

Oxford Colleges and some Country Parishes round Oxford in the Early 18th Century¹

By GABRIELLE LAMBRICK

ONE aspect of local history in the Oxford area which is of constant interest, in its variety from one period to another, is the impact of the city and the University on the people of the surrounding countryside. Throughout the 18th century, for instance, the nearby villages and hamlets were linked with the colleges by their parish clergy who, as Fellows and Chaplains of colleges, were at the same time resident members of the University. A curious and little-known feature of this link was the large number of marriages of country people from around Oxford which took place in the first half of the 18th century in college chapels. The circumstances of these marriages, and the way in which they were recorded, in their turn throw more light on to the connections between country livings and the colleges at this time.

The marriages section of the earliest parish register of the small hamlet of Wootton, in Berkshire, begins with three normal entries for 1728, 1729 and 1730; these are followed by an entry which was evidently written up some time after the marriage took place. It reads: '1730/29 [*sic*: no day or month given] John Webb and Sarah Smith both of Wootton were married in Magdalen College Chapel by the Minister of Wootton.' Thereafter, until January 1754, follow twenty-one entries of which seventeen are in respect of marriages which took place in Magdalen College chapel—a total of 18 college marriages for the twenty-five years from 1729-54. Sometimes there is a mention of the 'minister of Wootton' having officiated in the college chapel; sometimes the marriages were by banns, sometimes by licence. Practically all the brides and bridegrooms were ordinary villagers who almost certainly had no personal connection with the college.²

The South Hinksey marriage register which begins in 1716 also shows marriages of residents there which were performed in Magdalen College Chapel—but not until 1744. The first of these, entered out of place, records

¹ I am grateful to the Vicars of the parishes of Cumnor, Wootton, and New Hinksey with South Hinksey, for permission to examine the parish registers in their care; to the College Archivists and Librarians of Magdalen, St. John's, New College, All Souls, Trinity and Exeter, for their researches into their archives and for other help; to Mr. J. S. W. Gibson for most useful information gleaned from Oxfordshire marriage registers; and to the Church Commissioners' Record Officer.

² Parish Register of St. Peter's Wootton (Berks.) (Wootton church chest) Book I, mixed entries.

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the wedding of Joseph Morse of St. Mary Magdalen parish, Oxford, and Catherine Parker of Wootton—not properly a South Hinksey entry at all, and it is not duplicated in the Wootton register. Between October 1747 and October 1753 six South Hinksey couples were joined at Magdalen College and none at South Hinksey.³

In the Cumnor marriage register covering the first half of the 18th century there is no mention whatsoever of Magdalen College Chapel.⁴

Turning to the Magdalen College records, J. R. Bloxam, the editor of the *Magdalen College Register*, states without comment that 'In 1728 a Register of marriages solemnized in the college chapel was commenced and continued to be kept till the year 1754'.⁵ The register itself is reproduced from a manuscript in the library of the college.⁶ There are 159 entries in all, recording marriages of people from various Oxford parishes (particularly St. Peter's in the East) and, much more surprisingly, from villages and hamlets scattered all over north Berkshire, south Oxfordshire and even west Buckinghamshire. Cumnor has by far the highest score—24 spread over the whole period—and (leaving aside other Berkshire parishes) Dorchester has nine, between 1745 and 1754, Brill six, in the same period, and Yarnton five. Many other parishes have two or three. There is a note of who performed each marriage and his status in the college—Chaplain, Fellow, Master of Magdalen College School or Demy.

By collating the register printed in Bloxam with the parish registers mentioned above, several interesting facts emerge. In the first place, the whole system of registration, if such it could be called, was clearly somewhat haphazard. The 24 Cumnor marriages (with many couples 'both of Cumnor') and at least five South Hinksey ones, do not appear in the parish registers. On the other hand 15 of the 18 weddings noted as Magdalen College ones in the Wootton register make no appearance in the Magdalen College register; the three which appear in both are late entries of the 1750s. If Wootton was not alone in this method of registration, it may be that in parishes such as Dorchester and Brill, for which entries are fairly numerous for the last 10 years, there were also marriages performed in the college chapel which are not recorded in the college register. We can add 15 Wootton marriages to the total of 159 entries; it is quite likely that the true total for the period was something like 200 or more. Some entries were duplicated in the parish registers of Wootton and South Hinksey, all in the later years, perhaps

³ Parish Register of St. Lawrence's, South Hinksey (New Hinksey church chest) Book II, mixed entries.

