

WILLS OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE CLERGY
IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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The 32nd volume of Browne Wills' MSS treasured in the Bodleian Library contains a transcription of wills made by Buckinghamshire clergy in the first half of the 16th century, and exclusive of such testaments as may be available at Somerset House, a selection in abbreviated form is herewith presented. In these documents dictated under the shadow of on-rushing death the religious element comes out with a forcible pathos. They breathe the serene atmosphere that followed the strife of the Roses and reveal the personality of their authors, men who passed their days far from the current of national excitements and free from a need, not far distant, for a mental re-adjustment to a changing outer world. They lived in an age when human beauty and courtesy went hand in hand with squalor and horror, and when the little flowers of humanity got small contribution, except in the Church, and among people animated by religious ideals.

The wills were proved in the Archdeacon of Buckingham's court, which claimed jurisdiction over all executors or administrators: admitted them (under bond) to the execution of their trust and audited their accounts. The testators invariably acknowledged their allegiance to the mother church at Lincoln by a small bequest and duty to the church which they served, by a benefaction to the high altar or to particular images or Lights. Frequently money was assigned for the endowment of an intercessory service for the testator's soul on each anniversary of his death, and a detailed account of the funeral services, three in number, the placebo, dirige and the requiem, having already appeared in "Bucks Records" (XI. 322) it need not be repeated.

The redactor has endeavoured to give all the names of the persons mentioned with notes elucidating, when

possible, their identity: all bequests of furniture or stock when particularly described: any special quaintness of diction or grotesqueness of spelling. But every 'give' and 'bequeathe' has not been tediously transcribed, nor the conventional prefaces.

The prefix "Sir" attached to the names of these priests was a title of respect commonly given to the clergy at an early date. In the "Persones Prologue" of the *Canterbury Tales*, it appears:—

"Sire preest, quod he, art thou a vicary"?

A bachelor of arts was entitled to be entered in the buttry books of his college as "Sir," the accepted equivalent of the academical "Dominus," and therefore Archdeacon Nares remarks "as most clerical persons had taken the earlier degree, it became usual to style them "Sir."

The symbols S.R. in the notes indicate a quotation from Canon J. H. Salter's edition of the *Lincoln Subsidy Roll of 1526*. (Oxford Historical Society. LXIII). The letters q.m. and q.t. respectively denote assessment at a tenth and a fifteenth respectively. The arithmetic of the scribe is most erratic: he blunders impartially for and against himself.

SIR RICHARD HALLEY, of Stowe

The testator closes an unusually verbose preamble with a desire to be buried in the church porch. . . . Imprimis, I will there be an image of the Blessed Trinity set in the porch in the blind window with an image lyke a prest pictoryd under the same having a chalyis in hys hand with my name wrytten under ye fote for a remembarnce xxs. To Lincoln viijd: to by ij clothes¹ for the high autler of Stow, one to hang before ye high autler and another to hang before ye tabyll²

¹ The ij cloths of silk or other rich material bequeathed for covering the altar and re-table were inventoried by the commissioners of 1552. *Edwardian Inventories for Bucks*, p. 108.

² Above the altar was sometimes a table or reredos of painter's or carver's work, but more often a hanging of the same suit as the frontal and called the upper-frontal.

iijs. ijd.: to the lyght of St. John Baptist ijs, to Sepulchre Lyght ijs: to the Rode Lyght ijs: to the Lyght of ye Blessed Trinity iiijs. ijd.: to ye reparation³ of ye bells vjs. viijd: to ye torches⁴ ijs: St. Nicholas lyght ijs. For a trentall of masses to be celebrated at the Freers⁵ aulter in Oxford callid Scala Celi with diriges if it can be Vs and ijs vjd for the masse pence. I will everie month during ye yere be celebrated for my sowle five masses of the Five Wounds at Scala Celi, if it be at Oxford, London or Northampton, after my departing with so many diriges and ye masse pence, xxvijsjd. Also everie month day to be celebrated for my sowle "missa de requie(m) cum placebo et dirige" and iij tapers⁶ before the Trinity and the St. John's Lyghts, and for the performance of the same I bequethe a pound of wax and for the dirige masse with the oblations for ye hole yere Vs. vd. Everie month to V well-disposed pore folk that will come to the chirch and each saie ye Sauter of our Blessed⁷ Lady for my sowle and others I am bound to praie for iijd. I bequethe to Richard Halley⁸ demy of Magdalen in Oxford, six sylver spoons and likewise to the pepyll dwelling in his howse. To the fraternitie of Osney Xs viijd desiring them to receive me as a brother⁹ of the Religious: that they will say masse for my sowle; to the howse of Bittlesden¹⁰ vjs. viijd for the same favour: to the

³The Edwardian inventory schedules "iiii great belles and one saunse bell."

