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element of any research, in this case being marooned for five minutes next to the index cards. The order of discovery could have been different and I certainly do not rule out the existence of other enlightening documents. In fact I would be surprised if none exists but you have to stop somewhere...

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Ed

## SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY CHURCH COURT PAPERS

Registrars and clerks managed the vast quantities of unbound paper generated by visitation and court business of the several jurisdictions within the diocese of Salisbury by gathering material arranged by type, content and date into files. These were made by spiking the documents and threading them on leather thongs or cord, which was tied down against short pieces of wood, quill, or paper folded into one inch squares. The vast majority of these papers comprise formal procedural documents, such as citations, libels, sentences, absolutions and monitions. Wordy and in Latin, the language of the law until 1733, they struggle to excite the researcher.

However the files contain letters, petitions and certificates in English, which cut through the legal and linguistic fog and vividly illustrate the tensions and stresses created in maintaining control over the religious beliefs and moral behaviour of parishioners and clergy.

Those presented for misdemeanours might seek the support of their incumbent and testimonials can be most informative about both the circumstances and characters of the leading players. In 1664, Thomas Pelling, rector of Trowbridge, faced with a group of extremely poor parishioners summoned for marrying clandestinely without bans or licence, adopted an eminently practical approach. He wrote to the bishop's registrar: 'Bee it to save their soules from Hell, They are not able to beare their charge of trauaile, & to pay the fees of the Court for their Absolution. ... Yet it is not my desire that the poorest should escape scotfree'. He suggests open penance as an alternative punishment (D1/41/1/40/35).

Thomas Catchmay of Cherhill, presented for not attending church in 1682, was described by John Jennings, minister, as a good Christian, but by reason of his calling, he being a shepherd, he can not be there so frequently as he would' (D5/21/1/32).

The mitigating circumstances in the case of Christopher Hiscocke of Little Cheverell, similarly accused in 1664, were explained by Edward Hort, rector: 'In the time of harvest (being my selfe in distresse my servant leaving me) I gott him to help me with my come; & as our custome is he dinned with me on the sabbath day; soe that then he might be absent from his owne'. Presumably this break in routine resulted in Christopher being absent from church (D1/41/1/41/27). An attempt in 1671 to make Thomas Tilshead, also of Trowbridge, tow the line of orthodoxy, by requiring him to acknowledge his fault in declaiming that 'I regarded not Common prayer noe more than the I did the barkening of a dogge', was not initially successful. Robert Hawkins, vicar, found him 'so obstinate that unlesse some other course bee taken with him I have small hopes that Hee will ever bee brought to conformity' (D1/41/2/9).

Tensions between incumbent and parishioners were not uncommon and had many causes. James Garth, rector of Hilperton, had ongoing disputes with several parishioners, as is documented in other series of the diocesan archives. In a letter to the registrar in March 1690 he described that 'I

now labouring under several of the infirmitys of old age (being 71 years) as the stangary, the stone, the wind, the survey etc & whatnot', had been presented by a pretended churchwarden '(tho no Christian) for pulling away a wire over one of the windows placed there to make a ball court'. There were commonly about 30 'rude persons young & old playing there every Lords day, the whole day'. He maintained that there were scarce 12 Christians in the whole parish, which is probably more an indication that his relationship with most of his parishioners had clearly broken down and he felt isolated, rather than an accurate statement of the religiousness of the parish. (D1/41/1/46)

A tantalising glimpse of another dispute is given in a letter from James Troughton, who was the minister of Maiden Bradley, to Richard Kent, rector of Fisherton Anger in May 1665, in which he names the men who carried and followed 'Lawrences' corpse from the village to Horningsham and those who buried him in Horningsham churchyard'. (D1/41/1/41/110). Several of the people named were cited for not receiving the Eucharist or paying oblations earlier in the year, including Nicholas Lawrence, the probable identity of the corpse (D1/41/1/41/100,102). Dissenters had to be buried, and burial in consecrated ground could only be denied to those excommunicated for a grievous crime. Their nonconformist leanings probably lead them to Horningsham, where a meeting or conventicle existed, but the reasons for such an enterprise remain unclear. Troughton was concerned that this incident should not become a precedent which could lead to the loss of burial fees.

The opinions expressed in these letters are often frank and unguarded. Edward Northey, rector of Tisbury, wrote in 1665 about nonconformists recently excommunicated in his parish, two of whom are unfit to be dealt with in this way. He has been informed by several people that Edward Scammel, the Quaker, 'is become ... a very Idiot, & hath lost all use of reason & discretion', and Nicholas Scammel, an Anabaptist 'who is fallen into a kind of leprosy which is most likely to excommunicate him out of this world in a few weeks'. (D1/41/1/41/112)

Complaints about Benjamin Culme, vicar of Winterbourne Stoke, in 1678 reveal the important role of the incumbent at a most basic level. He had refused to administer the sacrament to a sick woman and to perform the burial service without receiving a fee of 12d, which required another minister to be found. One poignant indictment against him reads 'gorge vines Child was buried with out anie minister the minister not being at home the childe starke'. For any god-fearing parents such dereliction of duty must have been deeply upsetting. (D1/41/1/21)

In 1635 Wolstan Miller, curate of Berwick Bassett, was presented by the churchwardens 'for beinge often tymes Drunke ... and mainely upon Easter daylat'. This same was refuted by Richard Long, vicar of the neighbouring parish of Winterbourne Monkton, who said that Miller's absence at Easter was due to sickness; he had stood in for him. He continued, displaying a fine literary style, 'But it seemes as Envy hath a nimble Eye soe hath Malice a strong memory ...' (D5/28/35/17, 18, 22).

Churchwardens' presentments, made at the visitation by the ordinary of the particular jurisdiction, written in English, are an invaluable source for parish history, particularly in the 16th and 17th centuries. The files are often entitled *Detections*, a Latin word meaning disclosures, and they comprise details of matters of concern about the fabric of the church and, anticipating totalitarian regimes of more recent times, the moral behaviour of parishioners and clergy. Two examples illustrate how evocative they are. In 1619 several men and women, were presented for being 'behoulder s and players att football on a Sabbath day'. Both players and supporters were each fined 2s. As the holyday was the only