RELIGION IN THE LOCAL COMMUNITY LECTURE 1

THE MASS AND MORALITY

The beginnings of Christianity in our local area are obscure. Firstly there is the colourful legend of Joseph of Arimathea. According to the Glastonbury legend he visited Glastonbury in AD 63 with the Holy Grail containing the blood of Christ collected during the Crucifixion and founded the first church there. However this only dates from the late 12th century and could have been a fabrication aimed at generating money for the rebuilding of the abbey after the serious fire of 1184. On the other hand it could have been based on traditions which have now been lost.

From the available historical evidence it seems likely that Christianity was present in Britain from about 200 AD, brought here by Roman legionaries and traders, some of whom were interestingly enough Jews. It seems to have developed in the towns and particularly in the industrial settlements. By the 4th century it had spread to the wealthy villas. In the last 11 years tangible evidence has emerged from places near to Westbury; the 1980 excavations at Wells Cathedral showed that there was a Roman burial chamber on the site of the eastern end of the original Saxon Cathedral and Dr Rodwell, the archaeologist, suggested that the burials could have been Christian. The 1990 excavations at Shepton Mallet were much more conclusive about early christianity. Three cemetaries were excavated and the largest contained 17 burials, aligned east to west. One of the burials was accompanied by a silver amulet decorated with a Christian Chi-Rho symbol, possibly the burial of a priest. This evidence hints strongly at the presence of a small Christian community there by the year 300 AD.

It is possible that Christianity would have been known about in the Cheddar valley by about that date. Romano-British sites have been recognised on Stoke Moor and at Marchey Farm on Knowle Moor and there was also the mining settlement at Charterhouse but no evidence of Christian practises has as yet emerged.

After the end of Roman Britain in the 5th century, tradition links our area with the Celtic saints who came from Ireland and Wales to convert the people of Somerset in the 5th and 6th centuries. If the tradition is correct the local people knew little of Christianity but this would not rule out small pockets of believers. Some of our villages' links with celtic saints have survived the years: Congresbury and St Congar; Cheddar and St Columbanus; Street and Sts Gildas and Kea and Meare with St Beon. The remoteness of the moors was attractive to the Celtic saints who although they were travelling missionaries, also cultivated solitude.

The coming of the Anglo-Saxons brought the more organised Roman Christianity. Churches were set up as missionary centres and Westbury was equidistant between two of them: Wells which was a minster by 774 AD and Cheddar on the site of the present Kings' of Wessex school, by 899 AD. In the later Anglo-Saxon period one can imagine the villagers of the little settlement at Westbury listening to travelling preachers from these two minsters, possibly

on the site of the present cross. Westbury on the evidence of its name " the west fortified place ", has an Anglo- Saxon origin, and the settlement grew up around the water supply - the Square, Old Ditch, Crow Lane etc. The siting of the church was therefore away from the centre of the village. Unfortunately there is no direct evidence to provide us with a straightforward answer as to why this was. It is possible that the church was built on a site with pagan associations. Pope Gregory had instructed in 601 AD that pagan temples and sacred places should not be totally destroyed but rather that they should be sanctified with holy water and that christian altars should be set up within them. This seems to have happened in Wells in the 8th century and the nearness of a Bronze age barrow to Priddy Church should not be forgotten. Some other villages whose names end in "burh" have their churches set inside an ancient earthwork and the village could have got its name from this rather than the hill fort. We should look carefully at the shape of our churchyard; the south east side is still circular in shape and the land does drop away in front of Westbury House. Also the boundary of Court House Farm is rounded in shape where it abuts the road which is undoubtedly an ancient route dating back to Saxon times.This does indicate that some kind of ancient enclosure is a distinct possibility. One possible origin for this enclosure could be that it was a Romano-British farm site. It is known that it was Roman policy to encourage the local inhabitants to leave their hilltop enclosures and settle in lower areas. This was the origin of the Roman settlement at Shepton Mallet and the same could well have happened at Westbury, the iron age people leaving their enclosure near the Beacon and settling on lower ground. It seems strange that there should only be Romano-British settlements on the moor and not on the good site that the church now occupies. A farm site would also be a burial site and this would explain the religious associations which would be a pre-requisite for the establishment of a christian church.

As for the building of the church , this must be linked with the building of the first structure on the Court Farm site. When a church and a manor or court house stand side by side as they do in Westbury it is fairly certain that the church developed in the late Saxon period as a propriatory chapel attached to the manor. The only Saxon charter to have survived which mentions Westbury is a very late one of 1065 confirming the grant of Westbury with many other estates by King Edward the Confessor to Bishop Giso of Bath and Wells. The charter however, is a compilation of previous land grants by the King's ancestors " to be collected for security in a single charter", but Bishop Giso's autobiography that Westbury was a royal manor until the 1050's. This means that a late Saxon church here is a possibility, a wooden church perhaps. A stone church was definitely built by the middle of the 12th century and the much altered Norman north door is possibly structural evidence of this, the late Norman tower arch being constructed around 1180-1200. However the outside and inside of our church have been so heavily restored and the stone work reset and repointed so as to obliterate any evidence of Saxon or early Norman work. The dedication of the church was probably different to what it is now. It could have been dedicated to a Celtic or Anglo- Saxon missionary saint or to the Holy Cross, Holy Rood or Holy Ghost but there is a possibility that it was not dedicated to St Lawrence until the 14th century.Although Westbury is mentioned in the Domesday Book of 1086 there is no

reference to the church but this is hardly surprising because the church was part of the manor belonging to the bishop holding no land of its own and the Domesday was compiled for the purposes of taxation.

It is not until the 12th century that we can collect hard historical fact about our church. By 1100 the parish system was firmly established in most parts of England with each parish having clearly defined boundaries. Westbury was a fairly large parish based on the estate confirmed to Bishop Giso in 1065 incorporating the bishop's land in the Forest of Mendip at Priddy and what is now Rodney Stoke ( there is a reference to the church of Westbury and its chapel of Stoke in 1159. Stoke however became a separate parish soon afterwards.In 1164 Robert of Lewes, Bishop of Bath and Wells granted the church at Westbury to the Augustinian Priory at Bruton. Westbury had become like hundreds of other churches, appropriated by a monastic house. The Bishop regarded the church at Westbury and its revenues as his own property to do what he liked with and would not have consulted the parishioners. He was obviously a strong supporter of the Augustinian order and wished to support them financially. Appropriation meant that the Prior of Bruton became the rector of the church and took the great tithes of corn and hay, profitable tithes and easy to collect. Westbury parishioners would have considered Bruton rather remote and to see the carts jolting of to Bruton with one tenth of their produce must have caused some resentment one feels. However tithes were a fact of life and had to be paid to someone. The Bishop however reserved the right of appointing the vicar. This was because the record of monastic houses in appointing priests had not been good: priests were removable at the house's pleasure and they were often paid a stipend barely adequate for their needs making it difficult to perform the necessary spiritual work of the parish. The Bishop stipulated that the vicar of Westbury should be a perpetual vicar and should have sufficient financial support from the property of the church to enable him to carry out his spiritual duties satisfactorily. It was laid down by the Archbishop of Canterbury in 1222 that a minimum of 5 marks a year was required to support a vicar. Westbury seems to have been adequately endowed at about 10 marks a year in the later middle ages but was occasionally released from paying church taxes because of poverty; the weather could affect the harvest yield then as now. Although Westbury was appropriated to Bruton in the later 12th century there was some confusion in the mid 13th century when the Bishop out of ignorance appointed a Rector of Westbury instead of a vicar thus removing Bruton's right to the great tithe. The problem was finally sorted out in 1290 when Bruton's rights were confirmed and a proper establishment for the vicar was set up. It was agreed by the Bishop and Prior that the vicar was to receive the small tithes of Westbury and its chapel at Priddy together with the mortuaries( a payment to the parish priest from the estate of each dead parishioner and churchscot(a payment levied on the burial of each parishioner for the benefit of that person's soul. The vicar was also given three acres of meadow in Stoke meadow and the tithes and the grass in the cemetaries of Westbury and Priddy with the tithe of hay from Priddy. The problem of the vicar's accommodation was also sorted out. The Prior of Bruton had to construct a fitting hall with a chamber in which the vicar could live in the yard of Bernard de Wellington's house opposite the Bishop's court house (now Court Farm). The actual site of the medieval priest's house in

Westbury raises some problems - where was it? The site of Westbury House is not really opposite Court Farm but the status of the building immediately adjacent to the southwest side of the churchyard needs sorting out. Another possible site might be near what is now Cross House; this is opposite Court Farm adjacent to glebe land and next to the medieval preaching cross - a very appropriate site.
Let us now turn to the building we are sitting in and try to work out the main changes that took place in its structure during the Middle Ages. The first stone church here was at the time of the appropriation in 1164 most probably a barn like structure of the same length as the present nave and containing a nave and chancel. The survival of the late Norman tower arch gives us some idea of the height of the roof. The arch would have been framed by the roof which would have thus been considerably lower than the present one. Light would have come from two small windows high up in the wall where the enlarged windows now are. Access to the church would have been by the now blocked Norman doorway on the north side which has been considerably altered during rebuilding. Its lack of decoration when compared with the tower arch suggests that it comes from earlier in the Norman period, possibly early 12th century. We do not know if the Norman church had a tower but the tower arch was built for that purpose. At the end of the 13th century, Bruton started the building of the chancel . The architectural evidence of the east window and the small north lancet window places them in the style used at the end of the 13th century. Evidently Bruton Priory was rather negligent in providing funds for the building of their churches and Westbury could have been affected, the chancel not being completed until the second decade of the 14th century. One can only conjecture at the nature of the first chancel arch, probably a narrow Early English one.