⁴Great serges or yellow tapers made of a mixture of resin and wax were kept by the wardens ready for use of all parishioners who required them. They varied in cost between 2½d. and 3½d. per lb.

⁵Oxford was the head of a custody of Grey Friars, which included Northampton among its members. (*The Grey Friars in Oxford*, p. 68.) Scala Celi, probably the Lady Chapel—

"In that place a chapel ys.
Scala cely callid byt ys
In honor of our Lady."

The Stacions of Rome, Early English Text Society, vol. XV., line 156.

⁶Generally ¼lb. in weight.

⁷A name given to the rosary on account of its containing the same number of Aves as there are psalms in the psalter. (*N.E.D.*)

⁸The College register does not include a demy bearing the name.

⁹Such a bequest from a secular cleric to win a place of remembrance in the daily offices of a convent was not uncommon.

¹⁰The Cistercian Abbey of Biddlesden—see *V.C.H.*, I., 365-9.

howse of Burcester¹¹ for the helth of my sowle and those of my fader and mother William and Johanna, and my brothers John and William¹² and sister Alice vjs viijd. Bequests to Mr. Simon Tedde¹³ and Mr. Nicholas Cartwright¹⁴ of Magdalen Colledge, Oxford. I will that iiij m be distributed for the sowle of George Harryson, late parson of Crowton.¹⁵ Master Thomas¹⁶ to be Overseer to whom I give a pore reward viz., my horse that I used to ride upon. After my debts and bequests are discharged, the residue to pore and needie scollars in Oxford. Witnessed by Thomas Langstone, Nicholas Cartwright, Mag. Robert Harris,¹⁷ Mag. Johannes Hart,¹⁸ cum aliis.

Dated "xxiii daie Maie quo die obiit in vespere 1520."

By presentation of the Convent of Osney the testator was instituted 15 July 1494 to the Vicarage of Stow, and though neither his name nor that of his namesake appear in the College register the bequests in the will suggest association with Magdalene College, Oxford.

¹¹ Bicester an Augustinian priory founded c. 1185 by Gilbert Basset for a prior and eleven canons.

¹² A William Halley was rector of Kelsey St. Nicholas and Massingham in the co. & dio. of Lincoln at the Subsidy in 1526.

¹³ Tedde or Todde, M.A., Magdalen College, Oxon, 1507: one of the clergy celebrating requiem masses in the College chapel (Register i, 147).

¹⁴ Also of Magdalen College, B.A., 1507; M.A., 1514; R.D. 1523; D.D. 1536. Lecturer in Natural Philosophy 1517, in Moral Phil. 1518; Bursar 1522. One of the learned men consulted by Henry VIII, about his divorce; Master of St. John's hospital, Banbury, 1541; disputed with Latimer 1554; d. 1558. (ibid 146-7).

¹⁵ Croughton, Northants.

¹⁶ Thomas Langstone, who probably became Lessee tenant of the confiscated lands of Osney in Stowe (Willis's *Hundred of Buckingham*, 280).

¹⁷ Mag. Robert Harrys, Vicar of Stone 1517 and rector of Beachampton 1526, died 1551.

¹⁸ Mag. Johannes Hart, rec. of Oakley, valued at the Subsidy £6 13s. 4d. less to Dom. Ralf Borne, curate, £6 6s. 8d. In proc. et sin. 10s. 8d. In Visit. episcopi 12d. Repar vis. 8d. He supplemented a scanty net income by serving as stipendiary curate at Dunstable for the priory. On the other hand he might, perhaps, be that same John Hert or Hart who became perpetual fellow of New College in 1513 "and was afterwards an eminent schoolmaster." (*Festi Oxonienses*, edn. Bliss, Vol. I., 51.)

SIR ROBERT FLEMING pres. Amersham 10 December, 1522, by the crown, vice Robert Gilbert M.A. resg: P.R. 14 H. V111.

