⁷ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁸ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

¹⁰ It was in this period that charitable benefactors began to take an active interest in funding and promoting lay education. Around 1423, the will of Mayor Richard Whittington established a public library at the Guildhall. In 1458 the draper Simon Eyre left £2,000 (never honoured) to endow a grammar school in the chapel of the Leadenhall. Fifty years later, Dean Colet was to revolutionise grammar

school teaching when, as Dean of St Pauls, he re-founded and re-endowed its school. Significantly he entrusted its financial running not to an ecclesiastical institution but a lay one; the Mercers Company. Thrupp (1989, 156–8) estimates that as many as 50% of the male population was literate in English in the reign of Edward IV

¹¹ Thomas Eyre, the parson (1466–1469) mentioned in the Inventory does not appear in Emden's biographical lists as a graduate of either Oxford or Cambridge

¹² St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

¹³ I am grateful to my fellow MA postgraduate student Eleanor Sims who allowed me access to her database on the London aldermen. William Edward's will (d.1480) is enrolled in the Prerogative Court at Canterbury

¹⁴ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

¹⁵ A penitentiary was an ordained priest licensed by a bishop to hear confessions outside the parish, thus enabling members of the laity to fulfill the church's requirements that they should make a confession at least once a year at Easter. J.A.F. Thomson (1993, 343) points out that they were 'usually, though not exclusively, drawn from the parish clergy'.

¹⁶ J. Hughes (1988, 172) found that in a collection of late 14th-century inventories from Norfolk, 11 churches out of 35 owned a copy.

¹⁷ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

¹⁸ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

¹⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

²⁰ For Richard Fauconner see **The Chantries and the Brotherhood** below

²¹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

²² According to the introduction to Watkins (1947–8), the following vestments were the minimum needed for the celebration of high mass:

Officiating priest: amice, alb, gerelle, stole, maniple, chasuble

Deacon: dalmatic instead of chasuble

Subdeacon: tunic in place of chasuble and stole

This does not always seem to accord with the list at St Nicholas, for example no maniples (short strip of material looped over the left wrist) are mentioned

²³ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

²⁴ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

²⁵ Six occurrences

²⁶ *Velvet:* four occurrences; *Damask:* three occurrences

²⁷ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

²⁸ Most notably by E.K. Chambers (1903)

²⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³⁰ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³¹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³² St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³³ See **The Chantries and the Brotherhood** below

³⁴ This particular item is also described as being principally 'of the gift of Will[ia]m Abell'

³⁵ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³⁶ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³⁷ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory. No will survives for John Snell

³⁸ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

³⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁴⁰ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁴¹ This is the only mention of an altar dedicated to St Thomas

⁴² St Nicholas Shambles Inventory. For William Edward see **The Inventory Books** above

⁴³ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 5, f.295v, 298v

⁴⁴ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁴⁵ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁴⁶ ...for which he was paid £1.6s.8d. See Alexander (1972, 166–172)

⁴⁷ For the Abingdon Missal in particular, see Gameson & Coates 1988, 47

⁴⁸ See **The Chantries and the Brotherhood** below

⁴⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵⁰ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵¹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵² I am indebted to Dr Jenny Stratford for suggesting this line of enquiry

⁵³ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 5, f.349v

⁵⁴ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵⁵ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory. Most probably the names 'Mary' and 'John' are for the Virgin Mary and St John who were commonly represented on rood screens and not in commemoration of any particular donor of this chalice

⁵⁶ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵⁷ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory. No will survives for Julian Dey in the Commissary Court Records

⁵⁸ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁵⁹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁶⁰ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁶¹ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁶² St Nicholas Shambles Inventory. Julian Dey also gave to the Lady Chantry

⁶³ St Nicholas Shambles Inventory

⁶⁴ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 2, f.95v

⁶⁵ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 5, f.320 and 354v; probate apparently incomplete

⁶⁶ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 5, f.349v

⁶⁷ Guildhall Library MS 9171, Register 5, f.349v

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Dr Caroline Barron for her help, guidance and encouragement. Likewise I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr Clive Burgess of RHBNC, Dr John Schofield and Dr Tony Dyson, both formerly of the Museum of London Archaeology Service, and to Dr Jenny Stratford for sharing with me their expertise and, on many occasions, their own unpublished research. In addition I would like to thank the Yorkist Historical Trust, the staff of the Guildhall Library in the City of London and Mr N. Yeo, then archivist St Bartholomew's Hospital who enabled me to acquire a