It was not until the latter part of the 15th century that the Church assumed the final size and dimensions that we see today. It became established practice during the Middle Ages for the rector to take responsibility for the fabric of the chancel for lay people were not allowed in the chancel during mass. The nave was used by the parishioners for other purposes than worship and its upkeep and development became their responsibility. Towards the end of the 15th century the parishioners decided to enlarge the nave. This decision reflected their greater prosperity after the catastrophes of the 14th century - war, inflation and the plague. The parishioners would have established a building fund and employed a gang of workmen under the supervision of a master mason. The decision was taken to build a pulpit which was to be painted and decorated with images- the marks where they fitted are still visible today;, the nave was to be enlarged by the building of a south aisle with a chapel, altar and piscina. The extra altar would be required for the increasing complexity of worship and could have been used for services for small groups of villagers, informal fraternities possibly connected with the anniversaries which will be discussed later. To accomplish this enlarging of the church, the main roof would have to be raised and the south wall replaced by an arcade with piers shaped with four hollows in the latest perpendicular style. The wooden roof in the new south aisle was to be supported by wallshafts carrying painted corbels mostly angels while the older corbels which had supported the original nave roof were to be retained as far as possible with new ones being added

where necessary.The chancel arch was to be rebuilt in the same style, with no doubt an elaborate rood screen separating it from the nave and to be given its own priest's entrance door.The south aisle chapel was to have its own chancel arch and screen. Entry to the south aisle was to be through a new south porch with a singing gallery to house a choir for the great processional festivals on Palm Sunday and Rogationtide when the people traversed the churchyard before entering the church to offer their intercessions and for the marriage service the first part of which took place in the church porch. A new battlemented tower was to be built in the new perpendicular style and the whole new south nave extension was to be embellished outside with an image over the south door, shutes to take the water off the lead roof in the form of gargoyles and a pierced parapet decorated with trefoils in triangles. The church and its surroundings became a building site and the building could have taken up to ten or even twenty or thirty years according to the availability of the funds. This seems to have been the case because the architectural evidence of the capitals on the south arcade and the type of piscina made for the new chapel show a gap of 20/30 years. Conventional scaffolding was erected - vertical poles with horizontal putlogs and runners. Medieval walls filled with rubble as ours are were built from both sides simultaneously and so the putlogs went right through the walls. An examination of our walls would show the different building stages. Vast quantities of lime and mortar would be needed to bind the masonry together. Lime was stored in a large pit and the preparation of the mortar had to take place on site in circular basins in the ground called mortar pits. The ashlar work - dressed stone which surrounds our south porch was done on site by a mason as were the corbels and mouldings which have been recently repaired at such cost. A carpenter would prepare the centring for each arch, construct the screens that cut off the chancel and south aisle chapel from the nave, construct the new roofs and make the new south door. The plumber did his work on site, usually having his lead melting hearth inside the church. Lead casting had to be indoors to prevent the wind from cooling the melt too quickly which would result in the lead cracking. The south aisle would have been completely constructed before the old south wall was gradually demolished as the arcade was set in place. The floor of the nave would probably still have been earthen and covered with a layer of straw. To complement the new pulpit, timber pews would also probably have been introduced at this time but in the form of benches around the walls and not in rows as now. The high altar made of stone would have been towards the east end of the chancel but not against the east wall. On its north side would have been the Easter sepulchre where the sacred host was placed on Good Friday and watched over until Easter Sunday when it was ceremoniously restored to the altar. The side chapel altar would have been sited on a stone plinth which still survives here and attached to the east wall. The font would have been where it is now at the west end of the church. The limed interior walls would have been covered with vivid paintings depicting scenes from the life of Christ or the Virgin Mary, legends of saints or moralistic teaching on the vanity of human life and vivid warnings of the effect of sinfulness and the neglect of the Church's teaching e.g the dance of death. the last judgement. There would have been stained glass windows, numerous crosses, candlesticks, a pyx for the blessed sacrament, a silver pax for the kiss of peace ceremony during mass, statues, rosaries,

beads and other valuable items acquired as gifts over the years as well as sets of vestments and needlework for the altars. Finally after all this was finished extra light was provided for chancel and nave by the enlargement of the existing windows in late perpendicular style c 1520.

Now finally what do we know of the priests who ministered here, the services and the beliefs of the people? Priests were often the younger sons of lords of manors who had been educated in the schools attached to cathedrals and monastic houses which were ready enough to admit boys who were seen to possess those gifts of the Holy Ghost which might if duly cultivated make them useful in Church and state - a sort of holy civil service training school! It was regarded as the duty of ecclesiastical persons to look out for such boys and to support them in their careers. However technically the chance to become a priest was open to all boys regardless of birth. Richard 11 had in the 1390s rejected a proposal to forbid peasants to send their children to school to " learn clergee " and the Statute of Artificers passed by Parliament in 1406 enacted that " every man or woman of what state or condition he be shall be free to set their son or daughter to take learning at any school that pleaseth them within this realm". The income a priest could expect was not large and the income at Westbury was about average.The evidence from Westbury suggests that at least two of the medieval vicars came from local families; Walter Borde and William Smyth both from the 15th century, their fathers could only have been yeoman farmers; indeed two vicars were so poor that they had to be supported financially by their successors. Most of the medieval vicars seem to have been educated at cathedral of monastic schools but some went to Oxford University; Walter Borde, vicar between 1413 and 1425 was an M.A. from University College where he studied from 1397-1399. His successor Robert Colby was an ecclesiastical lawyer from Balliol College who had been a notary public in the Lincoln Diocese before coming to Westbury in May 1425. Three other vicars were career churchmen and the Westbury incumbency was only a minor part of their duties. The only recorded rector Gilbert of Sarum, at Westbury in 1256 was an ecclesiastical lawyer with a documented career in the Wells diocese spanning thirty four years: he was the Bishop's clerk, chaplain, canon of the cathedral, his tax collector and legal representative in dealings with monastic houses and his legal representative at the Papal court at Rome when the operation of the Wells deanery had been suspended by the papal representative in England. How much time Gilbert actually spent in Westbury can only be conjectured! Thomas Goldwege, vicar from 1490 until possibly 1513 was another ecclesiastical lawyer who was concurrently vicar of Cheddar, Westbury and Shipham, presumably he had a papal dispensation for this. He has a documented 40 year career in the Wells diocese often acting as a proxy at the institution of a vicar to a parish. It often seems as though the parishioners never saw their prospective vicar until after he had been instituted. He was a public notary, witnessing wills, acting as scribe in the election of the new Dean of Wells in 1499, deputising for the Bishops Commissary General, serving as an official of the archdeacon and finally ending up as a residentiary canon of Wells. The parish of Westbury was certainly neglected by its vicar in those years and there is evidence that it had a residentiary curate in 1487 thee years before Goldwege's appointment and these curacies must have been a fact of life for

many years when one considers the career of Goldwege's successor, Richard Eryngton. Eryngton was an Oxford man being admitted in 1510. He gained his Bachelor of Civil Laws in 1529, was a canon of Wells holding the prebend of Barton St David and vicar of Westbury and Wookey until his death in 1546. He was frequently away on the business of the diocese attending the convocation of Canterbury in 1539. Summing up it would seem that Westbury had resident vicars throughout the 14th and most of the 15th centuries but was to a certain extent neglected at the end of the 15th and at the beginning of the 16th century a period which paradoxically saw the greatest physical expansion of the church that has ever been seen. I wonder if there was any connection? While the cat's away the mice do play.

The conduct and duties of priests had been clearly laid down by the Pope in the Lateran decrees of 1215. Priests should allow no woman whose presence might cause suspicion of evil to live in his house. They were forbidden to buy or sell and prohibited from visiting taverns, gaming, dicing and from the carrying of arms. Unfortunately one of the Westbury vicars offended where women were concerned. Geoffrey de Bideputte who became vicar in 1317 cohabited with Juliana the daughter of Richard the keeper of the Bishop's park in Westbury. She bore him two children. The matter only came to the Bishop's attention when the vicar broke his promise to provide a suitable marriage for Juliana after sullying her reputation. The Bishop intervened and forced Geoffrey to pay 6 marks immediately and another 6 at other dates for her benefit and then to swear friendship with Richard and to stop his scandalous behaviour. This was a big fine and amounted to a year's income for Geoffrey. It does not seem that Geoffrey mended his ways because six years later he was again in trouble for withholding money from a will of which he was executor, the interesting point being that his name was coupled with the widow's in the case. Conspiracy to defraud possibly?

Priests were instructed by the Pope to preach the faith: they had to explain the creeds, the ten commandments, the seven deadly sins,the sacraments, the Lord's Prayer and the Hail Mary. They had the power of absolution and had to teach their congregations reverence and the simple essentials of manners. The priest had to employ colour, illustration to present the faith and the lives of the saints in an interesting way because medieval congregations easily lost their attention. The holy sacrament was used to stimulate the devotion of the parishioners and the adoration of it increased with the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi in the thirteenth century when it was carried in procession. The churchwardens supported the priest. Their duties had developed in the 13th century because of the need for keeping and safeguarding the contributions of the faithful both for the fabric and for alms. The churchwardens at Westbury could be independent in mind though. A good example of this was in 1413 when they took the vicar to the Bishop's court over who should have the ash tree which had been blown down in the previous winter's gale. The Bishop ruled in favour of the vicar who once his undoubted rights to the herbage of the churchyard had been confirmed, promptly gave the fallen tree to the villagers for use in the village forge.

To the medieval villager the church and religion were of the utmost importance. The church held a commanding position in society: it provided the King with literate counsellors; it was a rich landowner; its cathedrals, abbeys and priories were the largest and

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most splendid buildings a medieval peasant was ever likely to see; its intellectual systems provided an explanation of the mysteries of life and most importantly it was the interpreter of God's word to humankind. Its economic importance in the life of the Westbury villager can be shown in a document concerning the grant by Bishop Bekynton in 1463 of two tofts and fardels of land called Rammespytte with six closes containing 16 acres and 3 roods to Reynold Baker and his wife " all within the bishop's manor of Westbury". Reynold was to pay the bishop a rent of 36 shillings and 11 pence a year, plus 8s 3d for larder rent, churchscot and Peters Pence. Reynold also had to attend the Bishop's court twice a year and after his death his heirs would have to make a payment in the form of a heriot for entry into the property rights. Proviso was also made for distraining the tenant's property in the event of the rent getting into arrears and the tenants were not allowed to sell their rights to anyone else without the Bishop's licence. Business was certainly business in medieval times. The southern part of the village was bordered by the Bishop's park and many local landholders had to maintain the park wall as part of the conditions of holding their land. The Bishop's court house was a visible reminder that all villagers were subject to the Bishop's authority and any infringements of manorial custom were dealt with there. The archdeacon's court had extensive jurisdiction over wills and their interpretation, grants of probate administration, matrimonial disputes, debt, tithe adjudications, moral offences, perjury,and defamation of character.

Religion was a vital force in the lives of medieval villagers. Life was hard and unpredictable. The popular belief was in the continual conflict of good and evil as witnessed by the surviving demonic gargoyle on the south side of this church. The church through its sacraments gave protection to the helpless soul, it was a repository of supernatural power which could be used to protect the faithful. The Anglo-Saxon Church had claimed supernatural power in it's fight against paganism but in the medieval period the church as an institution did not claim the power to work miracles but it did reap prestige from those christians to whom God was deemed to have given miraculous gifts. Holy relics and images were believed to have the power to cure illnesses and protect against danger. St Lawrence because of his fortitude in the face of suffering was seen as a powerful saint and one to be feared.