In the name of God, Amen. ye fyrste day of June in ye yere of our Ld God 1526 I Robert Flemming, prest, make my last will after ye manner: Fyrste & principally I bequethe my soul to my Redeemer beseeching him to accept it of His grace & favour, praying our Lady Mother of mercy & ye holy company of hevyn yt my request be accepted: I bequethe my bodie to be bur. in the chancell of our Lady Church of Agmondesham: and to the mother churche of Lincoln xljd: Item towards the sute¹ of red vestments yt ye psh. intendeth to by xxs: to the Abbey of Messynden my bybyll² and common-place book containing in vi volymes and ye concordance: to my singular good lord of Lincoln my sylver pott: to my lord of Missenden my velvet Typpyt³ lyned with sarsenet: to Master Roger Wykston my chamlet⁴ coat for a tokyn. Item to Sir Christopher Roode,⁵ Vicar of Chesham, my velvet typpyt furred with black cony and my portewys⁷ of ye large prent in ii volyms: to Sir Thomas Allen C. of Aylesbury sermones⁸ pomerii in ii volyms and ijds of blake sarsanet & my gowne of London russet: to Sir William Baston⁹ my portewys in ij small volymes: to Sir Richard of

¹ "A sute" included a chasuble with appurtenances and a dalmatic and tunicle for deacon and sub-deacon. The Edwardian Inventory of 1552 scheduled a "suet of red velvat" (p. 51).

² The text of the Bible with Cardinal Hugo's comments: pr. in 6 folio volumes at Nuremberg 1504.

³ A garment usually of fur or wool, covering the shoulders, or neck and shoulders: a cape or short cloak, often with hanging ends (N.E.D.) Sarsenet, a silk material first made by the Saracens.

⁴ Descended from Leicestershire family of Wyggston "divers whereof were merchants of the Staple: which Roger being a lawyer I suppose" (Dugdale, Warw. 25): High Sheriff of Warw. & Leic. 33 H. VIII.: Seneschal of Bittlesdon priory, salary 40s. at the Valor. Will 1542. 15 Spert.

⁵ Made of angora goat which superseded in XVI. century the use of camel's hair mixed with silk. (N.E.D.)

⁶ Inst. 29 July, 1492, by consent of Leicester abbey.

⁷ A portable Breviary in the medieval church. (N.E.D.)

⁸ Sermones Pomerii by Pelbartus de Temesvar pub. 1502 by Heinrich Gran of Hagenau.

⁹ Boys capella (Chesham Bois). Dom. Willemus Baston, cap. £5 6s. 8d. Fifteenth 7s. 1d. S.R.

Chesham¹⁰ a postyll ye wh. Sir Weden the Canon hath in his keeping: to Sir Thomas of Pen¹¹ my short gowne: to Sir Robert of Chalfont¹² sermons ij: to Sir Thomas Chantre¹³ prest there sermons of ivorie ynlaide: to Sir John¹⁴ of ye next Chalfonte confiteor loaning to the parson of great Hampden¹⁵ sermones novi thesauri¹⁶ in ij volyms. Item to the Colledge of Eton Opera Sancti Thomae de Aquino & opuscula: to Thomas Alesye¹⁷ opera bona venturi: to Sir Richard Bolde my best capp and my best sherte: to Sir John Hody¹⁸ my seconde cappe and secund sherte and a black gowne lyned with satyn of Cypress: to Sir Milo Garnet¹⁹ a boke: to Boys chirch my new sharples: to William, Bachelor Scoler, my black gowne unlyned: to my god-children in Agmondesham apeece xijd to pray for my sowle.

Item to my cousin Robert Fellow²⁰ of Ellisborow a fether bede and bolster, a pelowe, a tester, a pere of blankytts, a pere of shetts, a coveryng of tapestry work, & half a garnish²¹ of pewter. Item to every prest yt shell be at my dyrige and ye mass on ye morrow xijd. & to them that be not at dyrige vijd. to the prests that bere me to the chirch xijd. apeece: to the priest wh: shall succeed me for the discharge of all my concerns &

¹⁰ Sir Richard Bolde. After Thomas Cheynys acquisition of Chesham Bois advowson, the chaplains were not instituted. Postyl, a book of homilies or a commentary. (*N.E.D.*)

¹¹ Mag Thomas Bayley pr. by David and Sibilla Pen. Patent Roll 29 May, 1553. The curate's name was Thomas Porter (Mr. Ragg's *Schedule of Tenths and Fifteenths* in *Records X.*, 409).

