

FRANCIS WICKHAM SWANTON (1746–1823)
OF WORTHY, HAMPSHIRE, AND LONG STRATTON, NORFOLK:
PLURAL CURATE, PLURAL AND ABSENTEE RECTOR,
MAGISTRATE, LANDLORD, AND MAN OF HIS TIME

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ABSTRACT

This biographical study aims to illustrate the life of the country clergyman in Hampshire, and more generally the workings of the Georgian and Regency church. It is set mainly in the city of Winchester and its surrounds, but also extends to Norfolk, in the vicinity of Norwich. Francis Wickham Swanton was educated at Winchester College and New College Oxford. He lived all his life in Winchester or the nearby Worthys, and enjoyed a clutch of absentee and resident livings as well as the income from two small country estates and other property. His Wykehamist credentials brought him little else but his Norfolk living, which did not prompt him to move from Hampshire. In order to live the life of a Hampshire country gentleman, he maintained himself and his family by acting as a locum curate in the Itchen valley. Thus, he was able to pursue a rounded, worldly life with a seat on the bench, occasional work as an arbitrator, clerkship of a turnpike trust and a game certificate. In short, Swanton, who seems to have discharged his duties diligently, was a middling sort of professional, one of those who formed the core of the community in southern England in the 18th and early 19th centuries.

Accordingly, this paper employs a biographical approach to shed light not only on the life of the country clergyman in Hampshire, but also on the workings of the Georgian and Regency church at a variety of levels.

All that can be gleaned from Swanton's obituaries, published in 1823 (HC, 10 February; GM, March), is that he was at one time a fellow of New College, Oxford, a rector of a parish in the diocese of Norwich, and a justice of the peace for Hampshire. His memorial, high on the southwest wall of St Mary's church, Kings Worthy, Hampshire, does not even mention his church career, merely giving his dates and noting (in Latin) that he was descended from good parents, had lived in the village a long time, and was gradually overcome by illness. But other sources show that the life of this solid, middle-class, yet unremarkable man (whose adult life almost exactly spanned the reign of George III) has left many traces. This paper is therefore a sketch of the life of an eighteenth-century cleric who satisfies many of the stereotypes, but also presents a more complex picture of a man of his time.

INTRODUCTION

Men like the Reverend Francis Wickham Swanton (1746–1823) can be easy targets for the often well-founded criticisms of the late-18th and early-19th-century church – corruption, pluralism, nepotism and so on. Yet such men provided the stability in the shires that saw England through the French wars and into the long Victorian peace, and as such they deserve more scholarly attention than they usually get.

SOCIAL LANDSCAPE

The notion that a strong religious faith and sound theological training, coupled with the right personality and ordination to the church, are sufficient qualifications to mount the career ladder of the Church of England, dates only from the last century. In Swanton's lifetime such an idea was at best Utopian and at worst revolutionary. A young man who had all the right qualities and qualifications, yet lacked a

patron (such as a family member, a close friend, or an Oxbridge College), was doomed to be a journeyman curate with little or no security of tenure and slim chances of preferment. Even those with patronage were not guaranteed an agreeably-situated parish (i.e. geographically convenient), which had the right attributes (e.g. proximity to a particular city, with good fishing and a local hunt), and which housed 'people of quality' with whom to engage in a pleasant social round.

As the 18th century advanced, the transport improvements facilitated by turnpiking mitigated many geographical restraints, but the lives of most parish priests had many disadvantages. The common practice of holding more than one living (sometimes many more!) was obviously beneficial; not only did it increase income, but it gave the churchman geographical, social and leisure choices. However, even this 'perk' was at risk as the 18th century wore on, and clergymen had to be careful not to upset the enthusiasm of 'reformers'. Nonetheless, as cities suffered the disadvantages of the Industrial Revolution, the lot of parish clergymen probably improved in relation their urban counterparts (many of whom were non-conformists). The quiet rural lives of people like Gilbert White of Selborne, and James Woodforde, have come down to us as models of contentment. However they also often suffered limited possibilities. For men of action, careers in the Navy and Army, or at the Bar, had many attractions (though for women of action, only eccentrics like Hannah Snell could buck the trend!).

Georgian England exhibited a level of moral laxity that must have made it difficult for churchmen to be heard. Indeed, what was the role of the church in the Age of Reason? As scientists and industrialists demonstrated that disease was not God-given, that poverty could be alleviated by industry, and travellers found that 'heathen' territories across the seas brought rich returns, how might the parish priest preach the church's traditional teaching? The answer is that he could often only 'do his duty' in church, filling the rest of his time with what he fancied.

THE SWANTONS OF SALISBURY, OVER WALLOP AND WINCHESTER

In the 18th century, family connection and patronage were of the utmost importance for a young man looking to the future. Although Swanton's family background (Fig. 1) was solidly middle class, Tory and Jacobite, it offered him no obvious patron. Founded on the law, local municipal administration and other professional services, his family had not garnered great wealth or extensive estates. Moreover, Swanton's father seems to have eschewed the family tradition and embraced somewhat the loucheness of early Georgian England. Yet although the Swantons never hit the headlines, they had their own coat of arms and left a mark in the record (Fig. 2).

Swanton's father, Francis (1717–1782) was born in Salisbury cathedral close (Kirby 1888, 232). His father, William, a lawyer and land agent (HRO/44M69/F6/8/26), had built Myles Place, a still-extant lavishly decorated four-storey house (RCHME 1993, 226–231; Fig. 3). William's brother, another Francis (Swanton's great uncle), was deputy recorder of Salisbury and MP for New Sarum from 1715–21. Yet Swanton's father never had a formal occupation, instead busying himself with public service. He probably owned a small estate at Denham, Buckinghamshire (BRO/D/W58/17), and certainly owned and occupied another at Over Wallop, Hampshire. In 1744, he married Susannah Wickham at St Katharine by the Tower in the City of London (<http://www.familysearch.org>), and two years later Francis Wickham Swanton was born in the parish of St James's, Westminster (ORO, Oxford Diocesan Papers, c.189). His mother's origins are uncertain, but she may have been the Susanna Wickam born in 1724 at High Halstow, Kent (www.familysearch.org). What Swanton senior was doing in Westminster is unclear, though his uncle Francis had been an MP and family members probably visited London frequently. In the 1790s, the Court Circular makes several references to 'Miss Swanton', 'Mrs Swanton' and 'William Swanton', suggesting a branch of the family moved in the highest circles (*The Times*,