The church developed various practices to draw down God's blessing upon everyday life: the blessing of salt and water for the health of the body and the expulsion of evil spirits; the use of holy water and the sign of the cross to bless houses, cattle, crops, wells and also to cure sick and sterile animals. When consecrating the holy bread on Sundays to be given to the laity the priest called on God to bless the bread " so that all who consume it shall receive health of body as well as soul". Sometimes members of the congregation instead of swallowing the bread in church would secrete it in their mouths, take it from the church and use it to gain a blessing on the homes, families and livestock. Periodically the priest took the holy water around the parish,( our priest had to take it from Westbury to Priddy as well), so that the people could sprinkle their homes, fields and animals.

The parishioners were often in the habit of wearing talismans the most common of which was the Agnus Dei which we have commemorated as the centrepiece of our 19th century reredos. The Agnus Dei was a small wax cake, originally made out of easter candles and bearing

many years when one considers the career of Goldwege's successor, Richard Eryngton. Eryngton was an Oxford man being admitted in 1510. He gained his Bachelor of Civil Laws in 1529, was a canon of Wells holding the prebend of Barton St David and vicar of Westbury and Wookey until his death in 1546. He was frequently away on the business of the diocese attending the convocation of Canterbury in 1539. Summing up it would seem that Westbury had resident vicars throughout the 14th and most of the 15th centuries but was to a certain extent neglected at the end of the 15th and at the beginning of the 16th century a period which paradoxically saw the greatest physical expansion of the church that has ever been seen. I wonder if there was any connection? While the cat's away the mice do play.

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the image of the lamb and flag. It was intended to serve as a defence against the assaults of the Devil and as a preservative against thunder, lightening, fire, drowning and death in childbirth.
Towers were important because they housed the bells which when consecrated made them resistant to evil spirits and consequently able to dispel thunder and lightening for which demons were held to be responsible. The key of the church was considered to be a remedy against a mad dog and the soil of the churchyard had magical power as did the communion offertory silver.
The main Sunday service was the mass preceded by matins and followed in mid afternoon by evensong. All villagers attended mass. At the beginning of the medieval period when the church was a barn-like building, priest and people had been together and the faithful had received the bread and wine but in the later medieval period the emphasis moved to the formal consecration of the elements of bread and wine by the priest and the congregation became virtual spectators of the mass and the special power of the priest became more important. Chancels were closed off by rood screens and then congregation were not allowed in them.The survival of two piscinas in our church, one from the 14th century in the chancel and the other from the early 16th century in the side chapel bear eloquent testimony to the importance of the mass. These piscinas were the drains by which the water used in the various ablutions performed in connection with the ritual of the mass such as the washing of the priest's hands and of the sacred vessels was emptied through the wall into consecrated ground. However the people still thought that they benefitted from the proceedings even if they could not understand them. The doctrine of transubstantiation was only understood by people as a magical notion: the ritual pronunciation of words in a ritual manner would make the material objects of bread and wine change into the body and blood of Christ. The reserved sacrament became common by the 13th century and in the later middle ages it was placed in an enclosed sanctuary for protection from the public gaze. The Host was seen as having supernatural potency and the priest was required to swallow the remaining contents of the chalice and to ensure that not a crumb of the wafer was left behind. Consequently the eucharist and the holy oil were kept under lock and key.
However the priest was brought into close contact with his people through the sacraments of baptism, marriage and extreme unction. Baptism had to take place within the week of birth. The church taught that the ceremony was absolutely necessary for salvation. Children who died unbaptised were virtually consigned to limbo where they would perpetually be denied the sight of God. At Baptism the child was exorcised, anointed with consecrated oil and balsam and the sign of the cross was placed on its forehead. Around its head was bound a white cloth in which it could be buried if it died in infancy. Confirmation usually followed at seven years of age. The font was an important symbol of the authority of the parish church and even when a church was altered the ancient font was preserved. The font here probably dates from the later middle ages but the circular font at Priddy is much older and could have been the original font from our church. More work needs to be done on this but it is an intriguing thought.
All marriages took place in the church and in the ceremony the ring was seen as an effective recipe against unkindness and discord as long as the bride continued to wear it. The churching of women

after childbirth was important because it was the general view that only virginity or abstinence from sexual intercourse was the true way to holiness. Finally there were the ceremonies which surrounded death; extreme unction - the annointing of the terminally ill person and the funeral services - the vespers of the dead on the evening preceding the funeral - matins and lauds on the morning of the funeral, then a requiem mass, the burial service and the internment. During the 500 years of the middle ages there would have been roughly 5000 interments in the church yard with no tombstones, raising the ground level considerably as well as the burial of more important villagers in the nave itself. It was during the later medieval period that our yew tree was planted yet little is known of the reasons for the particular siting of such trees. Could ours have marked the outer limits of the 1349 plague pit? In Westbury in the later middle ages at least five obits were celebrated yearly. These were full mock funeral services celebrated annually on the anniversary of a person's death. People left money in their wills for the purpose - the average for Westbury was about 2 shillings but one obit was more elaborate costing 5 shillings which would provide useful income for hard pressed parish priests. As there was no coffin, the church would have used a simple wooden framework, supported by a bier over which a pall was draped and to which fitments for lighted tapers were attached. The hearse stood in the chancel before the high altar for the duration of the funeral services. The reason for these anniversaries was the medieval belief in Purgatory, a place of temporal punishment where those who had died in the grace of God expiated their more grievous sins. Prayers said on their behalf would help to alleviate their sufferings and hopefully expedite their salvation.

As well as being the repository of supernatural power, the church was also the centre of community life. The great annual processional services on Palm Sunday, Corpus Christi ( the Thursday after Trinity Sunday) and Rogationtide( 25th April ), Candlemas ( the procession with lighted candles commemorating the purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Presentation of Christ in the Temple ), the Easter ceremonies of crawling to the cross on Good Friday and the rending of the veil which had hidden the sanctuary during Lent and the parish festivities held at Whitsun, Midsummer, on St Lawrence's day and at Michaelmas helped to keep the community together. Ale and food were sold and entertainment provided such as dancing bears, minstrels, dancing, bowling and archery. These festivities were known as church ales and they were effective ways of raising money especially for building projects. Until the 15th century they took place inside the church and in the churchyard but with the introduction of pews, church houses were built usually next to the churchyard. It is possible that the building which skirts the churchyard on the south-western side could be the church house of Westbury. The farming and business year were tied in with church festivals: the plough was blessed on Plough Monday immediately after Epiphany; rents were due on Lady Day ( paid on Hock Day-Easter Tuesday)and at Michaelmas; thistles could only be uprooted after St John's day ( June 24th ), if they were cut before then it was believed that they would multiply threefold; harvesting began at the end of July and the first loaf from the new corn was consecrated on Lammas (Loaf mass) Day(August 1st); the harvest season ran on until Michaelmas(29th Sept) and the Bruton tithe was collected by the canons from the corn standing in the fields; after

the Autumn ploughing the farming year ended with the feast of Martinmas ( Nov 11th ). At Christmas, work ceased for about 14/15 days, and the Westbury villager could expect about another 14 holy days a year when no work was done although there were about 40 in the church's calendar.

This then was our church in the medieval period. The religion of its people was conservative, insular, communal, emotional, visual and superstitious. The vision of Jesus of Nazareth was never pinned down or exactly mirrored but neither was the Holy Spirit absent. Relgion in the medieval period gave the people reassurance and an outlet for their emotions in a harsh, unpredictable and demanding world. We should remember this as we explore the troubled history of the 16th and 17th centuries the subject of the next lecture.

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REFORMATION AND REACTION

As you sit in your seats this evening, you will see around you many physical reminders of the Middle Ages: the stonework of pillars, arches and windows, the pulpit, font and piscinas, the holy water stoup by the door but of the mental world of the Middle Ages little remains. One of the reasons for this is the Reformation of the 16th century. Gradually over a period of about 150 years the attitudes of the villagers here were gradually changed by outside influences and it is this story which will be told tonight.

We start in the year 1529. The question is: how much did the villagers in Westbury want religious change? Did the Reformation begin because of desire of the ordinary people for change, was it imposed from above or indeed was it a mixture of the two? No documentary evidence has survived from Westbury to indicate how the people of Westbury felt in that important year but some indication of what their feelings were can be understood if we look at the building we are sitting in tonight.

The second half of the 15th century was a time of religious confidence and improved economic prosperity. Our own village was a farming village and so there was not as much money as in other villages to improve the church but what happened was fairly impressive. The village population over a period of some 20/30 years undertook the building of the south aisle and the upper portion of the tower. If their church and the type of religion it offered had not meant a lot to them they surely would not have undertaken this demanding and expensive work. Even more informative is the provision of a side altar early in the 16th century to cater for the more elaborate services and the growing practice of the anniversary, the requiem mass for the soul of the donor celebrated on the anniversary of his or her death.

The building improvements do not mean that there were no criticisms of the Church. One of criticisms which could be levelled at the church was the prevalence of non-residence and Westbury does seem to have suffered from this.
In 1529 the vicar was most probably Richard Eryington ( he was certainly the vicar in 1532 ). He was a pluralist, being also vicar of Wookey and later in the 1530s commissary to the bishop, prebendary of Barton St David and also held the prebend of Crediton in the Exeter diocese. In his will Eryngton makes no reference to Westbury or Wookey leaving 40s to Wells Cathedral where he stated his body was to be buried, bequests to his family and his friends on the Cathedral staff.Indeed Westbury seems to have been without a resident vicar for 55 years from 1493 -1548. One would imagine that this might have caused resentment amongst the parishioners but there is no evidence of this. Generally people accepted such behaviour as a fact of life; they had a Church which they wanted and they found it congenial and which did not intrude excessively into the average layperson's life. The work it did in correcting morals was largely welcomed, it encouraged neighbourly cooperation in its festivals and processions, it was the focus of village

activity and people left money in their wills to improve and adorn it, and it provided protection against the forces of evil. The pre-reformation church did not allow the laity an active part in its public worship, especially the mass. They went to mass to watch what little could be seen through the chancel screen and to hear what little could be heard from the nave.They communicated rarely. If they prayed, they prayed at mass not the mass. Otherwise their attention was focused on the crucifixion scene that surmounted the chancel screen: Christ hanging on the cross, with Mary and John standing on either side and the Last Judgement on the wall behind. It would be wrong however to think that the ordinary layperson felt excluded from the religious life of the church. There was a large increase at the end of the 15th century in masses for the recovery from sickness, a good harvest, safe return from a journey, good weather as well as the anniversaries I mentioned previously. Mass was not simply worship of God on behalf of the community by a priestly caste set apart from the ordinary people by ordination, vows, celibacy, the Latin language, dress and ceremonial: it was also FOR the people. The people still had a part to play in it. At the PAX the congregation made visible its unity by passing around a sacred picture or a tablet inscribed with the letters IHS and kissing it. Again and more importantly,at the end of the mass it was common for blessed bread to be distributed and consumed, so that, although holy communion was infrequent, the symbolism of actively sharing the bread and being made one body was affirmed.