¹² Sir Robert Semar, cur. of Chalfont St. Peter, stipend vijl. (S.R.).

¹³ Sir Thomas Langshaw (or Loncashire, in *Records X.*, 408), stipend vijl. (*ibid.*). "the Whaplode chantry which standeth in the churchyard and there is within the parish 500 houseling people, and there is none other to help the Vicar but the chantry priest." (Com. of H. VIII.) Langshaw still Incumbent at the suppression was assigned a pension of 6l. 13s. 4d.

¹⁴ Johannes Person, cur. of Chalfont St. Giles (stipend vijl. (S.A.).

¹⁵ James Unwin, rector, stipend viijl. (*ibid.*).

¹⁶ Novi Thesauri Quadragesimales, pub. 1518 by Johann Knoblouch of Strasburgh.

¹⁷ Possibly Mag Thomas Walesie, rector of Denham in 1526 (S.R.). The bequest should read "Vita Christi secundum Bonaventuram," by Ludolph, prior of the Carthusians at Strasburg, pr. 1481.

¹⁸ A cleric bearing the name was instituted R. of Drayton Beauchamp 5 Nov., 1547, vice Mag. Humfrey Darell res.

¹⁹ V. of Oakley worth vi. (S.R.).

²⁰ Stipendiary curate of Ellesborough vi. vis. viijd. (S.R.).

²¹ A set of vessels for table use. (*N.E.D.*)

the house I did let down. The rest of all my goods to my kinsman John Rice after funeral & other debts discharged provided alwise that a portion of my goods be at ye determination of my good lord of Lincoln & Roger Wykston my good Master & frend to be distributed for the health of my soul: executors John Rice and Roger Wykeston: Supervisor my Lord of Lincoln.

Witnessed by Sir Xtopher Roode, Sir Thomas Allen, Sir William Baxton, Roger Bennet²², Alice Gargate & others.

SIR RICHARD RATHBONE, Rector of DENHAM by presentation of the Convent of Westminster, xxii daie of Dec. A° D. 1522 to be buried in the chancell of Denham chirche. Bequests to the High Aulter jd. to Lincoln ijd: to buying of books at Denham XXs. For one prest to syng for me, my fader & mother at St. John aulter in the chirch afore-said for the space of two yeres iiiijl. vjs. viiijd, for wine bred & wax for hym iijs. iiijd. Residue to Mag. Thomas Walshe¹ & Master John Durant myn executors to bestow for helthe of my sowle and I give to Mag. Thomas Walshe for his labor xiijs. viiijd, and to Master Durdant Xs. Witnesses Thomas Walshe, Dom. George Curle.² The testator d. 26 Dec. 1522, and is commemorated by a memorial brass on the N. side of the chancel. (Lipsc. IV. 452).

²²A colleague of Wykeston bailiff and collector of Biddlesden abbey: salary at the Valor xls.: witness and overscer of the will of William Balon or Bennet of Amersham, pr. at Lincoln 3 Nov., 1535.

¹Thomas Walshe, M.A., Oxon, 17 June, 1521. Possibly the dean of C.C.C., Oxford, who inflicted a public flogging upon a scholar of the college (aged 19) laying a stripe for every line of the verses he had written against the mass, and as the lines were probably numerous and Walsh a zealous Catholic, the youth's fortitude must have been sorely tried (O.H.S. xxv 96).

²Probably a transcriber's misreading for Dom. Johannes Culle, rector of Water Stratford (S.R.): also pr. by Sir Humfrey Browne to Wolston Magna 2 April, 1559.

SIR PERCIVAL DUVAL, of Soulbury.