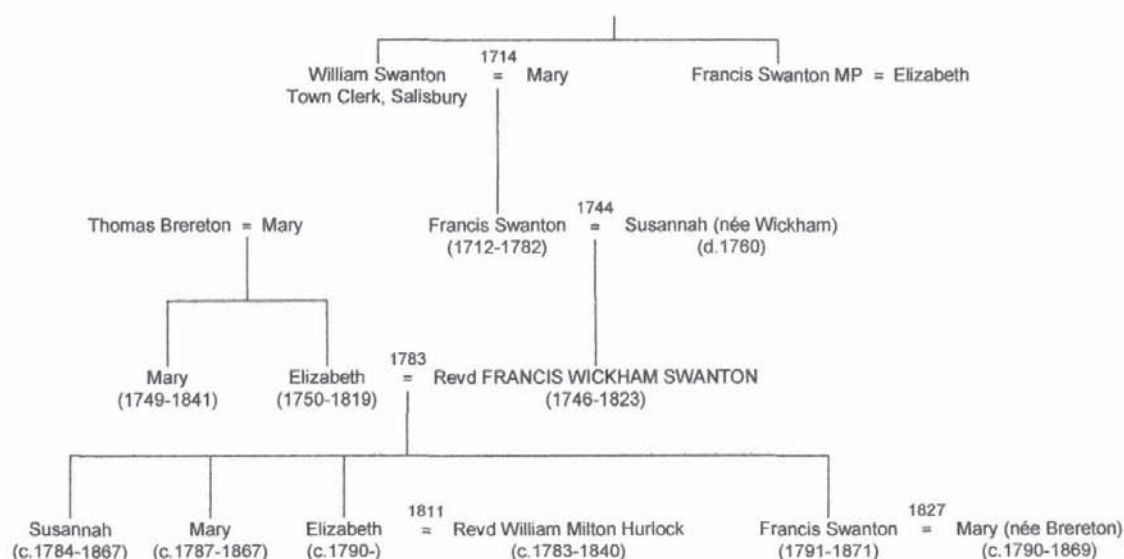


Fig. 1 Swanton's family tree

May 1791-March 1804 *passim*). A foothold in this part of London is further indicated by the will of Swanton's daughter Mary (c1787-1867), which refers to property 'in or near St James's Street, Westminster' (HRO/Wills index, vol 9, 1868, 496).

After Swanton's mother's death at Over Wallop in 1760, his father moved to Winchester. Probably the reason was that Swanton was by then attending Winchester College as a commoner, soon to be a scholar (Kirby 1888, 256; Holgate 1904, *passim*). Swanton senior quickly established himself in the city, almost immediately joining the Weekly Committee of the County Hospital, and sometimes acting as its chairman (Carpenter Turner 1986, 40). In 1764 was appointed a justice of the peace (HRO/Q27/3/28), and in 1769 he became a freeman of the city of Winchester (HRO/W/B8/1/1) and deputy lieutenant of Hampshire (HRO/Q21/6/1). That year he married a comfortably-off, well-connected widow, Mary Marthalina Imber of the Winchester Imber family (lawyers, clerics and wine merchants). Her first husband was Captain Edmund Imber of the 3rd Regiment of Foot, who died in 1759 on Guadeloupe (TNA/Prob11/848; Knight



Fig. 2 The ledger stone for Swanton's father and step-mother in the nave of Winchester Cathedral, showing the family coat of arms (courtesy of Tom Clague)



Fig. 3 Myles Place, 68 The Close, Salisbury, built in 1718 by Swanton's grandfather, William

1935). He was nephew of John Imber (c1693–1767; TNA/Prob11/687), rector of Kings Worthy, whose parsonage house was later to be occupied by Swanton.

At his death in 1782, Swanton senior willed Mary Marthalina the receipts from his Over Wallop estate (TNA/Prob11/1095) and gave her the right to sell the property, though within a few years Swanton had control of it (HRO/15M84/5/14/5). He continued to enjoy it at least until 1802, after which it drops out of the land tax assessments. Mary Marthalina's will, proved in 1796, shows she lived a comfortable life in Winchester among a coterie of well-placed friends and relatives (TNA/Prob11/1275). There were bequests to

members of the Swanton, Imber, Baddeley and Knollis (or Knollys) families and one of her executors was William Knollis, the 8th earl of Banbury, whose claim to the title was in 1813 rejected by the House of Lords (ODNB).

BORN IN WESTMINSTER, SCHOOLED IN WINCHESTER

Although 'Winchester and New College Oxford' was (and still is) a brand ensuring any young man at least a hearing before people of influence, many families recognised the shortcomings of English education and opted for private tutors followed by university education

on the continent. Swanton was not at Winchester during a glorious period of its history. Indeed many have lamented its mediocrity, fostered by a self-serving governing body (warden and ten fellows), and hampered by the iniquities of Founder's Kin and nominations for scholarships. The college's main contribution to 18th-century national life was to supply a stream of minor poets (Leach 1899, 367, 385), one of whom, William Collins (1721–59), son of a Chichester haberdasher, is reckoned to have penned some of the finest verse ever written (though in very small quantities).

Swanton's first appearance in the college Long Rolls was as a commoner, i.e. a fee-paying non-scholar, in 1758. He was elected scholar, like his father before him (Kirby 1888, 232, 256), two years later, being the penultimate of 13 on the list. Depending on the posers' assessments, pupils were ranked on the *ad Oxon* list for entry to New College. Swanton first appeared on the list in 1763 in position 15 of 21, rising in succeeding years to 10 of 23 and 4 of 20 (of which the top two were Founder's Kin; Holgate 1904, 88, 93). He matriculated at New College on 9 April 1766. The year before he went up, he took part in the traditional *ad Portas* ceremony at the school, meeting New College visitors at the Middle Gate and presenting a traditional Latin speech – a privilege usually given to the Praefect or senior pupil (Stevens 1998, 22). Later, Swanton himself was a junior poser, receiving £25.8s.0d for the task (New College, Bursars' Long Book, 1777; HC, 18 August 1777).

Swanton was almost at the top of his year group when he was one of seven scholars to go on to New College (Kirby 1888, 256). He and three others entered the church, another became a barrister, and one (Martin Wall) a distinguished professor of clinical medicine at Oxford. This was not an unusual pattern: Winchester did not produce as many churchmen as might be expected at this time; by no means all who went to university went to New College, and a substantial proportion did not attend university at all.