Our church was also the largest building in the village. It provided social space. For many people it would have given the first and only experience of painting, formal music( the singing gallery in the porch), sculpture and architecture. Its tower acted as the village arsenal, it possibly displayed the village clock probably the only one in the village. Its bells summoned, warned, gave a dreadful majesty to death and celebrated the joy of marriage. They warded off evil spirits, thunder and lightening.

Our church was also a political centre where churchwardens, constables and many other local officers were elected and the upkeep of church fabric and churchyards, the repair of church houses and tenements in the village discussed. It was the object of local pride and a symbol of the community. The vicar or curate could call the chancel his own but the rest of the church belonged to the people. The priest had his role and the people theirs, the partnership was there. There were bound to be disagreements even rows about tithes but arguments tended to be directed at individuals and not the system. There was no desire for change but it was coming.

You may be wondering why the particular date of 1529 was mentioned. Unbeknown to the people of Westbury events were taking place in London which started a process which would dramatically change the religious practice of the villagers during the next 40 years.

King Henry 8th had a problem: the succession. He had no legitimate male heir and remembering the Wars of the Roses when the succession

was disputed, he was a worried man. He had married his deceased brother's widow, Catherine of Aragon but the union had only produced one living heir , the Princess Mary, born in 1516. Catherine had since produced four more children all of whom had died at birth and Henry had become convinced that his marriage was unlawful and sinful. He argued that a text from the book of Leviticus which prohibited a man's union with his brother's widow was divine law and therefore his marriage with Catherine must be ended. If the Church and its head , the Pope, would not grant him a divorce then he would have to secure one by bringing the Church in England to heel. The Pope was unable to agree to Henry's request for the divorce because one of his predecessors had granted Henry a dispensation to marry Catherine in the first place and any change now would make a mockery of the Pope's dispensing power, and Catherine's nephew the Emperor Charles 5th controlled Italy, his troops having sacked Rome in 1527. So Henry moved against the Church in England. He was able to do this because there was some popular support for an attack on the Church in Court circles, ( Henry's new mistress, Anne Boleyn and her supporters, favoured the continental Protestant reformers, there was also much anti-church feeling amongst the lawyers at the Inns of Court, protestant reformers were active in London and the South-East and no clear English intellectual reaction to the ideas of Martin Luther and the other protestant reformers in Europe had evolved. We have to understand that the Reformation was something which was imposed on the people of Westbury by government decree and not something which rose up spontaneously amongst them.

Let us look now at some of the key ideas of the Protestant reformers which were to colour the religious experience of the people of our village.

The authority of the Catholic Church was attacked, particularly the authority of the Pope. The Bible was seen as a superior authority to the church. The cults of saints and the veneration of images were seen as idolatry and the Catholic system of penance and good works was rejected in favour of faith. The preaching ministry with its sermons was seen to be more important than the Mass. The idea of grace was crucial to the reformers. They argued that grace was God's free gift to believers. By contrast Catholics believed that grace was conveyed by the church. In his " Confessions", St Augustine had written in the 5th century, " I would not have believed the Gospel had the Catholic church not moved me to it". To the protestant reformers the Bible came before the church.

The reformers also believed in justification by faith. William Tyndale wrote," the right faith springeth not from man's fantasy, neither is it in any man's power to obtain it; but it is altogether the pure gift of God poured into us freely, without deserving and merits, yea, and without our seeking". This right faith was a form of pardon, an act of God that got rid of human pride and sin.
Many reformers also believed in predestination. The believer in Christ was chosen and ordained for eternal life before the world began. Some reformers believed in double predestination - that some

people were damned before the world began. It all stemmed from a belief that if God was almighty He must know what is going to happen and so all the destinies of people must be fixed from the beginning of time, therefore there was no need for the church to mediate with God, the issue had already been decided. We will see later that this belief was the basis for the attack on the prayers for the dead which were popular in Westbury as in other villages.

The other doctrine which came under attack from the reformers was that of transubstantiation, the doctrine explaining how every particle of bread and wine in the Eucharist is changed into the body and blood of Christ. Some protestants felt that Christ's body and blood were present in the Eucharist but not in every particle while others asserted that the Eucharist was commemorative only of Christ's sacrifice. Henry 8th although he remained a Catholic theologically all his life, used the energies of the protestant reformers to further his desire to be master in his own country, and this meant master of the Church. He also appealed to the greed and anticlerical feelings of the gentry, the merchants, and the wealthier artisans and yeoman farmers who cast covetous eyes on the wealth of the Church.

Henry's first acts in the 1530s were political: to sever the connections with Rome and to establish his own supremacy so that he could marry a new wife and secure the succession. He worked through Parliament and was quite happy for it to pass statues attacking such abuses as mortuary fees, probate fees, pluralism and non residence all of which the local villagers here had to cope with to a high degree. But as the reforming of these things did not attack the Catholic tradition, they would have been generally welcomed.
Henry's main attack was on three fronts: he stopped appeals to Rome, stopped money payments and finally in 1534 declared himself supreme head of the Church of England. Papal authority over the English church was at an end. The Act of Supremacy stated that " the King be taken, accepted, reputed the only supreme head in earth of the Church of England and shall have and enjoy annexed and united to the imperial crown of this realm as well the title and style thereof, as all honours, dignities, preeminences, jurisdictions, privileges, authorities, immunities, profits and commodities, to the said dignity of supreme head of the same church belonging and appertaining". The king now had the power to change the lives of the Westbury villagers.

The first thing he wished to do was to make an accurate record of the wealth and revenues and this was done by Thomas Cromwell in 1535. It was called the Valor Ecclesiasticus and the curate and churchwardens had to give accurate information on the income of the church and the name of the incumbent. In Westbury, no incumbant's name was given, but the income of the living was declared to be £ 6. 13s. 4d per annum while the Bishop was seen as drawing an income of £ 12 8s 6d from rents,on land and property and for payments in lieu of the old feudal services. This information was used firstly in the attack on the monasteries but it did provide valuable

information for the government of the charitable income which the church received and provided ammunition for the abolition of chantries and anniversaries which I will talk about in a moment.

The first great alteration in the worship in this church was made by the Injunctions of 1538 which instructed each parish to purchase a Bible in English which was to be kept in the church and made available to all parishioners; to extinguish all lights in the church except those on the altar, in the rood loft and before the Easter sepulchre; to remove any images which had been " abused with pilgrimages or offerings"; to regard the surviving representations of saints simply as memorials and to be prepared for the removal of more later; and to reject the veneration of relics. Most rural churches ignored the instruction to buy a bible for as long as they could but by the early 1540s most had complied. The instruction which undoubtedly hurt the parishioners most was the snuffing out of lights. In our church a candle would have been kept burning constantly before the image of a favourite saint and there may have been more lights, so their loss would have been felt deeply. There was as yet no attack on the anniversary because the 6 Articles defining religious belief published in 1539 still upheld the doctrine of Purgatory. Between 1542 and 1545 our church would have acquired the first services in English, the Latin Mass was being challenged for the first time.

The second very important event was the dissolution of Bruton Priory in 1539. Bruton had been the rector of Westbury since the middle of the 12th century, and had collected the great tithe. However in 1527 Dame Alice Rodney, had bought the lease giving the right to collect the tithe from the Prior of Bruton who had probably, found the whole business of tithe collecting a disagreeable chore. A money payment in lieu of the tithe was much more satisfactory. Dame Alice sold her lease in 1536 to William Bell of Wells. The tithe was worth £7 per annum. Bruton Priory also owned some land in Westbury, just over 100 acres and at the dissolution these with the right of collecting the tithes became the king's. He promptly renegotiated the leases, raising the payments and shortening the term of years. The Bruton land was granted to the Horner family of Mells for political services rendered and in 1550, John Horner and Sir Thomas Horner sold it to Richard Hardwick , who proudly called himself yeomen, and the Hardwiches became one of the more important families in the church for the next three hundred years on numerous occasions serving as churchwardens and latterly living at the Court House. The 19th century members of the family are commemorated on tablets over the south door. The right to collect the tithe passed into different courtiers' hands during the 16th century , none of whom had any connection with the village at all: the tithes were in effect sold on the open market. One can not help feeling that this must have caused some resentment amongst the villagers. By the 1580s George Rodney, from nearby Rodney Stoke had acquired them and his preeminent position in the village can be seen by his tomb in the south chapel. Things had indeed changed for a local gentleman to turn an anniversary chapel into a family chapel and to have his

tomb where once an altar had stood. I wonder what the more traditional villagers thought?

In 1546 the absentee vicar Richard Eryngton died and a successor was not appointed for 2 years. In January 1547, King Henry 8th died and dramatic changes in religion happened within months. Henry's brother-in -law, Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset became Lord Protector as the new king was still a minor, and it was he who decided to really reform the English church.

On 31st July 1547, the government of Lord Protector Somerset ordered the destruction of all shrines, paintings and pictures of saints and all images which had been offered to or had candles burned before them; limited the lights in the church to a couple upon the high altar; forbade processions around the church when mass was celebrated and repeated the instructions for the purchase of a bible. In the autumn of the same year two acts of Parliament were passed the first instructing that wooden communion tables should be substituted for stone altars and that the laity should take communion in both kinds and the other decreeing the seizure by the state of the endowments of chantries, religious guilds and perpetual obits on the grounds that the doctrine of Purgatory was false.
To enforce these instructions the Privy Council in London divided the country up into 6 circuits with 6 carefully chosen Protestant activists in each to tour the country to find out if the government's orders were being carried out. The churchwardens of Westbury suddenly found themselves being questioned about all aspects of religious practice in our church. They had to attend a visitation at Chew Magna in 1547, were summoned to Bedminster and Wells in 1548 and Axbridge and Wells in 1549. The government's zeal for reform continued unabated. On the 6th February 1548 a royal proclamation forbade four important ceremonies; the blessing of candles at Candlemas,ashes upon Ash Wednesday and palms on Palm Sunday and the adoration of the rood upon Good Friday, popularly called " the creeping to the cross ".
Two weeks later the council ordered the removal of all images from churches. The wardens had to pay workmen to come in and remove them and we can still see where two were removed, one outside the south door and another where the singing gallery used to be. There is no evidence of smashing because the people revered their images and they were no doubt secreted at home in the hope that times might change. The stone altar was replaced by a wooden communion table set in the chancel. The villagers must have felt confused and disorientated by all these changes and there is evidence that in rural parishes many other ancient ceremonies such as the lodging of the host in the Easter sepulchre on Good Friday were discontinued.

