

CONTINUITY AND CHANGE: THE CATHEDRAL CHAPTER AT WINCHESTER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

From 1541 to 1840 the chapter of Winchester Cathedral was unaltered in form, consisting of twelve canons, including two archdeacons and four dignitaries, and a dean. But by the 1830s criticism of abuses within the Church of England like pluralism and non-residence led to attempts to effect changes in the Church by Lord Melbourne's Whig government. In a series of reforms recommended by the Ecclesiastical Commission set up by the government the outward structure of the Church was altered and an attempt was made to change the perception of the clergyman's role. Bishop Blomfield of London, a determined reformer, aimed to use the Commission to establish "a consistent scheme of discipline . . ." among the clergy (Brose 1959, 125). The 1840 Cathedrals Act referred to the objective of increasing the efficiency of the cathedrals (Brose 1959, 126). Historians, in a rather Whiggish manner, have tended to regard these reforms as a watershed in the life of the Church, and the era before the reforms of the 1840s has been called that of 'the unreformed Church'. The legislation that arose from the Ecclesiastical Commission appeared to give the Church its modern form and to detach it from the practices of the past. The aim of this article is to examine the impact of the reforms on the chapter of Winchester Cathedral and to question whether the changes of the 1840s were as dramatic as has been traditionally assumed.

The most evident way in which the chapter was altered in the 1840s was in the reduction in the number of its personnel. The second report of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners, in 1836, revealed that the Cathedral had an income of £10,869. After the deduction of £1,478-2-6d for the salaries of thirty three lay officers and servants, and of £251-1-2d for maintenance of the fabric, £9,139-18-2d remained to be divided among the dean and canons. The dean received £1,430 and each canon £680-19-8d a year (*SREC*, 37–39). By the Cathedrals Act of 1840 the number of canons fell from twelve to five. However there was no corresponding rise

in their income. Indeed the dean's income fell to £1,304 and the canons' to £652 a year (*RIDC*, 1), and the canonries were to be reduced in number as they fell vacant: the second, third, fifth, sixth, eighth, ninth, and eleventh vacancies would be left unfilled and the first, fourth, seventh, tenth and twelfth vacancies were to be filled. The surplus made by the reduction of the incomes of the chapter members amounted to £5,136 annually once the reduction had been completed, and this sum was appropriated by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for redistribution within the Church (*SREC*, 38). In financial terms therefore the impact of reform was not great, money was still allowed for the payment of salaries and for repair of the fabric, and the dean and canons received similar amounts to their pre-reform income. The reduction in numbers of canons was a change that did not immediately effect great changes. It took until 1865 for all twelve canonries to fall vacant and thus for the number of canons to drop to five. Nevertheless it seems that the reduction in numbers of canons was the most unpopular aspect of the Cathedrals Act. As late as 1884 the Bishop, Edward Harold Browne, expressed his preference to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners for a large chapter. He claimed that the 'ancient foundation' cathedrals, with non-resident prebendaries and resident canons were more to his taste (*RECW*, 49).

At the heart of the Cathedrals Act was the issue of residence. Before the Act the majority of Winchester's canons were not resident at the Cathedral, combining their canonry with college, parish or other Church livings. Good examples of this practice are Thomas Garnier and Thomas de Grey. Garnier was the incumbent of four parishes within the diocese of

Winchester (Bishopstoke, Brightwell, Droxford and Foxhall) as well as chaplain to the bishop, master of St Cross and a canon of Winchester. (It is no coincidence that Garnier was the son-in-law of Brownlow North, bishop of Winchester 1781–1820 and in due course became dean.) Garnier's son-in-law, Thomas de Grey, was the second son of Lord Walsingham. De Grey was incumbent of Calbourne, Fawley and Merton, chaplain to the king, archdeacon of Surrey and a canon of Winchester (Wade 1832, 29, 107). These two canons with their pluralities piled high had little time to devote to the Cathedral at Winchester, and with the other canons spent a month each resident in Winchester in rotation (Gibson 1988). The Ecclesiastical Commissioners felt strongly that the canons of cathedrals should not be sinecurists, but active members of a chapter. In their report on cathedrals they proposed that canons should be inoffensive and useful aristocracy in a clerical body . . . (Brose 1959, 131). The Bishop of Winchester, 1827–1869, Charles Sumner, made clear his view that chapters of cathedrals should be 'nurseries of sound theological knowledge . . .' (Hansard, 151). In the Cathedrals Act of 1840 these ideas were refined into legislation that excluded deans from holding any other living in plurality, other than a parish in the same city as the cathedral over which they presided; and then the income of the living could not exceed £500 a year (Best 1964, 438). The canons were obliged to be resident at their cathedrals for at least eight months a year, unless they had the express permission of their bishop or held professorships or archdeaconries (*RECW*, 30). Like the reduction of the canonries, this was introduced gradually as posts fell vacant, so there was no overnight change at Winchester, nevertheless the role of the dean and canons had been redefined. The tide turned against pluralism and non-residence.