Despite the shortcomings of Winchester

College, which are doubtless more apparent in retrospect, Swanton must have valued his time there. Like 'old boys' everywhere he remained in touch, acting as steward in at least one annual London reunion of the 'two St Mary Winton colleges' (i.e. Winchester and New College Oxford) (*The Times*, advertisement, 23 April 1791). His fellow stewards included a future prime minister, Henry Addington (1757–1844), and his lifelong correspondent, George Isaac Huntingford (Bell, in Custance 1982, 354). Two years earlier, Addington had been appointed Speaker of the House of Commons and had ensured that Huntingford secured the wardenship of Winchester College. Although there is no evidence that such contacts played a significant part in Swanton's much humbler life, his world was awash with Wykehamists, and the influence and patronage they wielded were taken for granted.

OXFORD AND THE NEAR-PARALLEL LIFE OF PARSON WOODFORDE

A history of New College admits that it 'produced few men of distinction in the eighteenth century', pointing to 'difficulties at [its feeder school,] Winchester College, where the fellows ... consumed most of the income, leaving the masters few and underpaid' (Buxton & Williams 1979, 64–5). At the time, New College was essentially an Anglican seminary. Hence, a fellow used it 'as a base, from which he could hold curacies, and as a source of patronage, which he would ultimately supply him with a permanent living ...' (Buxton & Williams 1979, 64–5).

Swanton had done rather better at Winchester than his father, who had been elected to a scholarship (placed 8 out of 27) at Winchester College in 1725 aged 13, but was not a particularly successful pupil. Swanton *père* failed to grasp the glittering prize of a place at New College, and in 1731 he went on to Oriel College, Oxford. He left without a degree, which was commonplace for young gentlemen not wishing to enter the church or the professions.

Two years after Swanton matriculated, he

Table 1 Francis Wickham Swanton and James Woodforde at Winchester College and New College (NC), Oxford

FRANCIS WICKHAM SWANTON (1746–1823)

<i>Approx age</i>	<i>Event</i>
14	Winchester scholar
18	Admitted scholar New College, Oxford
20	Fellow of NC
24	Ordained deacon
26	Ordained priest
27	Graduated Bachelor of Civil Law
28	Dean of Civil Law, NC
29	Bursar (one of two), NC
31	Junior Poser, Winchester
33	Rector, Stratton St Michael, Norfolk, until death
36	Death of father
37	Married

JAMES WOODFORDE (1740–1803)

<i>Approx age</i>	<i>Event</i>
12	Winchester scholar
18	Admitted to NC (after bribe from father)
19	Scholar NC
21	Fellow of NC
22	Steward, NC
23	Graduated BA. Leaves Oxford
23	Ordained deacon. Curate
?	Ordained priest
27	Graduated MA
29	Poser, Winchester
31	Death of father. Unsuccessful bid for his livings.
33	Unsuccessful bid for Mastership of Bedford School
34	Resides again in Oxford. Sub-warden. Pro-proctor. Jilted, never marries.
35	Rector, Weston Longville, Norfolk, where he resides until death. Graduated BD

was elected a junior fellow of New College, qualifying him for a stipend and food and accommodation allowances. However, such advancement was customary and of no particular academic distinction (Buxton & Williams 1979, 63). Indeed, of the scholars elected to Winchester between 1759 and 1761 (including Swanton in 1760) no less than 14 became fellows of New College (Kirby 1888, 255–257). Thereafter, Swanton's career followed the well-worn track of many Oxford graduates of his day. The bursars' Long Books at New College (Fig. 4) show that Swanton became a bursar (one of three), a dean of civil law, and, as mentioned above, acted as a 'junior poser'. He is mentioned 16 times in the celebrated *Diary* of his more senior New College colleague, 'Parson' James Woodforde, whose career followed a similar path (see Table 1).

Swanton's name appears in the account of batells (provisions of food and other essentials) in the New College bursars' Long Books every year from 1760–79, when resigned his fellowship. His exact periods of residence cannot be determined, though clearly his allowances grew in line with his seniority. His residency at New College can, however, be judged by looking at the batells of Parson Woodforde, whose periods at Oxford are known exactly from his published *Diary*. This exercise suggests that Swanton was consistently resident for similar periods in each year of his fellowship. His New College testimonial for ordination to the priesthood states (no doubt formulaically) that he was up between 25 March 1769 and 25 December 1770, and presumably the two years before election to his fellowship were spent in Oxford. But between 25 December 1770 and 25 March 1772, three Hampshire rectors testified to his 'residence among us', and in May 1772 Lancelot Kerby, curate of Kings Worthy, vouched for Swanton's curacy of Headbourne Worthy from 'Midsummer day last' (ORO, Oxford Diocesan Papers, c. 189, c. 190).

The appointments Swanton obtained at New College from 1774–77 were, according to Chapter 14 of Wykeham's statutes, to be given to 'capable and discrete senior Fellows'. The positions qualified for relatively small emolu-

ments, and conferred no particular distinction; rather, they involved tasks to be performed to keep the college in business, and were farmed out to fellows residing for varying periods at Oxford to improve their chances of eventually obtaining a college living. The resulting 'musical chairs' is well illustrated by the ordination testimonials of Swanton, which show, for example, that from 1770–72 the senior fellow J Lucas went from being sub-warden to bursar, John Webber from dean of arts to dean of divinity, and Henry Bathurst (later Swanton's bishop in Norfolk) from dean of civil law to dean of canon law (ORO, Oxford Diocesan Papers, c. 189, c. 190). Swanton was one of those who in 1775 signed Woodforde's testimonial for his living of Weston Longville, Norfolk (Hargreaves-Mawdsley 1969, 279). A few years later it was his turn, when in August 1778 the warden and fellows presented him to Stratton St Michael, which he held for nearly 45 years (NOR/DN/REG24).

The process by which senior fellows of New College selected those awarded a church living is described by Woodforde in his *Diary*, when in 1774 he obtained the living of Weston Longville against competition from John Hooke by 21 votes to 15, after 'many learned and warm arguments started and disputed' (Beresford 1924, 142–144). Among those who voted against him was Swanton, then dean of civil law. However, there seems to have been no animosity. In the riotous celebrations that followed, they 'were exceeding merry in the Jun^r Common Room and had many good songs sung by Swanton, Williams Jun^r and Wight' (Beresford 1924, 142–144). The bursars' Long Books show that 'buying drinks all round' was routine: in 1775, when Swanton was a bursar, he was charged for 'a barrel of audit beer, but not the barrel'. In his penultimate year at the college he was 'in arrears to ye Wine Account' to the tune of £29.19s.6d. In his final year this rose to £51.0s.6d. – the entire income of a curate, even a fortunate one! No doubt the windfall of acquiring a 'living for life' obliged him, literally, to roll out the barrel. He could perhaps afford to be generous, as funds would soon begin to flow in from his living.