1548 must have been a very difficult year for our parishioners. On top of all this commissioners arrived to inquire into the amount of money that had been left in people's wills for masses for their souls. As we have seen the doctrine of Purgatory was under attack. The commissioners found that the rent payable for four houses in Westbury was donated to the church for the maintenance of " divers

obits," 2s on John Hicks's house, 2s on John Brent's, 2s 8d on Thomas Golde's house in Free Hill and 2s on John Bromwiche's house. There was also 4 acres of land in Westbury and 1 and a half acres in Wookey assigned for the purpose yielding 5s. The total was 13s 8d but as 1d was sent annually to the Wells almshouse and 12d given to help in the upkeep of the church there was an income of 12s 7d a year for the government to dispose of. This it did. The right to collect this money was granted to various courtiers for services rendered. These people had no connection with the village and it is interesting to note that the church lost the 12d under the new arrangements. Fortunately a new experienced vicar was appointed in this year, Robert Marshall who had been vicar of South Brent.

As well as trying to destroy the old faith, the government tried to inculcate the new Protestant faith. A book of homilies was produced: these were sermons on key topics and doctrines which could be read by clergy who were incapable of preaching or disinclined to. Churches were encouraged to paint key texts on the wall for the education of their parishioners. In 1549 the first book of common prayer was issued and was made obligatory by an act of Parliament. It was introduced on Whit Sunday 1549 and by 1550 it had been generally adopted by most parishes. The people of Westbury did have one small victory In 1547 the government ordered bishops to make an inventory of church goods in each parish with a view to confiscation. When the inventory was made in Westbury it was found that the goods had been distributed amongst the parishioners to the great blame of the parish and there was nothing that could be done about it. That was probably why a vicar was appointed so quickly to fill the vacancy left by Eryngton's death.

In June 1553, King Edward 6th died and within a month he had been succeeded by hi half-sister the catholic Queen Mary. In December, Parliament repealed all the changes of the past six years and restored the situation to that of 1546. The new queen ordered every parish to build an altar, obtain a cross, hallow ashes on Ash Wednesday, palms on Palm Sunday and water on Easter Eve. In March 1554, she ordered the restoration of all processions and all " laudable and honest ceremonies." If Westbury followed the same practice as other parishes, vestments would have had to be repurchased, the communion table sold and a new altar made. No doubt many of the hangings reappeared from storage in people's homes. The altar was rebuilt by 1554 and most of the utensils of the mass would have returned e.g. the pax, chalice, pyx, sanctus bell, the cruets , the mass book etc. Westbury reacquired its rood with its images of the virgin and St John, some images, the side altar, rood candles, altar cloths, banners etc. The old customs and ceremonies were restored like the Corpus Christi procession, Plough Monday collections, May Games, Rogation tide processions, ringing of bells on All Saints Day. The aspects which were not restored were the cult of the saints and the provision for souls in purgatory. The endowments had got into the sticky hands of the gentry and any clawing back by the government would have been deeply unpopular. The same went for monastic lands.
However the restoration of the old forms of religion cost the

parish a lot of money which was found by levying a compulsory church rate, by compulsory collections and as usual from funds accumulated.

When Queen Mary died in November 1558, religion was put into limbo again. In December, Queen Elizabeth ordered that existing services be continued pending a settlement but that the creed should be said in English not Latin. In July 1559, she issued a set of injunctions which promised a Protestant reformation and set up commissioners to tour the country to enforce them. Parishes were instructed to obtain a bible, processions were forbidden, except at Rogation-tide for the purpose of beating the parish boundaries. Images were to be destroyed. The rood loft images were to be burnt by the church wardens on the orders of the commissioners, stone altars were replaced by wooden tables. By the mid 1560s Protestant worship had been re-established. The revised 1549 prayer book was adopted, the English bible was replaced in the church, the ten commandments were displayed on a board. It seems that the parishioners of Westbury, like many others in rural parishes did not take to Protestantism with any great enthusiasm but the power of the government was such that the parishioners had to comply with its orders but one detects that they felt a certain war weariness.

This weariness would have been increased for two more reasons; one was the increased responsibilities the parish and the churchwardens in particular had to assume for the poor of the parish and the other was the financial disarray of the Bishop of Bath and Wells the main landlord of the parish.

The main social problem in Westbury during the 16th and 17th centuries was poverty. Nearly half the population would have been around the poverty line. Prices were rising faster that wages and because the enclosure of the common fields was well advanced in the village the gap between the living standards of the more prosperous yeoman farmers and the day wage labourers and servants was growing. The wills of yeomen farmers and the poorer husbandmen reflect the concern about rural poverty. John Hardwich, who died in 1617 left 20s to the poor of Westbury. Even William Hardwich a modest husbandman left 8d to the poor of the village in 1637. The aim of government policy was to punish the wilfully idle and relieve those who were in need for no fault of their own. The parish was chosen as the unit to administer relief to the poor and the Parliamentary acts of 1597 and 1601 ordered every parish to nominate overseers of the poor. All parishioners were assessed and those able to pay were forced to do so. Begging was carefully controlled and the children of the poor were apprenticed by the parish. Wayward apprentices were punished. For example, Thomas Hooper bound apprentice to William Vowles of Westbury, Husbandman was discharged from his masters service because he had lived " lewdly and dissolutely by often absenting himself from his master's service ". Hooper would have been classed as one of the wilfully idle. The parish officials also saw that parish apprentices were not ill-treated. In 1638, William Forde, apprentice, son of Mary Forde, widow of Westbury who had been apprenticed to John Hippy a baker from Cloford near Frome

was discharged from his apprenticeship because Hippy had beaten William forcing him to run away.

The Churchwardens were also responsible for public order and a tithingman or constable was appointed for this purpose. There were problems of public order in Westbury in the 16th and seventeenth century over common grazing rights on Westbury moor and particularly over the opening of unlicensed alehouses. The protestant reformation had as we have seen meant the end of the most of the great village religious festivals with the associated merrymaking. The church ale had been superseded by a compulsory church rate levied at a shilling in the pound on the value of individual land holdings. The changing economic conditions leading to a widening gap between rich and poor led to opposition to the church wardens who represented the protestant religious establishment. We see the wealthier yeoman farmers leaving money to the church often as much as 20s, and there is also evidence that they had their own reserved pews. John Hardwich wished to be buried in the church "at the end of my own seat."

Many people looked back on the pre-reformation period with nostalgia even if they had not been alive at the time. The 1590s were a time of great economic difficulty with a run of bad harvests and these conditions were often repeated in the seventeenth century. The government became concerned about the maintenance of public order as governments are wont to do and there was an increase in the number of parliamentary bills for the regulation of alehouses. The alehouses in Westbury became centres of opposition and attracted some of the least desirable members of society. In 1613 Henry Bendall of Westbury was complained about by the John Hardwick, John Boulting and other respectable members of the community for keeping a tippling house out of the village in a field. He had not cooperated with the overseers of the poor by refusing to serve the poor with bread and ale when he had it in the house. Presumably he was refusing to accept the overseers' money. It was also alleged that he had kept in his house the children and servants of the inhabitants of Westbury at the time of divine service on Sundays and holy days and that they had been there so long that there had been fighting and bloodshed to the disturbance of their near neighbours. Finally Bendell was also accused of harbouring known criminals. In 1618 the churchwardens succeeded in getting the unauthorised alehouse of Anna Plumbly suppressed by the magistrates. These were difficult times indeed. To many people it seemed as though the very fabric of life as it had been known was breaking down. Family life seemed to be threatened and the churchwardens and overseers were very concerned about illegitimacy. In 1614 the Bendell family were in trouble again: John Bendell the reputed father of Joan Boulting's child had refused to pay anything for the upkeep of the child. The magistrates forced him to pay 8d a week maintenance and stipulated that Joan Boulting should nurse and bring up the child.

The financial problems of the Bishop also affected Westbury badly during this period. In the mid 16th century the inhabitants of Westbury had seen the Bishops authority eroded. Two bishops had been imprisoned and the 7o% of the bishop's income had been lost to the crown. Westbury was one of the few manors the bishop retained. It was poorer than Wookey but its rents did amount to £46. 13s 4d per annum; the casual sources of income from heriots, fines and marriage licences came to £2. 13s 4d; sales of wood from the park, £7. 9s and interestingly wine silver at 4s 7d. It was necessary for the bishop to increase his income and he did this in Westbury by raising rents. Copyholds were renegotiated and the bishop in a year made over £40 pounds from this device. Thus as we approach the civil war period we can see that things were far from happy in Westbury and it is to the civil war period that we must now turn.

The vicar during the troubled period from 1623 to the Restoration of Charles 2nd in 1660 was Purefoy Middleham. Born in 1591 he came from a family which had served Bishop Godwin of Bath and Wells during his period of office from 1584-90. Thomas Middleham, his father was private secretary to the bishop and Purefoy got his strange christian name from his mother,s family , the Purfys of Shalstone, Buckinghamshire. He was educated at Magdalene College, Oxford, matriculating in June 1610,and gaining his B.A. degree on May 12th 1612. He seems as his name implies to have been middle of the road and survived all the religious and political changes for 40 years giving the village a certain amount of stability which more radical spirits would have found irritating.

The government of Charles 1 felt that the type of Protestantism which the Church of England had adopted in 1560 had emphasised personal salvation too much thus eroding the authority of the Church which was seen as the cement binding the society of the parish together. The old communal customs were disappearing leading to a fragmentation of village life as witnessed by the Bendell affair which I have just described. In an attempt to put the clock back, Charles 1 and William Laud , Archbishop of Canterbury, tried firstly to bring back some of the old tradition and beauty into church services. Altars had to be put back to the east end of churches, vestments were reintroduced and the use of more music was encouraged. The more extreme protestants, called puritans saw these moves as catholicism by stealth and resented them. The second piece of royal policy was to introduce the Book of Sports in 1633 which Purefoy Middleham had to read to his congregation. Some clergy with puritan leanings refused, but our vicar complied with the government's instructions. The book sanctioned many of the former village activities which had been discouraged by the puritan element: church ales, processions etc. Many village people welcomed the restoration of these customs but there was a puritan minority in the village which would have disapproved, regarding them as ungodly and profane. The outbreak of the civil war split the county gentry in Somerset. The lay rector of Westbury, Sir Edward Rodney, was a strong supporter of the king and was involved in the fighting, finally surrendering to the parliamentary forces at the seige of Bristol in 1645. Sir Edward held property and land in the

village and obviously had his supporters. However many villagers would have wanted to avoid getting involved in the war and to stop it affecting their livelihoods. The Mendip clubmen, an association of armed local men were formed to discourage fighting in our area.