The Winchester chapter did begin to conform to the model that the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had in mind. Of the sixteen canons appointed between 1842 and 1900, nine were resident canons who performed their functions at the Cathedral as their sole clerical function.

However a significant minority, seven canons, were pluralists who held other offices and had thereby to limit their residence at the Cathedral. Of these seven pluralists, three held parish livings in the diocese, three were high-flying young clergy – on their way to mitres – who held a variety of Church offices and one was an inspector of training colleges (Horne 1974, *passim*). An explanation for this partial enforcement of residence of canons can be found in the attitude of Bishop Charles Sumner to the changes proposed by the Ecclesiastical Commissioners. Although Sumner favoured the creation of chapters staffed by theologians he was a virulent opponent of the church reforms proposed by the Whigs. He refused to give up his patronage in other dioceses, as the Ecclesiastical Commissioners had advised. He also paid scant respect to the Commission, attending only 133 meetings out of a total of 506 meetings, between 1840 and 1847 (Best 1964, 316, 381). It is clear that until his retirement in 1869 Sumner continued to nominate a number of canons who had other livings to attend to and could not as a result be resident in Winchester (Sumner 1876, 167). A successor of Sumner's, Edward Harold Browne (bishop 1873–1891), was more sympathetic to the reforms of the 1840s. In 1878, at his visitation of Winchester Cathedral, Browne told the chapter that a canonry should not be 'dignified retirement in old age' but a chapter should be 'learned body . . . the Bishop's counsellors . . .' (Kitchen 1895, 444). Even so, Browne continued to nominate archdeacons from the active parish clergy of the diocese and in 1880 allowed Archdeacon Atkinson of Surrey to retain his vicarage of Dorking (*ibid*, 449).

By 1884, when the Ecclesiastical Commissioners reported on Winchester Cathedral, the chapter had come close to the model laid down in the 1840 Act. At Michaelmas each year the chapter members met to agree on periods of residence that they would observe. The canons' duties were described as four-fold: instructing, preaching, theological study and 'the oversight of useful work' within the diocese (*RECW*, 30). This last function was open

to interpretation by the bishop, and most of the pluralist canons were appointed under this heading. A good example being Canon Ernest Wilberforce, who from 1878 to 1882 was a canon of Winchester, but also the head of a diocesan mission house in Portsmouth.

The change from non-resident pluralist canons to a largely resident chapter was not the only effect of the reforms of the 1840s. Other changes can be detected in the chapter. There was a dramatic change in the geographical origins of members of the chapter. In the first forty years of the 19th century the vast majority of members of the chapter were born either within the diocese of Winchester, or within neighbouring dioceses in southern England. After 1840 this picture changed quite dramatically: only one canon nominated between 1840 and 1900 was born in Winchester diocese. The remainder were drawn from the midlands, the north, London and Ireland (Horne 1974, *passim*). Of course this change reflects, in some measure, the growth of geographical mobility generally in 19th-century Britain. But it also indicates a shift in the position of Winchester canons. The decline of pluralism, nepotism and personal patronage emanating from the bishop meant that fewer Hampshire clergy could expect to receive a canonry. Moreover, the requirement that canons be engaged on some pastoral or academic work introduced an element of a meritocracy to the selection of members of the chapter. This required that canons and deans be recruited from deserving clergy irrespective of their origins.