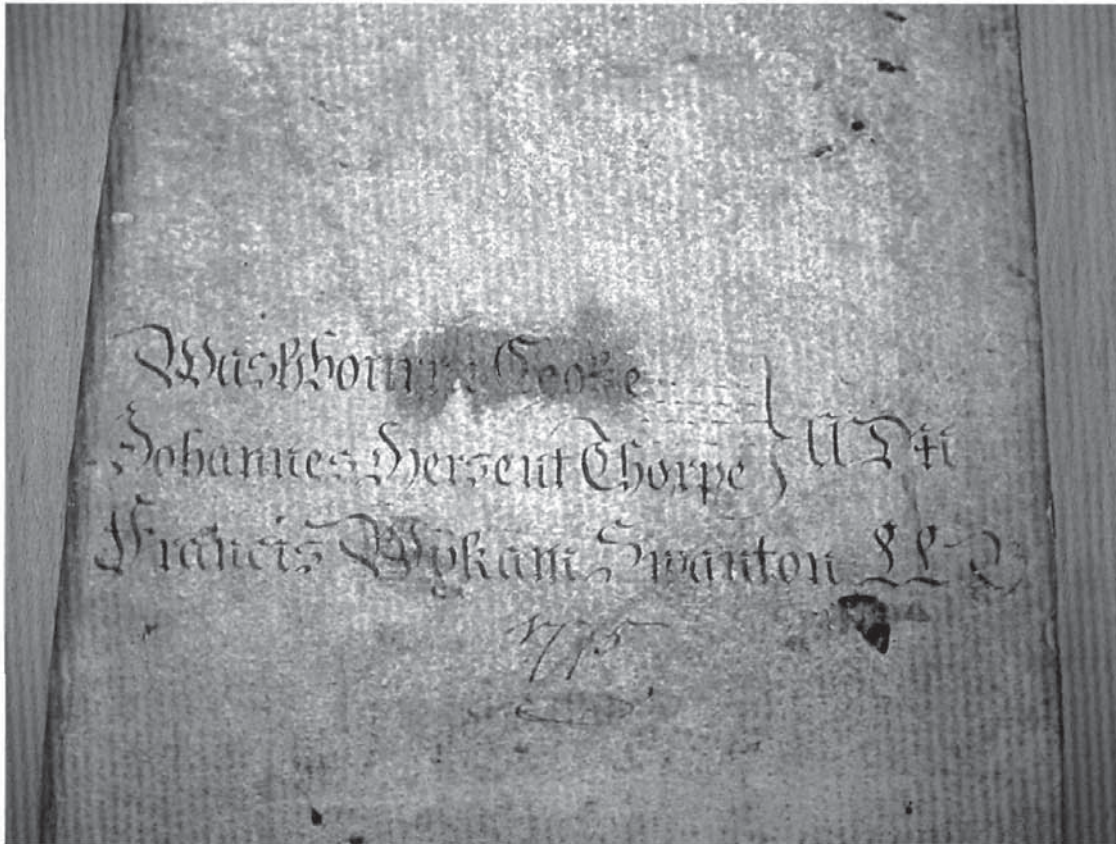


Fig. 4 New College, Oxford: the bursars' Long Book for 1775, emblazoned with the name of Swanton and the two other senior fellows who acted as bursars for the year (courtesy of the Archivist, New College, Oxford)

A BRUSH WITH FREEMASONS

A curious sidelight on Swanton's time at Oxford is that he seems to have striven to 'expose' freemasonry, then in its infancy in the 'modern province' of Hampshire, the Winchester Lodge having been founded in 1761 (Sermon 2003, 8). Viewed by freemasons as even more of a threat was Peter Gauntlett, a contemporary of Swanton's at Winchester and New College. Apparently a strong supporter of parliamentary reform, Gauntlett became a wine merchant, living at Easton, near Winchester, and later a clerk of the peace for Hampshire (Stephens 1961, 95). In a letter of June 1, 1773 from Dr Thomas Jeans, a member of the Lodge of

Albert, Oxford (and probably a fellow Wykehamist; Kirby 1888, 259), to James Heseltine, Grand Secretary to the Premier Lodge of England and Gentleman and Proctor of the Doctors' Commons, London, we find:

I recommend you to caution all Lodges in Hampshire ... not to admit Mr Peter Gauntlett ... into our Society as I am ... informed he is under an obligation ... of divulging our Mysteries. It would be also proper to be cautious of the Rev^d. Francis Swanton of Winchester without a proper Voucher for his taciturnity. (Library, Freemasons' Hall, London, GBR 1991/HC/5/J/5).

Ironically, Swanton was about to graduate as a Bachelor of Civil Law. If he had any ambitions

as a lawyer he might have been alarmed that such opinions were circulating around Doctors' Commons in the heart of legal London.

MINISTERING IN THE ITCHEN VALLEY

In the 18th and early 19th century, a clergyman might be a wealthy, well-connected socialite, or a poor man scratching a living from farming and schoolmastering. Swanton was somewhere towards the lower middle of this spectrum. He spent 50 years officiating at various times in the parish churches of Headbourne Worthy, Kings Worthy and to a much lesser extent Martyr Worthy and Easton, all situated in the Itchen valley above Winchester. And yet, as mentioned above, neither his memorial in St Mary's church, Kings Worthy, nor his short obituaries, mention this part of his life. Clearly, in Georgian and Regency Britain it was more prestigious to be a rector, no matter how absent or neglectful, than to serve an area, year in year out, as a journeyman curate – at least that was presumably the view of his only son, the Reverend Francis Swanton (1791–1871), who no doubt had a hand in the posthumous tributes.

Swanton's life as a curate in the Itchen valley, licensed or otherwise, began in midsummer 1771 at Headbourne Worthy, six months after he was ordained deacon by the Bishop of Oxford, according to a testimonial for his ordination as priest in June 1772. This was signed by the Reverend Lancelot Kerby, curate of Kings Worthy, which he served from 1768 until his death in c1797 (Pennell 1909, 102). His signature in the parish registers show that Kerby was also *de facto* curate of Headbourne Worthy from 1761–81, when no less than four individuals were absentee rectors (HRO, Incumbents of Headbourne Worthy, typescript), and of Kings Worthy during 1770–81, when Dr Richard Walker resided at his other living of Shorwell and Mottiston on the Isle of Wight.

