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*The Poor, the Pious and the Privileged:  
Towards a Social and Cultural Topography of  
Parish Participation in Late Medieval London*

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Who was a parishioner? Traditionally, the answer was a geographical one: those people who lived within the bounds of a parish. Several years ago, Clive Burgess asked a different question that focused on a more functional analysis of the term: who ran the parish and had responsibility for achieving certain goals?<sup>1</sup> Inspired by an unusual memorandum containing sixty names arranged in a pyramid among the parish records of St Mary at Hill in the city of London, Burgess concluded that 'although we use the term "parishioner" loosely, contemporaries may well have approached it with important distinctions in mind'.<sup>2</sup> This analysis prompted a response by Katherine French. While not disagreeing that parish leadership and policy was in the hands of a small number of men, French examined the unusually detailed records from St Margaret Westminster, which allowed her to characterize the term 'parishioner' differently. In these records, the discernible contributions of elite and non-elite men, married and single women and voluntary contributions for funerals by a wide range of parishioners fostered a broader vision of what it meant to be a parishioner. The records of Westminster notwithstanding, Burgess was right that in most parish records 'wives, younger or dependent family, apprentices, resident servants, and the very poor' remain elusive as named individuals, as do the working poor, whether non-liveried members of guilds who did piece work, or non-citizens.<sup>3</sup> This historiographic debate grew out of insights that come from familiarity with the archival sources of London-area parishes. Gary Gibbs' own work also noted the widespread evidence in London's parish records of references to poorer people who appear in a variety of ways, doing a variety of activities.<sup>4</sup> Such parishioners might not always gain much attention, especially when historians are on a search

<sup>1</sup> C. Burgess, 'Shaping the Parish: St Mary at Hill, London, in the Fifteenth Century', in *The Cloister and the World: Essays in Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey*, ed. J. Blair and B. Golding (Oxford, 1996), 246–85; K. L. French, 'Rebuilding St Margaret's: Parish Involvement and Community Action in Late Medieval Westminster', *Journal of Social History* 45: 1 (2011), 148–71.

<sup>2</sup> Burgess, 'Shaping the Parish', 259.

<sup>3</sup> Burgess, 'Shaping the Parish', 260.

<sup>4</sup> As, for instance, G. G. Gibbs, 'New duties for the Parish Community in Tudor London', in *The Parish in English Life, 1400–1600*, ed. K. L. French, G. G. Gibbs and B. A. Kümin (Manchester, 1997), 163–77.

for specific items or popular pastimes, but the involvement of the poorer members of the parish in the wider community was an essential aspect of institutional operations in the late medieval period. This observation does not take us back to the original, older position that merged all parishioners into one social category, rather this essay examines a multifaceted social model of the parish, paying close attention to the various ways poorer folks engaged in the corporate body.

Given the pervasive nature of the parish in late medieval society, inhabitants constantly engaged with it in a variety of activities. So, defining participation based on parish records is problematic for several reasons: firstly, we have only rough estimates of the parish population as a whole; and secondly, we use financial contributions as a proxy for all forms of participation, creating a narrow understanding of participation. This is necessary because of the distinctive nature of churchwardens' accounts, documents whose idiosyncrasies Clive Burgess, Gary Gibbs and Katherine French have given a great deal of thought to, but whose purpose was largely financial.<sup>5</sup> The inherent biases of such sources are not easily overcome. The spiritual value of the widow's mite notwithstanding, those who gave the most appear the most frequently in these documents and thus seem to be the most ardent parishioners. Tracking parish participation, and hence defining a parishioner, is a matter of recordkeeping, which favours those with money and status. Participating in parish culture occurred through a variety of actions and it is an important issue because of its implications for the significance of parishes in the late Middle Ages and the process of Reformation.