copy of the microfilm of St Nicholas Shambles Inventory.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ALEXANDER (1972), G Alexander 'William Abell, Lymnour and Fifteenth Century English Illumination' in A Rosenauer & G Weber *Kunststhorische Forschungen – Otto Pächt zu Seinem 70 Geburtstag* (Salzburg)
- BARRON & HARPER-BILL (1985), C M Barron & C Harper-Bill *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society, Essays in honour of F R H Du Boulay*
- BURGESS (1985), C Burgess 'For the increase of Divine Service, Chantries in the Parish in late medieval Bristol' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol 36 no. 1, 46–65
- BURGESS (1987), C Burgess 'By Quick and by Dead: Wills and Pious Provision in late Medieval Bristol' *English Historical Review* cccv, 837–858
- BURGESS (1996), C Burgess 'Shaping the Parish: St Mary at Hill, London, in the late fifteenth century' in J Blair & B Golding *The Cloister and the World: Essays in medieval history in honour of Barbara Harvey*
- BURGESS & KÜMIN (1993), C Burgess & B Kümin 'Penitential Bequests and Parish Regimes in Late Medieval England' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* vol 44, 610–636
- CHAMBERS (1903), E K Chambers *The Medieval Stage* vol I and II
- CHEW & KELLAWAY (1973), H Chew & W Kellaway *The London Assize of Nuisance, 1301–1431* London Record Society Publications 10
- CHRISTIANSON (1987), C Paul Christianson *Memorials of the Book Trade in Medieval London, the Archives of the Old London Bridge*
- CHRISTIANSON (1990), C Paul Christianson *A Directory of London Stationers and Book Artisans 1300–1500* The Bibliographical Society of America
- DAVIES (1972), G G Davies (ed) *A Dictionary of Liturgy and Worship*
- DREW (1954), C Drew *Early Parochial Organisation in England, the Origins of the Office of Churchwarden*
- DU BOULAY & BARRON (1971), F R H Du Boulay & C M Barron (eds) *London in the Reign of Richard II*
- DUFFY (1992), E Duffy *The Stripping of the Altars, Traditional Religion in England c. 1400–c.1580*
- EMDEN (1963), A B Emden *The Biographical Register of the University of Cambridge to 1500*
- FITCH (1969), M Fitch (ed) *Index to Testamentary Records in the Commissary Court of London* vol 1, 1374–1488
- FRESHFIELD (1887), E Freshfield 'Some remarks upon the book of records and history of the parish church of St Stephen Coleman Street' *Archaeologia* I
- GAMESON & COATES (1988), *The Old Library Trinity College, Oxford*
- GOSS (1933), C W F Goss 'The parish and church of St Martin Outwich' *Trans London Middlesex Arch Soc VI*
- HARPER-BILL (1989), C Harper-Bill *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400–1530* Seminar Studies in History
- HARRIS (1985), G L Harris (ed) *Henry V, the Practice of Kingship*
- HENNESSY (1898), Rev G Hennessy *Novum Repertorium Ecclesiasticum Parochiale Londoninese*
- HILL (1971), R Hill 'A Chaunterie for Soules' in F R H Du Boulay & C M Barron (eds) *London in the Reign of Richard II*
- HUGHES (1988), J Hughes *Pastors and Visionaries, Religious and Secular Life in Late Medieval Yorkshire*
- JONES (1976), P E Jones *The Butchers of London, a History of the Worshipful Company of Butchers of the City of London*
- KREIDER (1979), A Kreider *English Chantries, the Road to Dissolution* Cambridge Massachusetts
- MOORE (1918), N Moore *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital* vol I and II
- PALLISER (1988), D M Palliser 'The Parish in Perspective' in S Wright (ed) *Parish, Church and People, Local Studies in Lay Religion*
- PANTIN (1955), W A Pantin *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century*
- PFUFF (1970), R W Pfaff *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England*
- RUBIN (1991), M Rubin *Corpus Christi The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture*
- SCARISBRICK (1984), J Scarisbrick *The Reformation and the English People*
- SCHOFIELD (1997), J Schofield 'Excavations on the site of St Nicholas Shambles' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc*, vol 48
- SIMPSON (1868), W W Simpson 'Inventory of the vestments, plate and books belonging to the church of St Peter Cheap in 1431' *Brit Arch J* XXIV
- STOW (1908), J Stow *Survey of London* ed C.L. Kingsford
- TENTLER (1977), T N Tentler *Sin and Confession on the Eve of the Reformation* Princeton University Press
- THOMSON (1963), J A F Thomson 'Tithe Disputes in Later Medieval London' *English Historical Review* 78, 1–17
- THOMSON (1993), J A F Thomson *The Early Tudor Church and Society 1485–1529*
- THRUPP (1962), S Thrupp *The Merchant Class of Medieval London*
- WATKINS (1947–8), Dom A Watkins (ed) 'Inventory of Church Goods temp Edward III' Norfolk Record Society vol XIX Part II
- WESTLAKE (1919), H F Westlake *The Parish Guilds of Medieval England*
- WHITE (1988), W White (ed) *Skeletal Remains from the Cemetery of St Nicholas Shambles, City of London* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper 9
- WRIGHT (1988), S Wright (ed) *Parish, Church and People, Local Studies in Lay Religion 1350–1750*