After Swanton acquired his Norfolk living in 1779, he probably returned to Winchester, living in the house of his father and step-mother, which he subsequently inherited. This is now West Way House, 19 St Thomas's

Street (formerly Calp Street), identified as being 'bounded by St Thomas's Passage on the north' (HRO/34M91W/556/1, HRO/34M91W/496/6; Fig. 5). It was probably while living here that he met his wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Thomas and Mary Brereton of the parish of St Thomas's. His future brother-in-law, Thomas, the second son of that name born to the Breretons, was in the process of being ordained (HRO/21M65/E1/4/1198, 1236), his testimonials coming from the establishment of Winchester College (Joseph Warton, head master, George Isaac Huntingford, a future warden, and Charles Blackstone, a fellow). Brereton was one of those, more common in the 17th century, who was ordained without going to university, for 'Winchester was not one of the sees in which bishops refused to ordain non-graduates or admit them to benefices' (Ward 1995, xviii). He certainly valued his good fortune, commenting that his letters of ordination as deacon were 'so material to me, that I should not like to trust them by any conveyance whatsoever ...' (HRO/21M65/E1/4/1236).

After serving as curate at Littleton, qualifying him for ordination as a priest, Brereton followed Kerby in 1782 as curate of Headbourne Worthy, also serving Kings Worthy. Certainly Brereton was much more than a locum curate; the bold hand of a long note of 1785 in the Headbourne Worthy parish register concerning double fees for the burying of non-parishioners suggests a man involved in his work. However, soon both his curacies were held by Swanton. Two main events probably brought this about; in 1783 Swanton married Elizabeth Brereton, and in 1785 her father Thomas died, leaving the young curate Thomas head of the family (HRO/1785A7/1–2). After their marriage, Swanton and Elizabeth had gone to live in Martyr Worthy (NRO/DN/VIS/29a/3), where perhaps he hoped for a curacy – at least he took the occasional service. But from 1786 he had succeeded his brother-in-law as curate at both Headbourne Worthy and Kings Worthy. Perhaps Brereton knew that preferment was on the way, for in 1789 he obtained the rectorship of St Michael in the Soke, Winchester, in the bishop's gift (HRO/35M48/6/944). It was a



Fig. 5 West Way House, 19 St Thomas's Street, Winchester, the house occupied by Swanton's father and his stepmother Mary Marthalina (formerly Mrs Edmond Imber)

poor living, but perhaps enough for a bachelor, and it established him in his home town. Subsequently, the Swantons came to live in the 'Rectorial House of Kings Worthy', located in the tything of Abbots Worthy (Shurlock 2005) and may have been occupied by John Imber's widow Anne until her death in 1784.

The fluidity of ministering in the Worthys demonstrated by Swanton's life is even more marked in the overall record. From 1767–1823,

in addition to the curacies of Kerby, Brereton and Swanton, Headbourne Worthy was served by seven locum officiating ministers, some of whom held only one service, and Kings Worthy by no less than nineteen, a fair number of whom were schoolmasters. Clearly, just as many a young Oxford fellow served parishes within an easy ride of his college (Collins 1994, 21), so too in Winchester, which 'was [probably] a net consumer rather than a net producer of clergy' (Ward 1995,

xxvii), there was a band of clerics of various hues willing to do a turn in a nearby church.

THE NORFOLK RECTOR

The agricultural landscape of Norfolk contains a huge number of villages and hamlets, almost all of which have (or had) a church serving a small population. They are 'one of the signs of the great riches of Norfolk's past' (Pevsner & Wilson 1999, 17). The density of settlements is particularly high in certain areas, such as that around Long Stratton, which straddles the A140, 10 miles south of Norwich. Swanton's parish of Stratton St Michael, now part of the single parish of Long Stratton, covered less than 1000 acres and contained about 30 houses. Like many other parishes hereabouts, it was too small to sustain a clergyman. Stratton St Michael was in the deanery of Depwade, within which about half of the incumbents were non-resident, while many residents augmented their incomes with one or more curacies. Advowsons were not much of a prize for laymen, and several incumbents were their own patrons (NRO/DN/Reg 35–36 *passim*).

In Swanton's presentation deed, signed in 1778 by the warden of New College and senior fellows, the living is described as the 'Rectory and Parish Church of Stratton' (NRO/DN/PRE103). Unfortunately, this description is horribly ambiguous, since Stratton originally had three churches; St Mary's, located on the main road, St Michael's, more remotely located, but only a short distance away, and St Peter's 'not a bow-shot distant from it' (Blomefield 1805–1810, vol 5, 178). The last two were consolidated as early as 1449 and variously called Stratton St Michael with St Peter, or (rather strangely) Stratton St Michael and All Saints. The advowson was shared so that New College presented two turns and the duke of Norfolk one. At some time in the 18th century, and well before Swanton's time, the 'one turn in three' was sold to John Soley, rector of St Mary's (Blomefield 1805–1810, vol 5, 178), which became dominant when the two were joined in 1924 (NRO/DN/Reg 35–36).

As diocesan records confirm, the misdescription of the living in the presentation of 1778 meant that a year later Swanton was 'instituted anew' to what was described as the 'Rectory and Parish Church of St Michael & St Peter's [*sic*] of Stratton Long alias Long Stratton' (NRO/DN/PRE104). The mix-up suggests that neither New College nor Swanton were well-informed about the living: it was a gift of the college 'out there somewhere' in Norfolk, to be signed away with a piece of paper and a few pounds! The advowson was certainly complicated and ripe for a mix-up. The previous incumbent, Edward Hibgame, had been his own patron for the 'one turn in three', apparently having bought the rights from Soley or his heirs. Hibgame, like Soley, was also rector of St Mary's. Hence, during their incumbencies the two Stratton parishes were *de facto* joined. Since St Mary's was in the gift of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, the whole complicated business of the 'one turn in three' of the advowson may have invoked an 'Oxford vs Cambridge' tussle. In the event, the learned men of New College did not weaken, albeit needing to present Swanton twice. For him the whole episode must have been at least an embarrassment and at worst a huge bind, for rather than enjoying his new income in 1778 Swanton had to stay on at New College for another year, as the bursars' account of batells confirms.

A series of visitation returns in the Norfolk Record Office show that in 1777 Hibgame lived in nearby Tasburgh, but served Stratton St Michael himself (NRO/DN/VIS/27a/2). Replying to a standard query about the parsonage house, today part of a substantial dwelling, he commented '[it] is only part of a House, which I let to one poor family.' Terriers for the parish describe it as 'built of Wood & Clay & the covering is part Tile & part Thatch. Length 33 feet Breadth 15 feet' (NRO/DN/TER140/2/1–36). Hibgame also reported that he had failed to encourage any parishioners to present their children for catechism, while communion, held thrice yearly, attracted only four people. So, this was what a painfully honest, semi-resident rector could achieve at Stratton St Michael. Among the items bequeathed to

Swanton was a tithe map, drawn up in 1772 and quirkily marked 'for the use of the successor if he behaves well, and not otherwise' (NRO/PD99/18). It was perhaps a prelude to the hoped-for union of the two parishes under Caius, for it defined the arrangements whereby lands in the parish of Stratton St Michael paid tithes to Stratton St Mary, and vice versa.