. the xxvi daie of April A.° Dom. 1528
 my body to be buried in the chauncel of all hallowes in
 Soulbury before the image of our Lady on the right
 hand of the high aulter: to the mother chirch of Lin-
 coln xijd: to the sepulture Light iijs. ivd., to the Rood
 Light 11js ivd. and to the Torch Light iijs. ivd. and to
 the bells¹ iijs. ivd. The residue of my goods to Thomas
 Johnson and John Shrewsbury myn executors, and each
 of them to have vjs. viiij. for their labor and I desire
 Richard Lovett² gentylman and John Poynter³ gentyl-
 man to have the oversight and for their paynes Xs.
 each. I will my lands and tenement in ye towne and
 fields of Sulburie purchased of John Norris with ye
 meadow bought of William Charles and Isabel his wife,
 paying yerely 10s 4d for a cotage orchard and garden
 plott, I bequethe ye tenement late of Norys to Thomas
 Johnson myn executor paying 11s. viiij. quit rent to
 Master Lovet or such as may be chefe lord, and the
 cotage and orchard as it lyeth together to myn other
 executor John Shrewsbury and his assigns paying jd
 quit rent to John Chamber and the residue of the said
 10s. 4d. myn executors shall yerely keep one obit for my
 sowle, my frends and all christian sowles in the church
 at Sulburie and to have at the obit 2 prests besides the
 Vicar and 4 clerkes at dirige and ye morrow ye said
 prests to synge 3 masses one of the Five Wounds,
 another of Our Lady the 3rd of requiem, the said
 Thomas and John being present to give the prests vjd
 apece and ye clerks ijd. The residue shall be bestowed

¹The Edwardian inventory of 1552 schedules "vj belles with the saunce bell in the steeple: ij hande Belles" (p. 79). Handbell no. 1 would be used by the bedesman whose duty it was to cry obits, that is say give notice of them in the village and ask for the prayers of the faithful. No. 2, i.e., the houseling bell used in taking the sacrament to the sick and dying. Testators of sufficient means were careful to have the funeral offices repeated on the anniversary of their deaths, and were termed an obit.

²Lord of Discomb, the principal manor in the parish. Lovet and Thomas Hobbs the succeeding Incumbent (pr. 10 April, 1528) executors of the will of Alice Millet (1535) who bequeathed "to the building of the church ther vl." Richard Lovett was son of Thos. Lovett and was living in 1535. (See *Lovett of Bucks*, p. 9).

³Tentatively a progenitor of the John Poynter who married Sarah d. & h. of Edward West, Serjeant at Law, of Marsworth, Bucks. (Clutterbuck, Herts, IV., 536).

in bred and ale amongst poor folk yerely. My dede of feofment for the performance of my last will shall remain in the hands of myn overseers and other feoffes provided alwaies yt anything in my present will afore specified for lack of lerned counsel at ye tyme which should or might stand against law, right and good conscience or any other things left out for lack of cunning leasure I remit the performance to my good lord of Woobern⁴ heartile desiring him to oversee this.

Witnessed by Richard Lovett, John Poynter, Sir Francis Pollard⁵ and others.

Probate granted last day of April 1528.

Soulbury." Dom. Percival Dunwall. VIIJ1. q.m. xvjs" (S.R.).

In March 1499-1500 the rectory had been appropriated to Woburn Abbey, and a Vicarage ordained to which the Convent presented four times (Wm. Smith's register). By some oversight Duvall's name is omitted in Lipscomb's list of the Vicars of Soulbury (iii.459).

We may close these transcriptions of rectorial and vicarial wills by quoting a schedule of the earthly possessions of a contemporary unbeneficed priest. "Inventory of the goods of Dom. William Willersley, capellanus de Leckhampstead taken by Robert Bowden, apparitor, 12 daie of April A.D. 1521. Imprimis, the Beste gowne 18s. Item an olde gowne 6s. 8d. Item an olde jake 16d. (a short and close-fitting upper garment worn by men and women). Item, Hosen 1s. A dublet 3d. A hatte and a cappe 3s. 4d. An olde shete on hys Bedd for a Tester, viijd. An olde broken coffer 6d. An olde typpyt 16d. ij half postells 16d. ij Mary's postells 12d. A pare of olde shetts 16d. A coverynge of a Bedde 20d. Another Mary 8d.

Sum Bonarum in predicto inventario xvijs ixd.

⁴ Thomas Hogeson, elected 1499.

⁵ Pr. to Chalfont St. Peter 11 April, 1513; valued xl. in 1526.

The authors of these wills were fortunate in dying before the spoliation of the churches which they loved by the wild men of the Edwardian regime. Edward Spenser, Puritan, though he was, denounced the Blatant Beast because he ravaged the monasteries "regarding not religion nor their holy heast," and because

"From thence into the sacred church he broke,
And robb'd the Chancell, and the desks downthrew,
And altars fouled, and the blasphemy spoke,
And th' images, for all their godly hew,
Did cast to ground."