Generally, the medieval poor are only visible as individuals in court records. More commonly they are defined as a group in wills, which highlights an aspect of their parish involvement, even if it does not tell us who they were. With the prayers of the poor thought to be especially efficacious, the 'honest poor' were a routine part of funerals. Better-off testators wanted them in the funeral procession and to pray for their souls. They were often rewarded with new clothing and a meal. For example, in 1447, mercer John Goodson, of the parish of St Martin Vintry left thirteen poor men thirteen russet gowns and hoods and

<sup>5</sup> G. G. Gibbs, *Five Parishes in Late Medieval and Tudor London: Communities and Reform* (London, 2019); G. G. Gibbs, 'London Parish Records and Parish Studies: Texts, Contexts, and the Debates over appropriate Methods', in *Views from the Parish: Churchwardens' Accounts, c.1500–c.1800*, ed. A. Foster and V. Hitchman (Cambridge, 2015), 63–88; C. Burgess, 'London Parishioners in Times of Change: St Andrew Hubbard, Eastcheap, c.1450–1570', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 53 (2002), 38–63; C. Burgess, 'Pre-Reformation Churchwardens' Accounts and Parish Government: Lessons from London and Bristol', *EHR* 117: 471 (2002), 306–32; K. L. French, *People of the Parish: Community Life in a Late Medieval Diocese* (Philadelphia, 2001).

thirteen poor women smocks and sheets. He also expected their prayers.<sup>6</sup> The importance of the seven works of mercy made Londoners seek out the poor of their parish and incorporate them into the community, even if they did not name them.

In addition to prayers, labour was another way the poor contributed to the parish community. Many necessary tasks, most notably laundry, were low status and poorly remunerated. Typically, women's work, such as laundry, was seasonal and low paying and the laundresses would have needed other means of financial support. Consequently, laundresses had a reputation for moving in and out of prostitution.<sup>7</sup> Despite the Church's qualms about women touching items involved in the Eucharist, parishes routinely hired women to do their laundry.<sup>8</sup> While sometimes female parishioners took on this task as an act of piety, in other cases, parishes hired professional laundresses. Alice Small for example served as St Mary at Hill's laundress from 1510 to 1514.<sup>9</sup> Raker was another low-status job. At St Peter's Westcheap, the raker earned 2s. a year for carrying out the soiled rushes and dust of the church.<sup>10</sup> John Ashfelde, who held the position in 1447–48, certainly would have needed to augment his salary with other work.<sup>11</sup> A similarly low status job was chasing dogs out of the church, a task Westminster gave to 'Father' Yan in 1503 and 1504.<sup>12</sup> The boys and men who laboured with the skilled artisans offer another glimpse into the world of the working poor. As parishes built and maintained their buildings, they hired skilled artisans from the world of lesser craftsmen. These men employed labourers on a per-day basis. Charlotte Stanford has found that while there was stability among the skilled artisans, labourers, who earned half that of skilled artisans, might only work for a week or two and move on.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>6</sup> LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS9171/4, ff. 209r–209v.

<sup>7</sup> R. M. Karras, *Common Women: Prostitution and Sexuality in Medieval England* (New York, 1996), 54–5; D. Herlihy, *Opera Muliebria: Women and Work in Medieval Europe* (New York, 1990), 4–5; C. Rawcliffe, 'A Marginal Occupation? The Medieval Laundress and her Work', *Gender and History* 21: 1 (2009), 147–69, (at 155–9).

<sup>8</sup> R. Gilchrist, *Norwich Cathedral Close* (Woodbridge, 2005), 16, 240; T. M. Izbicki, "'Linteamenta altaria': The Care of Altar Linens in the Medieval Church", in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, ed. R. Netherton and G. R. Owen-Crocker (Woodbridge, 2017), 41–60, (at 55–6); K. L. French, *Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion after the Black Death* (Philadelphia, 2008), 29–33.

<sup>9</sup> LMA, P69/MRY4/B/005/MS01239/001/002, ff. 308r–367v.

<sup>10</sup> LMA, P69/PET4/B/006/MS00645/001, ff. 142r, 133v, 149v, 168r, 203v, 218v, 223v.

<sup>11</sup> LMA, P69/PET4/B/006/MS00645/001, f. 223v.

<sup>12</sup> Westminster Archive Centre (hereafter WAC), Westminster E1, ff. 484–85; 512.