⁴ Parish Register of St. Michael's, Cumnor (Cumnor church chest).

⁵ J. R. Bloxam, *Magdalen College Register*, 2, p. clxx.

⁶ *Ibid.*, Appendix xxvi.

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pointing to increased care in registration at a time when this question was in the air, as we shall see, prior to the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753.

An analysis of the officiating clergy at the weddings of the Cumnor, Wootton and South Hinksey people shows that for the most part the Fellows, Chaplains or School Masters concerned can be traced as being also curates, or their deputies, of these parishes. For example, Peter Priaulx, Fellow of Magdalen and curate of Cumnor; Robert Cane, School Master and deputy for the curate of Cumnor; Herbert Beaver, Chaplain of Magdalen and serving the cure of Wootton; John Hall, Fellow of Magdalen and perpetual curate of South Hinksey.⁷

But Magdalen was not alone in keeping a register of marriages in the college chapel; by 1728 St. John's College marriage register was already over thirty years old.⁸ It had been started in May 1695, 'in pursuance of an Act of Parliament made in the 6th and 7th year of the reign of William the 3rd King (etc.) for granting his Majesty certain dutys upon Marriages, Births and Burialls and upon Batchelours and Widdowers for the Terme of five years'. These duties were raised to finance the prosecution of the war against France 'with Vigour'.⁹ The St. John's register contains only one baptism (of a scholar) and a very few burials; but it records nearly 200 marriages in the college chapel between 1695 and 1752. Apart from Oxford itself, the parishes which appear prominently in the register were all, with the exception of Radley, college livings; Kirtlington and Fyfield (Berks) head the field with about 28 entries for each. The St. John's register does not usually give the status in the college of the officiating clergy, but it gives their names and sometimes notes the livings which they served, whether as vicar or curate.

It would be dangerous to try to generalize from the evidence provided by the Christ Church marriage register of the period,¹⁰ yet four facts are worth noticing. In the first place, marriages became progressively more frequent at Christ Church during the later years of the 17th century and throughout the first half of the 18th century. Secondly, the entries for couples from Oxfordshire and Berkshire villages became much more numerous in the 18th century; and Cassington, a Christ Church living, figures no less than thirty times between 1708/9 and 1754; the other villages mentioned, though many, only appear a few times each at most. Thirdly, in the 18th century

⁷ J. Foster, *Alumni Oxonienses*; Visitation Books of the Archdeacon of Berks (Bodleian, MS. Oxf. Archd. pp. Berks, e. 10, 11). (Hereafter referred to as 'A.V.B. Berks', with appropriate shelf number for relevant volume); Cumnor Churchwardens' Accounts (Berks Record Office, D/P 45/5/2).

⁸ Printed and published in *Miscellanea Genealogica et Heraldica*, Fifth Series, vol. 1., part iv.

⁹ 6 and 7 Will. 3, c. 6.

¹⁰ MS. Transcript of Christ Church Register (Bodleian, MS. Top. Oxon. c. 169).

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the villages of north Berkshire were not in the Oxford diocese, but in that of Salisbury; and their cathedral church was not, therefore, Christ Church. Lastly, there is a note in the 19th-century transcript of this register, inserted after the last 18th-century entry (for 21 March 1754—a significant date); it reads as follows: 'After this date no marriages were solemnized at Ch. Ch. until 1865 when a licence was obtained from Parliament.' Thus the Christ Church marriage register for the first half of the 18th century has somewhat of the appearance of a college chapel register, on the lines of those of St. John's and Magdalen.