The social status of the chapter members also reflects changes in the pattern of recruitment. Before 1840 the canons and deans seem to have been predominantly drawn from those at the top of the social pyramid: five canons were sons of noblemen, thirteen were the sons of armigers or 'gentlemen'. After 1840 this dominance was broken: in the remaining sixty years of the century only one noble and three armigerous canons entered the chapter. Instead the middle classes dominated the Cathedral clergy, by 1890 the sons of clergymen were in a majority in the chapter. The

decline of the aristocratic canon no doubt reflects the increasingly limited opportunities for nobles to use their 'connections' to obtain offices within the Church. Moreover as canons, after 1840, became increasingly residentiaries too, the attractiveness of a stall waned for rapacious noble clergy who sought sinecures. As nobles vacated the stalls the sons of clergy moved in, and this hereditary clerical element at Winchester was part of a wider process that was taking place within the Victorian Church. The Church was becoming a profession, with a career structure, societies which promoted its interests and the attributes of limited recruitment and rigorous education. It was therefore to be expected that like other middle class professions, the Church would attract clergy who had followed their fathers into a profession.

Two further minor changes are also worth noting in the Winchester chapter. First, after 1842 there were virtually no royal chaplains among the clergy of the Cathedral. This is a striking change, since between 1800 and 1842 there were six royal chaplains among the canons. The explanation for the decline lies partly in the decline of the aristocratic canons, since royal chaplains were frequently chosen from clergy from noble houses, who had connections at court or an established link with the monarch. Equally important is the decline of the monarch in the distribution of church patronage. As this happened, the opportunities for a king or queen to reward a favourite chaplain with a canonry or deanery collapsed. The second observation is that all canons had entered directly into the Church after 1842. However, of those canons appointed before 1842, two entered the Church after preparation and entry to another career. The Hon and Revd Gerald Noel had spent nine years as a lawyer in Lincoln's Inn and the Hon and Revd George Pelham had been commissioned into the Guards before he took Holy Orders.

Whilst there were major changes in the chapter at Winchester during the 19th century, there were also a number of ways in which the Cathedral clergy remained similar to their predecessors. In the area of education

and training, for example, the Winchester canons appointed after 1840 remained much as they had been before. Throughout the century a majority of canons were educated at Oxford, rather than Cambridge, and outnumbered Cambridge graduates by a constant two to one. In the 18th century, and before, this preponderance of Oxford graduates could be explained by the Cathedral's strong links with the Wykhamist foundations of Winchester College and New College, Oxford (Horne 1974, 76). However during the 19th century only six of the thirty-six Oxford-educated canons had gone to either of these colleges. Thus it is necessary to seek an explanation (elsewhere) for the dominance of Oxford. One possible answer is the growth of three Oxford colleges as the powerhouses of clerical training during the 19th century. Christ Church, Balliol and Oriel prided themselves on both high academic standards and on the education of clergymen. As the 19th century progressed these colleges came to dominate Oxford (Engel 1983). In all these three colleges educated fourteen Winchester canons.

A similar stability exists in the numbers of canons who have studied divinity during their academic careers. From 1800 to 1842 seven canons obtained a BD or DD (i.e. higher degrees), while the others tended to have studied Greats which included work on the Greek and Latin fathers, or they studied languages. After 1842 the proportion of canons with these degrees remained the same, although at the very end of the century there was a slight up-turn in the numbers of canons with divinity qualifications. Academic training in divinity was not considered a *sine qua non* for members of a chapter, even though they were expected to be involved in academic study. However it would not be correct to conclude that firm academic training was lacking. The numbers of canons who had been fellows of colleges remained stable throughout the century too. From 1800 to 1842 exactly a third of all canons had been fellows (or held a fellowship with their canonry); after 1842 this proportion fell only marginally to six out of twenty canons. Certainly the willingness of the

Ecclesiastical Commission to exempt academics from the full residence requirements encouraged fellows to become canons (*RECW*, 30).