<sup>13</sup> *The Building Accounts of the Savoy Hospital, London, 1512–1520*, ed. C. Stanford, Westminster Abbey Record Series 8 (2015), 17–18.

While on the one hand these tasks were remunerated (and so not, strictly speaking, done only for pious reasons), working for a parish might have been a preferred labour opportunity, because of its potential spiritual benefits. Burgess has argued that 'parish involvement was a good work that could affect the laity's salvation. The range and quality of parochial contributions, many of which were optional, facilitated a broad-based "self-help salvation"'.<sup>14</sup> And because most of these low status tasks offered only temporary employment (and, hence, temporary and incomplete entries in churchwardens' accounts), we do not know whether labourers performed similar duties for multiple parishes, whether they were parishioners of the church they served, or even if they were welcome in church. The example of Maria, alias Mariot, Harington a common bawd, 'infamous in the neighbourhood' is a case in point. In 1486, the churchwardens of St Martin Vintry brought suit in the Commissary court against her for sitting in a seat during Mass.<sup>15</sup> Was this an issue about sitting in the wrong seat or a case about not belonging in church? But the parish may well have tried to hire their own to keep them from falling into crime. For many years, St Andrew Hubbard allowed Margaret Kene, a fruiterer, to pay a modest sum to sell her wares by the church door, giving her a ready customer base and tying her to the parish.<sup>16</sup>

Some parishes had the resources and strategies to help the poor rooted in their parish. In Westminster, the Assumption Guild owned several tenements in Our Lady's Alley, which they leased to alms people, most of whom were women. The combination of guild, civic and parish records allow us to see the progression of some of these individuals from involved parish member to alms recipient. The Fishers lived on Tothill Street, the poorer section of town, where John Fisher had a victualing licence.<sup>17</sup> He was once cited for broken pavement outside his tenement, for which the Abbey waived the fine, presumably because he agreed to fix the problem and it was his first (and only) citation. He twice stood pledge for two different men charged with fighting.<sup>18</sup> He served as a parish collector for two of the bi-monthly collections held in 1502 to raise money for the new

<sup>14</sup> French, 'Rebuilding St Margaret's', 159 referring to: C. Burgess, "'A Fond Thing Vainly Invented": an Essay on Purgatory and Pious Motive in Late Medieval England', in *Parish Church and People: 1350–1700*, ed. S. J. Wright (London, 1988), 56–84; see also P. Heath, 'Between Reform and the Reformation: the English Church and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 41(1990), 647–78 (at 672).

<sup>15</sup> LMA DL/C/B/043/MS09064/002, f. 163v. We are grateful to Shannon McSheffrey for this citation.

<sup>16</sup> *The Church Records of St Andrew Hubbard Eastcheap c.1450–c. 1570*, ed. C. Burgess, London Record Society 34 (1999), nos. 4, 6, 17, 19, 22, 24.

<sup>17</sup> Westminster Abbey Muniments (hereafter WAM), MSS 50770, 50771.

<sup>18</sup> WAM, MSS 50771, 50773.

church building and in 1508 his wife Lettice purchased part of a pew.<sup>19</sup> Despite their modest means, this couple was embedded in visible and reputable ways in the town and parish. Yet, when John died in 1515, Lettice was unable to support herself and turned to the Assumption Guild for help. She remained in charity housing until her death in 1525.<sup>20</sup> James Kyrke's wife purchased a pew in 1464, buried a child two years later and twenty-two years later was listed as still the wife of James, but was living as an almswoman in the guild's seventh tenement.<sup>21</sup> For his part, James Kyrke never appears in the records, leaving us to wonder at the relationship that lay underneath these sparse records.

These examples allow us to provide some parameters on how the poor might interact with their parish and what kinds of behaviour would make them welcome or not. Those known and of good repute fared better than those who were not. The ability to work or to have worked also helped. Nonetheless, the poor are still difficult to see in parish records in more than an anecdotal way. The rest of this essay will examine participation in four London parishes: St Peter Westcheap, St Stephen Coleman Street, St Botolph Aldersgate and St Martin Outwich. What makes these parishes notable is that their churchwarden's accounts can be used in conjunction with other sources about who was living in these parish. Knowing something of a parish's population throws different light on who appears as contributors to the parish, and who does not, and allows a greater understanding of the local society.