We know from some Oxfordshire parish registers that marriages of village people took place on a significant scale in the chapels of other colleges; New College for Eynsham,¹¹ Trinity for Headington and Great Milton, Exeter for Kidlington and Great Milton, All Souls for Stadhampton and Chislehampton, Queen's for Hampton Poyle,¹² all with dates between 1725 and 1754. It is doubtful whether these colleges ever kept their own registers or recorded the marriages in any other way; in which case they must have relied on the officiating Fellows to enter the marriages in the parish registers the next time each went to take a Sunday service in his cure. St. John's, on the other hand, evidently aimed at recording all the marriages taking place in the college chapel in its own register—only one 'parish' entry has been found, and that is duplicated in the St. John's register. Magdalen would seem to have had a mixed system, sometimes using the college register, sometimes the parish ones, sometimes both.

It is not then altogether surprising if these varied arrangements for registration sometimes led to confusion and duplication, and perhaps even to omissions. The Yarnton register shows five marriages in Magdalen College chapel (one undated) in the 1740s; but these are not the same as the five noted in the Magdalen register. And the Richard Hawkins who was the incumbent of Yarnton during this period, while still a Chaplain at Magdalen, went to the length of entering in the Yarnton register the marriage of an Oxford couple at which he had officiated in Magdalen College chapel—and did not even note the year in which this took place.¹³ Small wonder if the suspicion grows that there were weddings in college chapels which were never entered in any register.

This brisk marriage business in college chapels had to come to an abrupt end owing to the operation of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act of 1753, which came into force in March 1754. The Act made illegal the performance of a

¹¹ W. P. W. Phillimore and W. J. Oldfield, *Oxfordshire Parish Registers. Marriages.* Vol. 2.

¹² Information kindly supplied by Mr. J. S. W. Gibson, from his examination of certain Oxfordshire marriage registers.

¹³ W. P. W. Phillimore, *Oxfordshire Parish Registers. Marriages.* Vol. 1.

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marriage in any place except the church or public chapel of the parish in which one of the parties was resident and where the banns had been called or for which the marriage licence had been granted; the penalty for a parson found to have broken the law was fourteen years' transportation. The Act also tightened up the regulations regarding the registration of marriages, to include more details such as the names of the officiating cleric and of witnesses.¹⁴ Until 1754 the clergy could, and often did, perform valid even if irregular marriages anywhere and at any time; marriages in prisons such as the Fleet had become a public scandal; and there must have been many a runaway couple who had no difficulty in finding a parson to marry them and even a church or chapel to marry them in. At South Hinksey marriages of 'foreigners' had far outnumbered those of residents in many years during the 17th and early 18th centuries,¹⁵ and the same was true, perhaps to a lesser extent, in other north Berkshire parishes such as Sunningwell.¹⁶ These 'foreigners' usually came from other Berkshire villages, sometimes a considerable distance away, but within the same Archdeaconry of Berkshire. The college chapels, however, as we have seen, were used, and marriage licences were granted, for couples coming from different archdeaconries and even, in the case of Berkshire people, from a different diocese, that of Salisbury. In the Magdalen College register Bloxam has a footnote regarding Lord Hardwicke's Act, referring to the marriage dated 18 June 1752; but unfortunately he was in error over his dates and the provisions of the Act, for it reads, 'This and the following marriages were performed after the publication of Banns or by Licence, according to the *Act for the better preventing of Clandestine Marriages, 26 George II*'. By 1752 the College may well have thought it prudent to make sure that the provisions of the then existing marriage legislation were carried out; but the Act of 1711¹⁷ only required the publication of banns or the issue of a marriage licence without specifying for what place they must apply. As suggested above, there may have been some effort to take greater care over the registration of marriages in advance of the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Act; the scandals of irregular marriages and false entries must by the early 1750s have made it obvious that there would have to be legislation to tighten up the regulations considerably. Nevertheless, Magdalen and some of the other colleges continued to allow what must be regarded as somewhat irregular marriages to take place in the college chapels up to the last moment, in the spring of 1754, when the Act passed the previous year came into force.

¹⁴ 26 Geo. 2, c. 33.

¹⁵ Bishop's Transcripts for South Hinksey (Salisbury Diocesan Registry); South Hinksey Parish Register, Book I.

¹⁶ Parish Register of St. Leonard's, Sunningwell (Berks Record Office, D/P 127/1/1).

¹⁷ 10 Anne, c. 19, s. 176.