The picture of Stratton St Michael painted by the visitation returns did not change during Swanton's time: it is variously described as having 'no families of note ... about 30 houses ... no dissenters ... one Quaker family, dues regularly paid ... the Communicants seldom exceed[ing] five.' During Swanton's tenure the parish registers show that Stratton St Michael was served by only two curates, both Cambridge graduates, namely William D'Oyley, from about 1781 until his death in 1814 (but only formally licensed in the previous year; NRO/DN/CUR/2), and Ellis Burroughs, rector of Tasburgh from 1804, who served from 1814 until Swanton's death in 1823 and beyond. He was the son and heir of the lord of Long Stratton Manor and, like Swanton, a JP. Throughout this period, the visitation returns were completed by D'Oyley, who lived at Hempnall two miles away, with the exception of the return of 1820 (NRO/DN/VIS/54/7), in Swanton's hand and probably completed by post, and that of 1801 in which Swanton is quoted; 'I reside in the Rectorial House of Kings Worthy Hants as officiating Minister of the Parish about 140 miles [actually, 200 miles] from Stratton St Michael. I am usually absent the parsonage house being only a cottage suitable for a labouring man' (NRO/DN/VIS/37/13).

Although Swanton obviously could not attend to his parish from the distance of Winchester, the curates he appointed, especially D'Oyley, displayed a long-term commitment. He probably looked after Stratton St Michael as well as some fully resident incumbents in other parishes, for one admitted on a visitation return: 'I do not know whether my Curate is licenced [*sic*] ...' (NRO/DN/VIS/34a/1), and another wrote: 'I have been unable accurately to ascertain the Extent of my Parish' (NRO/DN/VIS/37/13).

It is difficult to be sure how often Swanton visited Stratton St Michael; his signature can now only be found on a long series of terriers, drawn up at intervals in the summer months between 1784 and 1820 (NRO/DN/TER140/2/1–36). It therefore seems likely that at least every few years he visited the village. He may even habitually have visited his flock each summer. After the appointment of Henry Bathurst as bishop of Norwich in 1805, Swanton had a hotline to the top, since they had both gone through Winchester and New College, the prelate a few years ahead of the rector. They apparently also shared an interest in country pursuits; Swanton is regularly listed in the *Hampshire Chronicle* as possessing a game certificate, and it was well known that Bathurst had been scarred on the hand chasing badgers on St Catherine's Hill, Winchester, as a boy, and he was apprehended for poaching at Oxford (Blore 1944, 12).

A SECOND NORFOLK LIVING

In 1808, Swanton was presented by Sir Charles Rich to a second living at Hellington, a few miles east of Stratton St Michael. To avoid accusations of plurality, Swanton wrote to the warden of New College, his Wykehamist near-contemporary Samuel Gauntlett. A copy letter records that Hellington, which had been held by the previous incumbent 'on his own petition' (NRO/DN/REG35–36), had a value of £72, but 'being subject to a modus [money paid in lieu of tithes], the Income cannot be improved to more than 100£ p ann' (NCA 1021). Nonetheless, Hellington rose in value, in line with the trajectory of agricultural incomes, being valued in the *Clergy List* of 1845 at £126, with a population of 64 (compared to £388 pa and 273 inhabitants in the same source for Stratton St Michael).

Clearly, Swanton was concerned to avoid accusations of plurality. However, Gauntlett consulted the senior fellows in residence and assured him that he had 'paid all due respect to the College' and 'if, contrary to all probability, inquiry should be at any time made concerning this plurality, the letter I am now writing,

will no doubt be sufficient justification.' Subsequently, Swanton obtained a licence of non-residence for Hellington (and Stratton St Michael), which he justified on the grounds of 'the small value of the Benefice and being a stipendiary curate elsewhere [i.e. in the Worthys]' (NRO/DN/NRM/1).

FAMILY LIFE IN THE WORTHYS

Being the only son of a mother who died young, it seems that Swanton eventually sought and cherished a family. In June 1783, three months after mortgaging his small Buckinghamshire estate for £500 (BRO/D-W/12/19), aged 36, Swanton walked down the aisle of St Thomas's church, Winchester with Elizabeth Brereton, 32, though the licence gave her age as 21 (HRO/21M65/E14/1783 Swanton). It was less than a year after the death of his father, whose ledger stone, bearing the family's arms, lies in the nave of Winchester cathedral (Fig. 2). As mentioned above, she was the sister of Thomas Brereton, but, in the manner of the time, apart from being cited in the baptisms register, she disappears from the record until her death, aged 68, in 1819, when she was buried at Kings Worthy. The Breretons were a solid middle-class Winchester family – apothecaries, drapers/upholsterers, clerics – Elizabeth was a lady 'on the up', and (compared with the heady days of Swantons living in Salisbury cathedral close, and treading the corridors of Westminster) he was on the way down. There is no evidence that they had anything but a happy marriage.

Swanton had perhaps waited long for a bride, and within ten months of marriage Elizabeth bore a daughter, Susannah, who was privately baptised at Martyr Worthy. In succeeding years, at about three-yearly intervals, there followed Mary, Elizabeth and finally, in 1791, their only son Francis. Francis followed his father to Winchester and Oxford (Wadham College), becoming a chaplain (1828–60), tutor or subpreceptor (1815–29) at the school (Wainwright 1907, 27), a minor canon of Winchester (1818–1844), and also held several livings in the gift of the bishop.