A strong element of continuity existed in the career structure of the canons during the century as a whole. Less than 20% of canons at Winchester acted as curates before obtaining their own livings, and this figure is constant throughout the century. This confirms the view that canons in the first half of the century were frequently men of some social standing, who had access to patronage and could therefore enter directly into their own parish. In the second half of the century the absence of canons who had been curates may be the product of fellows of colleges being ordained on a title of their fellowship. Equally, after 1842 with a strong meritocratic element entering the appointment of canons, it may be that canons were recruited from the ranks of young able clergy who had stepped over curacies as their abilities were sufficiently apparent to obtain them livings directly after ordination. Throughout the century all but three canons had tenure of at least one parish living, and a majority had served between one and three parishes. Ten canons over the century had held four or more parishes. The vast majority of canons had held at least one parish within the diocese of Winchester. Nine canons came to the chapter from the headship of a great public school or college. Clearly the career background for a canon remained stable during the century, in spite of the reforms of the 1840s.

Most remarkable are the constant patterns of recruitment to the chapter that are apparent in the 19th century. Bishops seem to have appointed canons and exercised their patronage in an unvarying manner. Of course the lengthy episcopate of Bishop Charles Sumner from 1827 to 1869 is partly responsible for this, but even after his retirement Samuel Wilberforce (1869–1873) and Edward Harold Browne (1873–1891) continued 'pre-reform' patterns of recruitment. Nepotism remained a constant feature of the Winchester chapter, even late in the century. Bishop North's relationship with

Garnier and Garnier's with de Grey have already been noted. (In addition North nominated two of his sons to the chapter at the ages of 26 and 29 years of age.) But as late as 1885, George Sumner, Charles Sumner's son, was made a canon of Winchester, and subsequently suffragan bishop of Guildford. This was a classic example of 'transferred nepotism', a strong feature of the Church in the 18th century (Gibson 1987). Samuel Wilberforce's son Ernest was a canon of Winchester also: and between 1860 and 1890 the chapter at Winchester seems to have been a family domain as a result of intermarriage between the Sumner, Browne and Wilberforce families (Coombs 1965, 192-3). As marked, though less reprehensible, was the way in which Winchester canonries, like other Church offices and fashionable parishes, served as stepping stones for clergy destined for the highest reaches of the Church. Thus John Garnett (canon 1810-1813) became a dean of Exeter; George Pelham (canon 1797-1803) became a bishop; James Hook (canon 1807-1814) became a dean of Worcester; Samuel Wilberforce (canon 1840-1844) became a bishop; Joseph Cotton Wigram (canon 1847-1860), James Utterton (canon 1860-1874) and Ernest Wilberforce (canon 1878-1882) all became bishops too. Winchester canonries clearly remained part of a wider web of patronage that was recruiting into positions in the Church. There was a certain upward propelling effect that gained Winchester canons high offices in the Church. Of course the source of this propulsion was the original reason for the nomination to the canonry (in the case of Pelham for example this was noble origins), but the canonry seems to have been an added qualification.

There are then clear areas of continuity in the chapter of Winchester, as well as change during the 19th century. It is clear that the Whig reforms of the 1840s did not effect an overnight change at Winchester, indeed it took

at least twenty years for the 1840 Cathedrals Act to begin to change the face of unreformed Winchester. Paradoxically, when the changes gradually took effect they affected the social and geographical origins of the canons as well as their number, residence and functions. By the end of the century Winchester's chapter was a strong contrast to that described by Edmund Pyle in the mid-18th century. In 1756 he wrote,

'... the life of a prebendary is a pretty easy way of dawdling away one's time; praying, walking, visiting; and as little study as your heart would wish. A stall in this Church is a charming thing ...' (Hartshorne 1905, 266).

In stark contrast, in 1880 Edward Harold Browne, in nominating a new member of the chapter, outlined his qualifications: an able preacher, an excellent administrator and a man of great energy (Kitchen 1895, 449). Perhaps therefore the greatest change that occurred at Winchester was not in the formal or functional changes effected by legislation, but came in the way the chapter was perceived both from within and without. A stall in a cathedral was no longer a reward for clergy irrespective of merit, carrying no defined functions and without clear qualifications. By the end of the 19th century it had become part of a professional, meritocratic career, regulated by law and part of a system of patronage within the national Church.

Note: All statistics in this paper have been compiled from: *Dictionary of National Biography*; Foster's *Alumni Oxoniensis*; Venn's *Alumni Cantabrigiensis* and the *Clergy Lists*. The detailed careers of four canons have not been traced, these are: Henry Jenkins (1809-1817); Edward Poulter (1791-1832); William Heathcote (1789-1802) and Robert Barnard (1793-1834).

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