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The reason for the cessation of college chapel marriages in 1754 is therefore easy to see; but why did the practice grow up at all? This is a much more difficult question to answer. The 1695 preamble to the St. John's marriage register, which has already been quoted, might lead one to suppose that, in order the better to carry out the provisions of an Act of Parliament, the college was putting on to a more regular footing something which it was already doing habitually and frequently; yet the entries for the last years of the 17th century are very few indeed, and marriages of peoples from country livings did not begin until 1701. It seems rather more likely therefore that *after* the register had been started in order to record the occasional marriages (and burials) which did from time to time take place in the college chapel, the Fellows came to realise that they could with advantage to themselves extend the scope and frequency of college chapel marriages. The other colleges (leaving aside Christ Church) did not apparently catch on to the idea for about another twenty-five years—or perhaps did not for some time realise what St. John's was about. No particular reason and no deliberate decisions of policy have been found to show why the practice began to spread among other colleges in the 1720s and (so far as we know at present) not earlier; but on the evidence gathered up to now it must be assumed that about that time they began to think that the St. John's practice had considerable attractions, and found themselves in a position to enjoy the same advantages. The colleges themselves must surely have charged fees for the use of their chapels and thus had some incentive for encouraging the practice. It might be possible to trace such payments in the old accounts of various colleges which are known to have had significant numbers of weddings—though a search in the old 'computus and expense' rolls of All Souls College has so far yielded no result. At all events, the Fellows of these colleges had the satisfaction of performing one of their parochial duties, for which a fee was payable to themselves, without the inconvenience of a special journey to an outlying cure. And this brings us to the question of the practicable field of operations for marriages of country people in college chapels.

College livings within easy reach of Oxford were obviously suitable, as there was no difficulty in seeing that they were served by incumbents or curates who were concurrently Fellows, etc., of their colleges, and who could therefore perform the marriage ceremony in their college chapels. However, if the same situation could be established in other parishes within riding distance of Oxford, a college could increase the supply of marriageable couples for the college chapel, as well as obtain other more important advantages for its Fellows. In certain of the nearby parishes of north Berkshire circumstances were certainly propitious for Magdalen, by the 1730s, in just such a way.

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Magdalen had in fact built up something of a miniature empire—whether by accident or design—in the livings of Cumnor, Wootton, South Hinksey and Wytham. To see how this had come about it is necessary to go back a little in the history of Cumnor and its chapelries of Wootton and the Hinkseys.

The vicarage of Cumnor itself was, by the end of the 17th century, in the presentation of the Earl of Abingdon; and the incumbent from 1682 to 1728 was William Peacock who had been a Fellow of Magdalen and was a member of a prominent local family. The chapelries of Wootton and the two Hinkseys were served by curates or their deputies during some of his time,¹⁸ but the situation in this regard is obscure until 1725, when a development of importance to the chapelries took place. Wootton and South Hinksey were endowed as perpetual curacies by Montagu Bertie, the second Earl of Abingdon, in conjunction with Queen Anne's Bounty and the Godolphin Trust. The two deeds which still exist for the augmentation of the Wootton living both show that a Richard Kent was at the time curate of Wootton and he is named as such in these indentures.¹⁹ He was a Fellow of Magdalen from 1713-32 and he succeeded old William Peacock at Cumnor in 1729.²⁰ Hearne says, apropos the death of Peacock and the endowment of the Wootton and Hinksey livings, 'The Minister of Wotton is Mr. Stephens, Master of Magdalen College.'²¹ If he was so, it seems probable that he was an assistant to, or acting for, Richard Kent, and his successor as perpetual curate, James Fynes.

No presentations seem to have been made to the new perpetual curacies until after the death of old William Peacock in December 1728. Then in 1729 there appear at South Hinksey another William Peacock, the son of the old man and himself a Fellow of Magdalen from 1716 to 1753;²² and at Wootton, James Fynes the son of Norris Fynes of Albury, Oxon, and yet another Fellow of Magdalen until he resigned his Fellowship on being presented to the Rectory of Moreton Hampstead, Devon, in 1736. He almost certainly had some sort of family connection with the Earl of Abingdon, his patron—there is the evidence of his father's unusual name; the fact that his native village was close to Rycote which the Berties had inherited with the barony of Norreys of Rycote; and the fact that he was presented to the living of Moreton Hampstead by the Earl of Abingdon's brother-in-law. He may possibly have served the new perpetual

¹⁸ Foster, *op. cit.*; A.V.B. Berks, e. 8; Bishop's Visitation Book (EP.LIB.VIS. 1698-1714) and Bishop's Transcripts for South Hinksey (Salisbury Diocesan Registry).