Although the young Swantons started their married life in Martyr Worthy, they were soon living in the parsonage house of Kings Worthy, beside the river Itchen at the foot of Mill Lane, Abbots Worthy (Shurlock 2005). Swanton is returned as living in Martyr Worthy in 1784 and 1794 (NRO/DN/VIS/29a/3, 34a/1) and thereafter in Kings Worthy. The later date for Martyr Worthy was almost certainly an error as his game certificate for 1790 (HC, 4 October 1790) gives his abode as Abbots Worthy, where the parsonage house of Kings Worthy stood. In 1799 it was described as a 'Messuage of Brick and Tile – with a Barn and Stable [in] Timber and Thatch of an old construction, but in good Repair ... The Yard & Garden 2R[oods] ... The Watermeadow 1a 0r 0p ... The Drying Close 1a 2r 0p' (Stratton Estate Terrier: HRO/photocopy 407, f. 186). Swanton and his family (four children, a wife, and probably her sister Mary Brereton) lived in the parsonage house until March 1808 (they then lived elsewhere in the neighbourhood, but the location is unidentified). Subsequently, the newly-appointed rector of Kings Worthy, Dr William Short, took up residence for two years (HRO/19M78/PR5) before being called to Westminster as a tutor (subpreceptor) to Princess Charlotte, daughter of the Prince of Wales and his estranged wife Caroline of Brunswick. He returned to Kings Worthy in 1816 (the year in which Princess Caroline married, his reward being a prebendal stall in Westminster Abbey) to reside at the parsonage house, where he made substantial improvements (HRO/19M78/PR5). Swanton played his part by agreeing, with another JP, to approve the diversion of a footpath to avoid its running through the grounds of the parsonage house (HRO/QO31, 19 October 1818).

THE HURLOCK AFFAIR

It no doubt pleased Swanton to see his only son Francis follow in his footsteps, and even become a minor canon of Winchester (Swanton is recorded with the same preferment in Kirby 1888, p. 256, and in Sewell's

manuscript register, held by New College, Oxford, but this is almost certainly an error, as no corresponding entry can be found in the chapter books). But the joy of his life was probably the marriage in 1811 of his daughter Elizabeth, aged 21, to the Revd William Milton Hurlock, aged 27, in St Mary's church, Kings Worthy, where he had long served and the bridegroom was now curate (Moens 1893, 411). However, the event had been preceded by a period of uncertainty for Swanton, who, like all curates, was prey to that unfortunate happening, the death of the incumbent. As mentioned above, the new rector, Dr William Short, decided to be resident and between 1808 and 1810 lived in the parsonage house, until being called to Westminster to tutor Princess Charlotte. The obvious course of action would have been to ask Swanton to resume the curacy, but instead he appointed Hurlock at a stipend of £55 pa (HRO/21M65/E1/4/2497), granting him the glebe but not the parsonage house. It is clear that Hurlock had met Elizabeth Swanton and fallen in love. But he had no income, so his prospective father-in-law had stepped aside to allow him to be appointed curate. The evidence that Hurlock was being encouraged to settle down to life with a family is in his ordination papers for deacon, which include a testimonial dated September 1810 to the bishop of Winchester from the bishop of Salisbury, apparently in his own hand; '... It was his intention to have gone to Cambridge this October to have applied to the study of Divinity, & not to have been a Candidate for Orders till midsummer. But this offer of being settled under the auspices of M^r Short induces him to drop his intention ...' (HRO/21M65/E1/4/2383).

Fisher, presumably aware of Hurlock's desire to wed, was given leave by the bishop of Winchester to examine him for ordination as deacon, and within six months he and Elizabeth had wed. Two years later the bishop of Winchester ordained him priest; his nomination was supported by three clergymen, including his father-in-law, Swanton (HRO/21M65/E1/4/2497). He had joined the 'family firm'.

There are two other strands to this story. First, between 1805 and 1817 Fisher was in charge of the education of Princess Charlotte, and must have known – even recommended – Short as her subprecentor. Second, the officiating minister at Hurlock's wedding was Sir Charles Rich, who, as already mentioned, was also the patron of Hellington. How he and Swanton became acquainted is unclear, though Rich lived as a young man at Shirley House, near Southampton, as well as at Rose Hall, Beccles (<http://www.stirnet.com>). After Swanton's death, the Hellington living was presented by Sir Charles to Hurlock – a fine example of patronage in action! (NRO/DN/REG35–36).

Hurlock served Kings Worthy for only two years, after which it was 'business as usual', Swanton acting as curate (with others) until Short's return from Westminster in 1816. In 1814, Swanton had finally been licensed as curate to Headbourne Worthy, 43 years after his first officiation at the parish church! That same year, Swanton was licensed to the curacy of Easton with a stipend of 50 guineas, which he called 'very liberal' (HRO/21M65/E3/1), though he seems rarely to have served there. Clearly, the local church community rallied round at a time of change to set the young married curate on the right path and to keep his father-in-law busy, suggesting that the older man took a good service. In 1814 Hurlock left Hampshire for Essex, first taking a curacy at Great Dunmow and four years later becoming lecturer in his father's parish at Dedham (<http://eagle.cch.kcl.ac.uk:8080/cce/index.html>).

AN ARBITRATOR

During the 19th century, the experience of commissioners for tithes and enclosure demonstrated that administrators could often settle disputes better than courts. In fact, informal arbitration had long been used by individuals. In the early years of married life Swanton was kept busy settling a boundary dispute with the earl of Portsmouth concerning the Over Wallop estate (HRO/15M84/5/14/5). It was

several years before the matter was settled, by arbitration – an experience Swanton later put to good use himself when he arranged arbitration for Thomas Hall of Preston Candover, a JP and local landowner (Sheail 1979, 11, 96; HRO/44M69/F14/1/37). The correspondence between Hall, and Swanton at 'Worthy' sheds some light on the cleric's character. In a letter of 1 June 1791, the writing sprawls across the page as he complains with some force about difficulties in making the necessary arrangements:

... it was with no little surprise that I rec'd from Mr Hodges that letter ... nor was my astonishment less (when in consequence of a letter written to Mr Bonham (by order of the assignees) who I understand has y^e whole management of y^e business) to find that Mr Bonham had come past to Mr Faithfull to say the true reason of his asking to defer y^e arbitration was because they c^d not get their witnesses together – why sh^d not Mr Bonham have given this reason at first ... (HRO/44M69/F14/1/37).

A week later all was in place: 'Mr Swanton presents his compliments to Mr Hall, Wednesday in y^e Whitsun Week being y^e day now fixed on by all y^e Parties concerned in y^e intended arbitration. Mr S hopes he shall meet Mr Hall on that day at y^e Swan Alresford by ten o'clock.'

The 'Mr Faithfull' mentioned in the letter was William Faithfull, Swanton's neighbour from at least 1788, of Kings Worthy Court, Kings Worthy (which still stands) (Clegg & Neyroud 1999, 159). Faithfull was a Winchester scholar, became an attorney and founded a successful firm which, among other things, were agents for the duke of Bedford, the Whig candidate in the controversial 1790 Hampshire election (Faithfull 1791). The firm was subsumed into law practices which have come down to the present day as Shentons, a Winchester firm of solicitors (Sermon 2003, 40). It is noteworthy that Swanton acted as a clerk to the turnpike trust for a stretch of road between Popham and Winchester (now the A33), which was championed by the duke of Bedford, seated at Stratton House, East Stratton, Hampshire (HRO/149M89/R4/6109).