The breakdown of authority did allow extremists to emerge who challenged the existing order. One of the most interesting for us is Thomas Collier, born in the village in March 1623. His family was related by marriage with the yeoman Hardwich family. He was soundly educated and joined the parliamentary army at the outbreak of the war. It was no doubt then that he became a convinced Baptist but he must have been part of the dissident group in the village as he grew up. Collier saw the beginning of the war as a cataclysmic event heralding the establishment of Christ's kingdom on earth. In his sermon to the army at Putney on Sept 29th 1647, he quoted Isaiah 65 v 17 " For behold I create new heaven and a new earth. Former things shall no more be remembered nor shall they be brought to mind." He said:" Some believe that Christ shall come and reign personally, subduing his enemies and exalting his people, and that this is the new heaven and the new earth. But this is not my apprehension; but that Christ will come in the spirit and have a glorious kingdom in the spirits of his people, and they shall, by the power of Christ in them, reign over the world , and this is the new heavens and the new earth." These were revolutionary sentiments! On another occasion he said: " it must be the poor, the simple that must confound the mighty and the strong." He saw it as his job to prepare the common people for the future event. He said:" God as truly manifests himself in the flesh of all his saints as he did in Christ." He must have known that many of the ordinary people listening to him would be led to believe that they were saints. He preached liberty of conscience, " not to be subject to men in the things of God in matters of conscience. That belongs to God himself." He attacked the established church as " carnal, profane and ignorant, having a form of godliness without the power of it. " He looked forward to a church " compacted together by the Spirit, the principal and power of love." He urged people to " pray in the Spirit, preach and prophesy in the Spirit and praise in the Spirit. In this way God will create a new heaven , a new church estate in the Spirit which will produce spiritual communion, spiritual joy and gladness amongst the saints who live in this light and glory." Collier was revolutionary in his politics supporting the Levellers. In a sermon he said: " all the earth is the saints' and there ought to be a community of goods and saints should share in the lands and estates of gentlemen and rich men. Sir Edward Rodney and the wealthier yeomen in the village would have found these sentiments totally unacceptable.

Unfortunately Collier did not extend spiritual communion to other radicals who held different opinions. His criticism of the Quakers was ferocious: " They would have no Christ but within, no Scripture to be a rule, no law but their lusts, no heaven or glory but here, no sin but what men fancied to be so. Quakers smooth it all over with an outward austere carriage before men but within are full of filthiness." It was Collier who drafted the Somerset petition in support of the trial of Charles 1 urging " that justice be done on

great offenders in satisfaction of the bloodshed in the late quarrel."

Collier must have been a formidable man. He was a most effective evangelist and established a Baptist congregation in Taunton. By 1650 there were Baptist congregations in Wells, Axbridge, Wedmore and Cheddar. His activities tended to split parishes. The traditionalist Henry Bankes of Cheddar declared that he hoped to see Thomas Collier and his friends hanged because they were independents and would not go to church. Local people were often hostile to them: in 1652 at Wookey an army preacher was interrupted by parishioners who demanded to see his commission and rang the bells to arouse the village against him.

The victory of Parliament and the execution of the King in 1649 ushered in a new phase of attack on the changes brought in by King Charles and Archbishop Laud in the 1630s: altar rails, organs, choirs, statues and ornaments were outlawed, possibly the holy water stoup was defaced at this time. Church ales and processions were superseded by fast days and days of thanksgiving - a poor exchange in the eyes of many ordinary people. There was much local resistance to these measures and local royalists encouraged the continuance of the old customs.

When the Restoration of Charles 2 came in 1660, the triumphant royalists were determined that the religious excesses of Thomas Collier and his friends should never be allowed to happen again and that the Church of England should be redefined into a broad church with which most people could agree - a church which would unite a nation riven with dissension for generations. The nature of that church and the extent of its success is the subject of the next lecture.

ST LAWRENCE LECTURE 3 " SERMONS AND SOBRIETY "

In May 1660, Charles Stuart was restored to the throne and it was clear that the chaotic religious situation in the country had to be sorted out. Were the bishops to return? What was to happen to those clergy who had been ejected from their livings under the Commonwealth and Protectorate? Were the clergy who had obtained livings under the old regime to be allowed to keep them? Were the Christians outside the Church of England to be encouraged to rejoin, and if they did not what kind of toleration was to be extended to them? Finally what form was the re-established church going to take? Was it going to be evangelical or charismatic enough to sustain the independents and baptists? Was its government going to be acceptable to Presbyterians who rejected bishops? The problems involved in re-establishing a truly national church which would heal the divisions caused by the civil wars seemed almost insuperable but Charles 2nd approached them in an optimistic way, his sceptical and somewhat cynical mind failing to comprehend the depth of the emotions felt by the different religious groups.

Charles was inclined towards toleration. Before his return to England, he had issued the Declaration of Breda in which he said, " And because the passion and uncharitableness of the times have produced several opinions in religion by which men are engaged in parties and animosities against each other, which, when they shall hereafter unite in a freedom of conversation, will be composed or better understood, we do declare a liberty to tender consciences, and that no man shall be disquieted or called in question for differences of opinion in matter of religion which do not disturb the peace of the kingdom."

At first things seemed to go well. Charles's government was seen as the protector of all religious persuasions. A conference opened at the Savoy in London between leading Presbyterians and those in favour of bishops; a royal proclamation was issued forbidding the imprisonment of Quakers for refusing oaths and Charles told the Anglican clergy that the penal laws against Catholics should only be laxly enforced. However the breakdown of the Savoy conference and the election of a strongly royalist parliament in 1661 soon destroyed any idea of tolerance for those Christians who found themselves outside the established church. The aim of the royalists in parliament was to make everyone join the Church of England by force if necessary. Episcopacy was re-established and the priests dispossessed of their livings during the period of the Commonwealth and Protectorate had their livings restored to them, while their successors were dispossessed. Nonconformists were not allowed to participate in local government; all clergy had to be or have been ordained by a bishop and had to use the new Book of Common Prayer issued in 1662. Religious worship, except for family prayers at which no more than five people could participate , had to take place in the parish church. Penalties for breaking the law were severe: fines or imprisonment for the first two offenses and transportation to the colonies for the third.

This persecution was not ended until 1689 when a Toleration Act was passed " exempting Protestant subjects dissenting from the Church of England from the penalties of the laws passed in Charles 2nd's reign providing that dissenting meeting houses are registered either in the bishop's court or at the quarter sessions, that there must be no worship behind locked doors and that the dissenting minister must take the oath or make a declaration of allegiance to the crown and sign 35 and a half of the 39 articles.

This Church of England set up in 1662 was to continue in the same form particularly in rural areas for the next 200 years. It has been attacked as a dead, complaisant church lacking in the gifts of the spirit. It aimed to offer a religion with which most people could agree. In the preface to the 1662 prayerbook, the compilers stated: " Our general aim was to do that which to our best understandings might most tend to the preservation of peace and unity in the church; the procuring of reverence, and exciting of piety and devotion in the public worship of God." It was a religion that avoided enthusiasm. The emphasis was on morality, sobriety and reasonableness. The purpose of Christianity was to refine people's natures, govern their actions and restrain their appetites and passions. Speculations about the mystery of the Trinity and the nature of Christ were avoided. God's action in the world - his providence, and miracles which had exercised the minds of many during the civil wars period, was played down. The way to salvation was not so much through the personal faith of the Reformation but through true morality and good works.

It is now time to look at the situation in Westbury during the years 1662 - 1851. The vicar during the period 1623 - 1657 was Purefoy Middleham. These date are not inclusive ones for his incumbency but the surviving Bishop's transcripts of the parish registers, ( the original registers having long since disappeared ) show him as vicar in 1623 and he witnessed one of the Hardwich wills in 1657. It is not clear if Middleham survived to the Restoration of 1660 but the next vicar to be appointed was Andrew Warler in 1662. In that year 62 incumbents were removed from office in Somerset for supporting the Commonwealth and Protectorate but these were men who had been appointed during that period and Middleham was not one of those. By 1662 he was an old man of 71 years and probably died.

What can we glean from the records about the clergy who served this church between 1662 and 1851? How effective were they in promoting the Christian Religion? That regular weekly services went on is attested by the records and as is usual only the complaints of vicars have survived and not the steady unglamourous routine work of preaching the gospel. However the low income which the vicar drew from the lesser tithes was bound to affect his motivation. If you remember, the great tithe had passed into lay hands at the reformation and although Sir Edward Rodney had lost it as part of his fine for supporting the King in the civil war, after the Restoration it had been granted back to the Rodney Bridges family again.The Vicar still only collected the lesser vicarial tithe

which in the mid 18th century was only about £50 per annum. John Richards, vicar from 1755 - 1757 complained about this when he applied for a faculty to build a new vicarage in 1755. Edward Ruddock, Curate here from 1834 - 1851 was vitriolic about the financial situation when he filled in the ecclesiastical census form in 1851. " That if Lord John Russell or Mr George Grey of Whitehall or Mr George Graham the Registrar General had to maintain and educate eleven children on a poor curacy, he would have full employment without having to make statistical returns without any remuneration." One cannot help reflecting that some of the Rev Ruddock's problems were self inflicted. The collection of the vicarial tithes was also often a bone of contention. When the vicar was an absentee he relied on the tithe payers to collect the tithes themselves. By the mid 18th century the vicarial tithe had been commuted to a money payment and the tithe payers all had to take their turn to collect them. Current rates in 1780 were 2 shillings per acre of pasture, 8 pence per acre of meadow and 8 pence an acre for poor ground. This tithe was often difficult to collect and the wealthier farmers often had to advance money to make up the full amount of the tithe and then have the unpleasant task of reclaiming money from their neighbours. In 1812 the absentee vicar James Tuson who was vicar of Binegar as well as of Westbury felt that he was not getting the amounts he should and considered that the 17th century glebe Terrier which showed all the fields and their acreages was out of date, particularly considering the recent enclosures of the hill and a Westbury Moor. He demanded that the parishioners should make a new list of tithe allocations " whether they were legal or not." The tithe payers were so annoyed that at a vestry meeting on February 20th 1812 they " resolved and agreed to take a counsellor's opinion respecting the terrier and the tithes " and the Rev Tuson's demands. The problem was resolved by an independent survey and valuation of lands in Westbury undertaken by Jeremiah Cruse and Mr Hippesley in March 1816. Unfortunately for the Rev Tuson he did not live to see this because he had died in 1814.