¹⁹ Indenture for the Augmentation of the Wootton Living, 7 June 1725 (Bodleian MS. Ch. Berks. c. 18, 1143); similar deed of same date in Church Commissioners' records, filed under 'Wootton (St. Peter) Diocese of Oxford' with other allied papers.

²⁰ Foster, *op. cit.*; Bloxam, *op. cit.*, 6, p. 153.

²¹ Sc. 'School Master'. *Hearne's Collections* (Oxford Historical Society), x, p. 92, February 2, 1728/9.

²² Foster, *op. cit.*; A.V.B. Berks, e. 9.

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curacy himself from Oxford until he went to be rector of Moreton Hampstead, where he was resident, holding the Devonshire living in plurality with the Wootton one, until his death in 1774.²³ But from 1736 at least, curates or deputies of some kind must have been appointed to look after Wootton; the first of these of whom we know was Matthew Nicholas (Fellow of Magdalen 1731-45) who was serving in that capacity in 1739.²⁴ He was succeeded by John Hall, a Demy and then from 1745 a Fellow of Magdalen, who soon—in 1748—stepped into the shoes of William Peacock the younger at South Hinksey.²⁵ The flow of Magdalen College clergy in and out of Wootton continued right on into the 'seventies—Thomas Sherwin (Fellow), Herbert Beaver (Chaplain), Thomas Price (Usher, Magdalen College School), Robert Bryne (Master of the School).²⁶ Meanwhile Richard Kent at Cumnor had as his curates another succession of young Fellows of Magdalen—Peter Priaulx, Thomas Sherwin, and Christopher Robinson, later Rector of Wytham.²⁷ The last named had other colleagues to act for him, Robert Cane and then Robert Bryne, both of them Masters of Magdalen College School.²⁸

But by the middle 'fifties the Magdalen College "empire" was dwindling. Richard Kent of Cumnor was succeeded in 1746 by John Simpson of Lincoln College,²⁹ though Christopher Robinson was still curate until about 1755,³⁰ and he it was who officiated at the weddings of Cumnor people in the college chapel in the later years. John Hall of South Hinksey was followed in 1754 by one Hewett, who had no Magdalen connection, and shortly afterwards by Samuel Selstone, Precentor of Christ Church.³¹ At Wootton alone did the Magdalen connection continue right up to the 1780s.³²

Was the building of the "empire" accidental or deliberate? It could have been accidental. There was nothing extraordinary in the stipendiary curate of Wootton, Richard Kent, being presented to the vicarage of the mother church of Cumnor on the death of the old vicar. Richard Kent was followed at Wootton by James Fynes who almost certainly had a family connection with his patron, though he too happened to be a Fellow of Magdalen at the time. Old William Peacock's son became the incumbent of another of the new perpetual curacies, at South Hinksey, perhaps to avoid giving him the Cumnor living on the death

²³ Foster, *op. cit.*; information regarding James Fynes as Rector of Moreton Hampstead kindly supplied by the Devon Record Office.

²⁴ Foster, *op. cit.*; A.V.B. Berks, e.10.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*; and A.V.B. Berks, e. 11.

²⁷ *Ibid.*; Cumnor Churchwardens' Accounts, *loc. cit.*

²⁸ Bloxam, *op. cit.*, 3, p. 232.

²⁹ List of Vicars on board in Cumnor church.

³⁰ Cumnor Churchwardens' Accounts, *loc. cit.*

³¹ A.V.B. Berks, e. 11.

³² *Ibid.*; Wootton Parish Register.