JP AND MAN OF COUNTY BUSINESS

In 1795, Swanton was appointed to the commission of the peace in Hampshire (TNA/C202/182/5). Doubtless influence was important, and perhaps his legal training at Oxford and the fact that his father was a JP and deputy lieutenant were sufficient. Certainly it was not uncommon for a clergyman to be appointed. Between 1793 and 1801, commitments recorded in the calendar of prisoners in Winchester's bridewell show no less than 24 clergymen in action, about ten of them in any one year (HRO, Calendar of Prisoners, Q9/1 passim, and photocopies). Their status is starkly apparent from the list of attending JPs given at the front of records of the quarter sessions held four times yearly in Winchester Great Hall. First comes the name of the chairman, the *custos rotulorum*, whose role was titular; then one or two aristocrats; then a sizeable list of 'esquires', the landowners of the county; and finally up to a dozen or so 'clerks'. One great qualification of Swanton's was that he lived a short ride away; the records of the quarter sessions show that from time to time he attended merely so that the sessions could be adjourned to a time when the full team would be there.

Being a magistrate brought considerable stature in a county society hidebound by class. The job was not onerous, but then it was not remunerated. The sessions were a mixture of administrative and criminal proceedings. Often they would be adjourned to a nearby hostelry, including the Fleur de Lys (now The Wykeham Arms), where a sub-committee would consider some issue of the day. Swanton, with other JPs, performed a variety of tasks: helping to drum up recruits for the navy, (HC, 17 May 1795), fining a miller for a false return of corn prices (HC, 23 April 1796), fixing carriage rates for goods within the county (HRO/Q3/12/157). He committed people to the sessions for relatively minor offences – being a rogue and vagabond, stealing a gallon of beer, or a shirt and a worsted stocking, suspicion of stealing hempen sacks and a bill-hook, failing to appear at the sessions, etc.

Between his appointment in 1795 and 1801,

Swanton committed an average of two people a year, falling slightly to 1.5 per annum in the last 20 years of his life. No doubt he had other unrecorded business, such as acting as a lone JP, or with another, or at the petty sessions, but the job was scarcely a full-time occupation. However, of the 23 Hampshire JPs in action during 1793–1801, 12 had a lower rate of committal. Only six were more active, notably Isaac Moody Bingham, who locked up no less than eight people yearly in the fractious seaport of Gosport, for transport on to the court at Winchester. Thomas Obourn was twice as active as Swanton, while his clerical colleague Edmund Poulter pulled in more than three people a year to face the bench. Poulter was perhaps ideally qualified, having been a member of Lincoln's Inn and a barrister before taking holy orders.

WHAT SORT OF LIFE WAS IT?

Swanton's life was indelibly marked with 'Winchester and New College Oxford', a club he entered from his early years at school. Its members were received into 'the mysteries' as scholars, followed by long years at Oxford, as today, as much a seminary, a club and an employment agency as a university. This biographical study has illustrated in some detail how the system worked and how, for the Anglican church, it solved certain logistical problems in return for a lifelong career for participants.

Yet being a Wykehamist *per se* did not bring great rewards. In order to pursue the life of the country gentleman in Hampshire, which was apparently his main aim, Swanton had to appoint a curate to Stratton St Michael, and act in the same capacity himself in the Itchen valley. Being a mere curate in this setting did not seem to impair his social status – at least it did not prevent him from being appointed a magistrate. Swanton's was a life that no doubt required careful management. His income from his property was modest and he was, for example, very pleased to gain an income from Easton at a time when he had lost Kings Worthy to his son-in-law. As we have seen, Stratton St Michael was served by two long-term curates, both of whom

served elsewhere in the locality. In Hampshire, this pattern was mirrored by Swanton serving for long periods as curate of Kings Worthy and of Headbourne Worthy, also officiating at Martyr Worthy and Easton. It is doubtful whether his Norfolk parish would have received any clerical presence had it depended on a resident. Equally, the upper Itchen valley parishes depended on the flexibility of people like Swanton to 'cover' for rectors who had other plans, as well as coping with the vagaries of life. And by arranging parish duties accordingly, a son-in-law like William Milton Hurlock could be set on the path to the life of a minister. Even so, nothing was certain about the set-up, and the decay of a parsonage house, or the death of the incumbent could throw well-laid plans into disarray.

Many critics have wagged a finger at non-residence and plurality, and Parliament has passed various acts in an attempt to curtail the practices. There were certainly many abuses (yet, ironically, plurality and non-residence are now commonplace in the Anglican church). But would Swanton have served a more useful life if he had been compelled to live in Norfolk, when all his family and scholarly connections were elsewhere? As Smith has pointed out in a study of the 1810 return, which mainly concerned non-residence, 'what really mattered to the majority of ... parishioners was the character and capability of the clergymen with whom they had to deal rather than their status ... There is certainly no evidence [in Hampshire] of the ... widespread dissatisfaction that might lead us to conclude that the system ... was in serious difficulties' (Smith 2004, lxii). Like many clerics of the period, Swanton could only secure an income from patrons he knew (New College and later Sir Charles Rich). He was more a victim of a system than a miscreant. Would he have been a better clergyman if he had led a narrowly clerical life, without inputs from his other roles, as JP, landlord and arbitrator? Or did these activities harden him and make him less of a friend to the poor, the sick and the needy? It is impossible to know, though Swanton's life illustrates the fact that the respectable middle class were a remarkably tight social group, probably none

more so than Wykehamists. Only his wife, daughter of an upholsterer cum draper, could be said to come from outside the pale.

The life of Francis Wickham Swanton and his family is of historical interest for various reasons. It challenges the picture of the struggling curate and the heartless, pluralist absentee rector; in this case at least, the rectors and curates of Hampshire and Norfolk seem to have arranged their lives rather well. It presents a picture of the 'journeyman curate' at work in the countryside and also as one of the cleric magistrates whose presence on the bench was a common feature of county administration. Biographical studies of the 'middling sort', like Swanton, are important, particularly in the history of the shires and cathedral cities like Winchester. Their lives have often fallen between those of aristocratic and plebian heroes, and they deserve more attention.

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Abbreviations used in the text

Buckinghamshire Record Office [BRO]
Hampshire Chronicle [HC]
Hampshire Record Office [HRO]
Archives, New College, Oxford [NCA]
Norfolk Record Office [NRO]
Oxford Dictionary of National Biography [ODNB]
Oxfordshire Record Office [ORO]
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England [RCHME]
The National Archive (Public Record Office) [TNA]
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