As I have hinted in my preceding remarks, absenteeism by vicars was a problem for the church here throughout the period we are studying tonight. The living was a poor one, and as we have seen the tithes were somewhat difficult to collect. The proximity of Wells and its ecclesiastical preferments often worked to the detriment of Westbury. As the gift of the living was in the hands of the Bishop, he could use it to reward particular clergymen who were of service to him. Let's look at the career of Joseph Shallet from at least 1678 - 1704 vicar of this parish. He came from Chard. He was born in 1648, was educated at St John's and New College Oxford gaining a B.A . in 1668. He got his M.A. in 1672 and then came into the Wells Diocese in 1672. On 20th Aug he was admitted a vicar choral assigned the Yatton stall and became Rector of Rodney Stoke. On May 4th 1674 he became prebendary for Combe VII with his seat in the Chapter House and in September became Escheator for the Dean and Chapter.In 1679 he was Tabellar, collector of the fees for dining in Vicar's Hall, to the Dean and Chapter. His position made it necessary for him to attend cathedral services and quarterly

chapter meetings. He was responsible for installing men to vacant prebends and would have lived in Vicars Close and not in the village. In 1682 he was appointed to hear causes in the consistory court of the Dean and Chapter of Wells. In 1687 he was appointed vicar of Cheddar, resigning Rodney Stoke, but he resigned the Cheddar post in 1689 to become vicar of the wealthier living of St Cuthberts Wells where he remained until his death in 1704. He seems to have been fairly conscientious attending the annual vestry meetings in Westbury from 1678 until 1698 when his name disappears from the record. We can see from the details known of Shallett's life that he was a career churchman. and that the strong lure of Wells with its ecclesiastical preferments did not work to Westbury's advantage.

Shallett's career also illustrates the problem of pluralism where a vicar held to livings, residing in one parish and installing a curate in the other. This certainly happened in Westbury from 1769 until 1851 when Thomas Richards, James Tuson and Noblett Ruddock all resided in other parishes and installed a series of curates to serve Westbury.

As yet I know little of Thomas Richards vicar from 1769 - 1784 but James Tuson, the son of a Wells lawyer, who was vicar from 1784 - 1814 lived at Binegar and Noblett Ruddock, vicar from 1814 - 1851 combined the Westbury living with that of Stockland Bristol near Cannington. So for the 191 years under study this evening Westbury only had resident vicars for 35 years. This need not mean that the church was neglected but it did mean that the curates who served here were poorly paid and consequently had problems of motivation.

Most of the clergy who served here were well educated, being mostly Oxford men, but the resident vicars because of the poverty of the living tended to be young inexperienced men with little knowledge of the local area. James Lewen whom you see commemorated in the church was only 24 when he became vicar here after a short curacy in the Diocese of Lincoln. He came from Durham and had an M.A. from Cambridge and stayed here until he died in 1753. It is interesting to note that in the first year of his incumbency the number of celebrations of Holy Communion rose from 3 to 10. However in the following years they returned to a steady average of 3. Presumably the vicar soon learned what was what in Westbury.

John Richards and Morgan Cox, his successors were both Welshmen, Richards came from Carmarthen and Cox from Glamorgan. Richards , a batchelor of civil law only stayed two years before leaving the ministry to continue his career as a lawyer, while Cox who came here after a short curacy at Corston near Bath died here in his early thirties. Robert Burnet Patch, vicar for only three years from 1757 - 1760 resigned the living to take up the career of schoolmaster in Crewkerne.

Little is known of the curates who helped to keep the church going. Their names appear occasionally in the churchwardens account books, or they sign the agreed record of the monthly vestry meeting. Sometimes they only held the Westbury curacy, like the Scotsman, John Rio 1702 - 1723 who owned land in the village but others were vicars of other parishes who were augmenting their income like Thomas Lyte , the Rector of Bleadon in 1697, or John Pope, the Rector of Rodney Stoke in 1701 who was to succeed Joseph Shallett as Vicar of St Cuthberts in 1704. A particularly good friend to the church in the first 25 years of the 19th century was Peter Lewis Parfitt a minor canon of Wells Cathedral and unofficial curate here until his formal induction as curate in 1816. He lived in the village at Combe Hay and it does seem that he provided some stability during the unpopular incumbancy of James Tuson. Tuson seems rarely to have visited the parish and seems to have communicated by annual letter. Parfitt was called in by the churchwardens to vet accounts, to take services to give advice and in 1821 to act with William Sealy as one of the surveyors of highways or waywardens. One of the jobs he did for the Bishop was to authorise the opening of dissenting meeting houses in the Bishop,s name. However what was Westbury's gain must have been Allerton's loss where Parfitt was the Rector.

Edward Ruddock, curate from 1834 - 1851 and son of the vicar, despite his comments on the ecclesiastical census form was an assiduous curate. He attended all vestry meetings and wrote up the reports himself. He was active in all branches of church work, despite his eleven children: Arthur, Mary, Lucy, Montague, Elizabeth Mary, Mary Elizabeth, Rose Mary, Gertrude Mary, Edward, Reginald and Charles. But he did employ Maria Walker as governess, Mary Lock and Sarah Clark as nurses, Hannah Vincent as housemaid and Sarah Wall as cook to help his wife Emma deal with the brood.

The other problem in Westbury was the state of the vicarage.
The living conditions were poor here until 1755, and decidedly modest until 1833. The vicar John Richards in 1755 complained that the vicarage was " quite decayed and dilapidated " and was " not of any real service or advantage but rather a great burden and incumbrance". The same was true of Priddy. The vicar was granted a faculty to pull down the remains of the old buildings and build a new house and stables of " less dimensions than those former and better proportioned to the small income and profits of the vicarage. " It was indeed a modest house, the 4 rooms downstairs were 12ft by 10ft, there was a central staircase leading to two bedrooms at the front of the house which were of roughly the same dimensions.

In 1832 when the absentee vicar Noblett Ruddock decided that he wished to install his son Edward as curate he felt that the modest 18th century dwelling was inadequate for his son. He was obviously percipient because as we have seen, his son was to raise 11 children during his time in the village. He applied to the Governors of Queen Anne's Bounty for a loan of £500 for " the rebuilding of the parsonage house and other necessary offices upon

the glebe." Queen Anne's Bounty was a fund set up in the early 18th century to help maintain clergy with low incomes. Ruddock was given the loan but in return had to grant to the Governors " all the glebe lands, tithes, rents, stipends, fees gratuities and other emoluments and profits payable to the vicar," until the loan had been repaid. As the vicar did not live in the parish he was charged 10% interest on the loan nearly double the current rate. The Ruddocks would have been forced to live off their private income for approximately the next 15 years to repay the debt. The building of what we now call the Old Vicarage commenced in 1832. Ruddock wrote: " I am going to build a new vicarage house. The Bishop has permitted me to take down the old house that I might be enabled to Quarry stone for the new building. This I am at present engaged in doing." Presumeably the present house was built from the stone quarried by the excavation of the extensive cellars. The new house was ready for occupation by 1834.

What can we now say of the services that took place in the church during the period under examination. The main services were morning and evening prayer on Sundays based on the 1662 prayer book, which took place in the morning and afternoon. Weekday services were rare. Sermons were considered important and could last for over an hour. In this church as in most others the pulpit, was made as imposing as possible. It seems to have been moved from its old position where the piano is now to its present position at some time possibly after 1660 and given a sounding board and a canopy. It was backed by a lined curtain bought in Bristol and entered through a door. The preacher placed the Bible or his notes and possibly his arms on a large well upholstered cushion. There was also a reading desk where the piano now is from which the parish clerk, usually a member of the Derrick family, read out parts of the service and lined out the Tate and Brady metrical psalms. To get the note he would have used a pitch pipe. He was paid £1 9s 6d for his services.In the mid - eighteenth century, William Derrick was clerk and he seems to have been the general oddjobman responsible for keeping the boys in order during the periodic cleanups of the churchyard, and also washed the vicar's surplice 2 or three times a year. To improve the music in the services a gallery at the west end of the church was built in 1794 to accomodate a small village band and choir. Members usually brought their own instruments but the church wardens did buy a new clarinet and a secondhand bassoon as well as providing music for the singers.The number of communion services per year varied from three to as many as ten in exceptional years: the average was 5 : Easter, Whitsun, and Christmas and possibly Michaelmas and All Saints. The communion table was covered with a mat on which was placed a linen cloth. It is not clear from the accounts if candles were used but there were probably two on the altar; they do however appear as a separate item in the later 19th century accounts. It in the late 18th century that the church plate was augmented, a flagon was acquired in 1788, a cup in 1800, and a plate in 1814.

The churchwardens also bought forms of service and prayers for special national occasions. At times of national disaster litanies for fast days and days of humiliation were purchased. The spring of 1798 Britain was at war with the new French Republic and things were not going well. Parson Woodford wrote in his diary " By the public papers everything appears most alarming not only respecting Great Britain but every state in Europe and beyond it "
Austria had surrendered to the French who then invaded Italy and Switzerland. On Wednesday 7th March the parishioners here sent up prayers to the divine Majesty for " obtaining pardon of our sins and for averting these heavy judgements which our manifold heavy provocations have most justly deserved and imploring his blessing and assistance on the arms of his Majesty by sea and land and for restoring and perpetuating peace and safety and prosperity to himself and his kngdoms".

When the tide of war turned in this country's favour victories were also celebrated in church. After Trafalgar in 1805 the following prayer was used in this church: " O Almighty God and most merciful father, we thy humble servants acknowledge with thankful hearts thy great goodness in the late glorious success which thou hast vouchsafed unto the fleet of our sovereign over the combined armaments of France and Spain. While we bear in remembrance the skill and intrepidity of those who fight our battles ,we confess that they are but instruments in thy hands and that thou dost direct them according to the unsearchable purposes of thy will. Prosper we beseech thee the earnest endeavours of our sovereign for the good of this nation and for the common welfare of Europe and for the preservation of thy holy faith. Continue thy favour and protection towards him, evermore guide him with thy counseland strengthen him with thy might. Grant unto his arms such further success as may in thy appointed time secure to us a lasting and happy peace, that we being delivered from the hands of our enemies, may serve thee without fear in holiness and righteousness all our days through Jesus Christ our Lord." You can see from this prayer how national the church of England was. It is interesting to compare the Church's attitude to this victory with its attitude after the Falklands war of 1982.
Other prayers were purchased concerned with events in the life of the royal family: accession, George 111's mental illness, the births of Queen Victoria's children etc.

There was also the annual Rogationtide procession around the village with its festivities. In 1775, 20 loaves costing 12/6 were bought, the cheese cost 18/6d and the hogshead of cider containing 52 and a half gallons cost £1. 10 shillings. In 1738 a whirlygig was put up for the parishioners' entertainment, the account states " for putting up the wherlygog and the posts and for colouring and oil - 8/6d ."