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of his father. (He does not seem to have been a very reputable character.)³³ These naturally appointed as their assistants or substitutes when they were needed young colleagues whom they knew and who could conveniently do the work required while remaining resident in the nearby University. But the general impression is so much one of a group of Magdalen College livings that it seems odd to find that the Earl of Abingdon was the patron of all three parishes, and still more that he had himself been responsible for the endowment of the new perpetual curacies.

Supposing the Magdalen College 'empire' was planned, there was one character, not yet mentioned, who was in an ideal position to carry it into effect. In 1712 Robert Lydall had been presented to the rectory of Wytham, the nearby parish where the Earl of Abingdon had an estate at Wytham Abbey. Writing in 1733, Hearne says, 'It is he that manages my Lord's Estate';³⁴ and though from the context this might mean simply the Rycote estate, it seems probable that Lydall, then and earlier, acted for the Earl and advised him on all sorts of financial matters. In 1725 we find him a party to one of the deeds for the endowment of the Wootton curacy;³⁵ and he and Richard Kent were both trustees for the management of a large trust for the Earl, set up under a private Act of Parliament in 1732.³⁶ Lydall was a Fellow of Magdalen until 1725 and a candidate for the Presidency of the college in 1722. In this connection Hearne comments, 'Lydall had been making Interest almost, if not quite, as he had been of the College [he graduated from Merton] and might have carried it had he not acted falsely with respect to Dr. King, when he stood lately for Parliamt Man for the Univ. of Oxford, at w^{ch} many of the Fellows were angry & deserted him, as he had deserted Dr. King.'³⁷ At all events, it seems evident that Lydall's interest in Magdalen affairs was strong, that he was a man of financial and business ability, and something of a schemer. Thus he may have had both means and inclination to persuade his patron to create new benefices and then turn them, together with Cumnor, virtually into Magdalen College livings.

If this was Lydall's scheme, some evidence of a negative kind comes from the third of the ex-chapelries of Cumnor, that of North Hinksey. A new perpetual curacy was endowed here in 1725, not by the Earl of Abingdon, but by Edward Perrott, in conjunction with Queen Anne's Bounty.³⁸ The

³³ He was nicknamed 'Dizzy Peacock', and Hearne called him 'a great sot and blockhead'.

³⁴ *Hearne's Collections*, xi, p. 169, March 9, 1732/3.

³⁵ The deed in the Church Commissioners' records (see note 17 above).

³⁶ Royal assent, 3rd April, 1732 (*Journals of the House of Lords*, xxiv, p. 79).

³⁷ *Hearne's Collections*, vii, p. 388, 30 July 1722.

³⁸ *The Victoria County History of Berkshire* (iv, p. 408), relying on the contributor of 1759 to *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, assumes that the North Hinksey curacy was endowed by the 2nd Earl of Abingdon; but the Church Commissioners' records show that the endowment was by Edward Perrott.

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Earls of Abingdon seem to have held the advowson, however, and the agreement under which they only made alternate presentations (later sharing with the Harcourts)³⁹ was probably reached with the Perrotts at the time the new curacy came into being. The timing of this step to coincide with the endowment of the Wootton and South Hinksey livings shows that the Berties and the Perrotts must have come to some mutually agreeable arrangement over it. In the second quarter of the century no Magdalen College clergy appear as incumbents at North Hinksey and it would seem as though the Earl of Abingdon had not the freedom there to further Magdalen College interests that he enjoyed elsewhere.

Other colleges besides Magdalen must have managed to draw into their tentacles parishes which were not college livings, for the benefit of their Fellows. For instance, Nathaniel Thompson of St. John's, after serving as curate in various college livings in Berkshire and Oxfordshire to the west of the city⁴⁰ became, about 1715, curate of Radley, a donative in the gift of the Stonhouse family.⁴¹ He was still a Fellow of the college and was therefore able to marry Radley people in the college chapel. In 1730, however, he became rector of the neighbouring parish of Sunningwell, which by that time had also become a Stonhouse living.⁴² He married one Sunningwell couple in the college chapel that year and must have resigned his Fellowship shortly afterwards; his name appears no more in the college marriage register as an officiating cleric,⁴³ and he may well have gone to live in the rectory house at Sunningwell, continuing to serve Radley from there instead of from Oxford.⁴⁴

It is quite clear from the evidence of the college marriage registers and the frequency with which villagers were married in college chapels in the first half of the 18th century that many of the country parishes in the neighbourhood of Oxford—and this is true for north Berkshire in the Salisbury diocese as well as for Oxfordshire—were at that time served by Fellows of colleges, either as incumbents or as curates. This meant that nearby college livings and other parishes too in the vicinity, if they were served in this way, suffered from the non-residence of their clergy and from all the accompanying disadvantages which that involved. President Holmes of St. John's tried posthumously to put some check on this sort of abuse, by bequeathing an additional £10 a year stipend to the curates of Fyfield and Northmoor (both college livings) on condition that they resided in their parishes for three days and nights each

³⁹ *V.C.H. Berks*, iv, p. 408.

⁴⁰ St. John's College marriage register.

⁴¹ A.V.B. Berks, e. 8; *V.C.H. Berks*, iv, p. 416.

⁴² A.V.B. Berks, e. 9; Foster, *op. cit.*; *V.C.H. Berks*, iv, p. 427.

⁴³ St. John's College marriage register.

⁴⁴ A.V.B. Berks, e. 9, 10.

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week;⁴⁵ at Fyfield, however, this seems to have had little effect, for the parsonage house which had been leased to the descendants of Sir Thomas White's kin since the 16th century was in 1753, five years after President Holmes's death, let on a renewed lease to Dr. James Musgrave, who had been 'vicar' of Fyfield 1743-6 (and of course a Fellow of St. John's) and went to live there in his retirement.⁴⁶

Conditions in the early 18th century in the parishes around Oxford must have been very much as those described by Mrs. McClatchey for the end of the century in her recent book *Oxfordshire Clergy, 1777-1869*.⁴⁷ She mentions the poverty of curates' (and some incumbents') stipends, and the lack of adequate accommodation for resident clergy, as reasons why college Fellows and Chaplains were so frequently to be found serving as curates in one or more of the parishes within easy reach of Oxford. These considerations must certainly have held good in the early years of the century also—and perhaps the complementary factor in addition, of the poverty of Fellows' stipends compared with the social standing to which they aspired by that time, resulting in the need, or at least desire, to supplement college stipends from some other source; and what could be more convenient than a nearby non-resident curacy for a Fellow who was already in Orders?

Mrs. McClatchey also puts forward the shortage of college livings compared with the number of Fellows waiting for preferment, in the late 18th century, as another reason why Fellows so often became non-resident curates of country parishes near Oxford.⁴⁸ This point seems to be equally valid in the early 18th century, judging from the evidence of the St. John's and Magdalen college marriage registers, and still more from the activities of Magdalen (and probably other colleges similarly) to get control, even if only temporarily, in nearby livings which were not in their gift. There is a slight complication here, however, for it was not until 1736 that an Act was passed prohibiting the acquisition of additional advowsons by any college already holding livings equal to half the number of its Fellows;⁴⁹ and the frustrating effect of this can hardly have been much felt before the middle of the century. The answer may be in part that many of the colleges were already short of livings in the early 18th century and continued in that state, not willing to reduce the number of their Fellows and unable to increase the number of their livings after 1736, even if the opportunity to do so arose.

⁴⁵ W. E. Costin, *History of St. John's College, Oxford, 1598-1860* (Oxford Historical Society, N.S. xii, 1958), p. 188.

⁴⁶ Rev. A. V. Billen, D.D., *1,000 Years of Fyfield History* (Abbey Press, Abingdon-on-Thames, 1955), p. 38, 9.

⁴⁷ Diana McClatchey, *Oxfordshire Clergy, 1777-1869* (O.U.P., 1960) *passim*.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴⁹ 9 Geo. 2, c. 36, s. 5.

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Here then we see a set of uses and abuses typical of 18th century clerical life—the non-resident parish priest with other work and more congenial interests elsewhere, pluralism, the importance attached to influence and “interest”, irregular marriages, laxity in attending to parish business and in carrying out regulations, and so on—but all a little exaggerated, a little more highly-coloured and more sharply outlined, because of the impact of the University on the surrounding villages. It is a small section of local history peculiar to Oxford—perhaps to Cambridge, too?