The churchwardens were also concerned about moral matters and in 1762 purchased a book concerning profane swearing and other forms of prayer for 2/6. In 1819, for moral and financial reasons, the churchwardens were determined to proceed agaist George Andrews for absconding from his wife and family and leaving them chargeable upon the parish.

Every year the churchwardens and the vicar/ curate met the Archdeacon for his visitation. In the mid 18th century a pound was spent, about £200 on modern money. Obvously a convivial time was had by all although in 1822 the vestry meeting felt that the maximum fee to be paid for the privilege of meeting the Archdeacon should only be 3/-, the entertainment expenses were not discussed. You will note that I have continually mentioned the churchwardens. Because of the non-residence of many of the vicars a lot of responsibility devolved on to them. During the 18th and early 19th centuries an average of about 8/10 men attended vestry meetings. When a contentious issue such as the disputed vicarial tithe arose as many as 39 attended. The parish needed at least 8 people to serve each year: 2 churchwardens, 2 overseers of the poor, 2 constables and 2 waywardens. In the first half of the 18th century the main families who shouldered the burdens were Hardwich, Spratt, Spenser, Holder, Collier, Tutton, Tucker, Vowles, Salmon, Arnoy, Browning, Lane and Spearing. After 1750 Cook, Urch, James and Phelps appear. After 1800, Carver in 1801, Stott in 1820, William Sealy in 1821, Hole and Glanvile in 1823 and Sidney Sealy in 1855. It was their responsibility to make sure the vicar's tithes were collected, to fix a church rate, a poor rate, a constable's or tithingmans rate and a waywarden's rate - all of which had to be collected from reluctant landholders.
A glebe terrier had been drawn up in the 17th century showing the acreage of all fields in the village and their money value. Every year an accurate record was made of who held what land and and individuals were charged. For example Let's look at the poor rate of 1834 , Forest Glanvile paid £7. 15s 8d and John Phelps £6. 9s out of the £122 raised; the Decoy pool was assessed at 3/1, gooseland 4/-, Cooks Field 13/1, Henox 3/-, Paradise 10d, The Meares 1/6, Cowleaze3/4, Slapham close and Hollybush Hill 10/1, Redley 3/3, Great Croft, Pond Croft and Long Croft £1. 3s 6d in the parish rate book.

The churchwardens were very careful with the money raised: in 1785 " to prevent unreasonable bills for the future, no parish officer shall pay any artificer's bill or other bill whatsoever before such bill is produced seen and approved of in a public vestry and after such approvement is endorsed on the bottom or back of such bill the date of such vestry, it shall be paid and not before and if any parish officer shall pay any bill before the same is allowed in vestry, such parish officer shall lose the money paid and shall not charge the parish."

Churchwardens, all of whom were men, had inherited a church with structural problems. You can see them today. The 15th century side aisle was pulling the church sideways due to the faulty construction of the new chancel arch in the 15th century and the 12th century tower base was an inadequate foundation for the 15th century tower which had been built on it. The north wall had been weakened by the resiting of the pulpit and a buttress had had to be built over the blocked north door to hold the wall up. The churchwardens' accounts show that much time and money was spent in maintaining the fabric but no major structural alterations to the masonry were made.

About £ 25 per annum was raised through the church rate in the early 19th cent to be spent on maintaining the church fabric ( in modern terms roughly what the current quota is now. The exterior of the church during the period of study presented a very different picture to that of today. Most of its stonework except for the Doulting stone was covered with a lime and hair stucco plaster which was regularly coated with a lime wash as was the interior. In 1709 £8. 5s was spent on beautifying the church, £ 1 1s on whiting it, the lime and Spanish whites costing 8s. Even the pulpit was coated with white. In 1727 John Savidge worked in the church for 6 days coating over the pulpit while John Phelps mended the clock. The tower often needed attention; in 1735 the battlements on the top had to be reset; the staircase to the belfry seemed to need constant repair and the bells were given a lot of attention. The ringers had plenty of work to do: besides ringing for the services, every year on November 5th the bells were rung the ringers receiving 7/6d, whereas for the occasional coronation they were paid the princely sum of 10s. The sexton was paid 1/- for ringing the passing bell for half an hour at a burial. The wooden roof needed constant attention and in 1794 it was " new cieled and the roof made strong and properly propped." In 1768 the east end of the south aisle needed repairing and in 1779 the leadwork down the south side of the church needed attention. The floor of the church was covered with flagstones under which were burial vaults. These stones were frequently raised and often needed replacing. Only two of them now survive. They were covered with mats which according to the accounts were nailed down. Toilet facilities were much better in 1804 than now, the churchwardens paid 1/9d for a chamber pot. Little is known about the pews but the church was reseated in 1794. I presume that the more influential villagers had their own pews as was the custom but no evidence about pew rents has come to light yet.The windows opened much as they do now. they often needed reglazing possibly due to the number of catapaults in the village. The churchwardens had a duty to control vermin in the village and they paid the local boys for any vermin they killed. The reward list is interesting: crows, rooks, magpies, jays, sparrows, yellowhammers and finches fetched 1/4d each; polecats fetched 2d, foxes 4d and hedgehogs 1d. In the years 1805 & 6 1304 birds were killed. Even in the 1850s eight polecats were killed in the village.

As well as the two sets of tithes and the church rate all holders of land had as we have seen to pay a compusory poor rate to support the poor of the village. In 1731 £6. 12s 11d was spent on the poor, about £1330 in modern money. About 10 families in that year needed support. But that was a cheap year; In 1752, £33. 13s 8d was spent, £6,734 in Modern money but that was exceptional and only £25. 6. 2d was spent in the following year, £5062. By 1834 the figure had risen to £122, there were then more poor but prices had doubled since 1750. Some of the families who needed cvonstant support were called Masters, Russel, Vowles, Bush, Comes, Marchant, and Heal. Monthly payments ranged from 7s for larger families to 3s for smaller. There were also much needed gifts of bedding, clothing and fuel. In 1760 William Combes was given a shirt and a pair of breeches while his wife Alice was given a gown and 2 shifts. In May 1761 Thomas Russell was given a blanket and 3 changes of clothes were supplied to Anne Masters children. The overseers in November 1760 bought 200 faggots to be distributed amongst the poor. The overseers' accounts often make sad reading:

" For making kneecaps, a bolster, clothes and apron for Anne Webb 6d
For tending Anne Webb in her sickness 2/3
For Ann Reeves on Anne Webb's account 6d
For beer for Anne Webb 5d
For candle sugar and nutmeg for Anne Webb 1/6d
For Anne Webb's coffin 12/-
For burying Anne Webb, digging her grave and ringing ye bell 2/-
For bread and cheese at ye burying 3/7
Anne webbs debts 6d
Total £1. 4s 3d.(£250)

The children of the poor had to be apprenticed at the expense of the parish and considering that the poor often had big families this was a perennial problem. The more substantial farmers often tried to avoid taking this sort of apprentice and it was often difficult to find places for thr pauper girls in service. The problem was finally sorted out in 1832. All closes of land in the village were numbered and ticketed and when there were children to be apprenticed lots were drawn by a disinterested person and those whose names were drawn had to take an apprentice or pay a £10 fine ( £1000). In the first draw, George Stott had to take Valentine Boyce and John Phelps had to take George Russell. The overseers also provided a surgeon to tend the poor when they were sick at a cost to the parish of £15 per annum. It is interesting to note that 5 families of the Club could also avail themselves of the surgeon's services each year. A possible reference to the Friendly Society.Until 1836 the village also had its own poor house, the 2 houses " adjoining the churchyard and divided by a wall." The poor who had nowhere to live were accomodated there. The houses were sold in 1836 when the new Poor Law made them unnecessary.

It is difficult to gauge the effectiveness of the church here in the 18th and early 19th century but it did not supply the spiritual needs of all the villagers. The existing records give the impression of a church that saw no need for change. The lists of items on which money was spent varied little from the late 17th century to the mid 19th. The services remained the same except for the introduction of the village band at the end of the 18th century. The church could seat 300 people but a steady rise in population can be observed starting in 1801 with the first census. Child mortality was falling, the parish was vaccinating the children of the poorest people and there was some medical help. New people were moving in and in the 50 years between 1801 and 1851 the population rose by 50% from 400 to 600 hundred.
Unfortunately as we have seen, the curate Edward Ruddock did not take much care about filling in the ecclesiastical census of 1851. His return states that 75 people regularly attended morning service and 300 came in the aftenoon but these were estimates because he made no accurate count on the day. The general pattern of larger attendances in the afternoon is correct because it applies equally to the local nonconformist churches but their percentage difference is not nearly so great as it is in the C of E return nor is it at St Paul's Easton.

We heard in the last talk that in the 17th century there were people in the village who wished to worship outside the church and we heard about Thomas Collier the Westbury Baptist who had a national career and was one of the founders of the Baptist churches in the south west in the 17th century. However the laws passed against them in the after the Restoration in 1660 forced them to keep a low profile but they probably said prayers in their own homes. However in the mid 18th century the evangelical Methodist revival spread throughout the country. Wesley visited Wells three times and Shepton Mallet 31 times and people in in the village felt that his message met their spiritual needs. Dissenting meeting houses had to be licenced by the Bishop and in 1794, the very year the gallery in the church was constructed, Mary Nipper's house was licenced as " a house set apart for theworship of God and religious exercises for Protestant dissension. There were 8 people in the breakaway group, all of them of relatively modest means. In 1816 a group of Baptists were licenced to meet in Mary Penticost's house; In 1821 another group of Protestants had a meeting house registered in Hannah Bales house. The Church of England vestry meeting was only attended by men and the parish was run by men but it does seem that nonconformity was popular with men and women equally and that it afforded women a chance to play a major role. In 1820 Mary Billing's house was licenced for another group and in 1819, 1843 and 1850 three men also provided their houses for nonconformist worship. By 1850 the Baptists were meeting at the Providence Chapel in Easton having a general congregation in the morning of 40 with 45 in the afternoon and the Bible Christians, an offshoot of the Methodist movement had established themselves in Westbury having purchased a house which was used exclusively as a place of worship.

They met in the afternoon and evening: normal congregation was 28 in the afternoon and 50 in the evening. They had their own minister, Mr Westington who travelled to Westbury from East Brent. There were also Baptists at Priddy and Bible Christians at Draycott. It was also noted in the 1851 census that parishioners at Priddy were loth to turn out in the morning if the weather was bad. Some things don't change.

We must leave the story here in 1851: in this year the last absentee vicar, Noblett Ruddock died, and the old system of worship the layout and appearance of the building and the parochial responsibilities were to change. But the nature of these changes and the reasons for them is the subject of the next talk.