#### St Peter's Westcheap

St Peter's Westcheap, located at the corner of Cheapside and Wood Street and across from one of the Eleanor Crosses, was dominated by goldsmiths. There was an altar dedicated to the goldsmith's patron saint, St Dunstan, and in the 1430s and '40s, when the earliest churchwardens' accounts survive, at least one of the churchwardens was usually a goldsmith.<sup>22</sup> The churchwardens' accounts are frustrating; they start out promisingly enough in 1433, but break off in the late 1440s and do not start up again until 1514. What is more, the manuscript is chaotic; it appears to have been dropped and reassembled out of order, with sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wardens using blank pages from the fifteenth-century portion of the manuscript. In the middle of the gap between the 1440s

<sup>19</sup> WAC, Westminster E1, ff. 449r, 550r, 554r.

<sup>20</sup> WAM, MA/15/01/001, f. 10v. (St Mary Guild Accounts, 1515); WAC, E2 (1516 and 1525).

<sup>21</sup> WAC, Westminster E1, ff. 31r, 63r; WAM, MA/15/01/001, f. 9r. (St Mary Guild Accounts, 1487).

<sup>22</sup> LMA, P69/PET4/B/006/MS00645/001, ff. 167r–68r; see also G. G. Gibbs, 'London's Goldsmiths and the Cult of St Dunstan, c.1330–1530', in *Intercessors between the Wealthy and the Divine: Art and Hagiography among the Medieval Merchant Classes*, ed. C. T. Camp and E. Kelley (London, 2019), 179–203.

accounts and early sixteenth-century accounts are two donation or collection lists, which contain fifty-five and forty names respectively.<sup>23</sup> The occasion for the first collection is raising money for new liturgical vestments 'ye new sewte of blew clothe of gold' and the second is 'toward the making and feneshynge of owre vestre wt ye chambres'.<sup>24</sup> Both lists are undated; the first one is the work of two named churchwardens, Richard Hadley and Robert Rambald, for whom we have no accounts. Internal evidence correlated against wills, puts the first list to 1470–71 at the latest and the second collection list at 1478–79.<sup>25</sup>

The lists are interesting because they provide us with a snapshot of the parish and the names of parishioners beyond the wardens and auditors. Anyone working on churchwardens' accounts has had to grapple with how to read lists like these: do we read them as individual or household contributions? The vestment collection list uniquely notes the contribution of Thomas Capron *and his wife* (our emphasis), who gave 9s. 6d. to help make the vestments, the 'wives and bachelors' also apparently came together as a group and gave 2s. 11d., and John Brett's wife, not his widow contributed, but John apparently did not. The lists suggest a catalogue of householders rather than individuals. We also cannot know for certain the dynamics behind contributions. Couples may have disagreed over the need to contribute, but does that make it less of a household contribution when married women had no legal and financial autonomy? Except for John Brett's wife, however, the individuals' named were both individuals and heads of households, even if those households were single-rooms in a tenement or headed by single or widowed women.

If we think of each name as representing a household then the first list, with its fifty-five names could reasonably be taken as almost 70% of the parish. The chantry certificate puts the population at 360 communicants in 1548, so it was probably somewhat less a century earlier, when the collection for the blue vestments was created.<sup>26</sup> The second list with only forty names is a smaller

<sup>23</sup> LMA, P69/PET4/B/006/MS00645/001, ff. 225v–26r; 226v–227r.

<sup>24</sup> LMA, P69/PET4/B/006/MS00645/001, ff. 225v; 226v.

<sup>25</sup> For the vestment collection John Luke, girdler contributed, but died Jan 1472. For the vestry collection, both Joan (also known as Alice?) Bangor and Joan Darby contributed, but died in 1477. Given the death dates, the collections are likely c.1470 and 1478–79. The nineteenth-century vicar of the united parishes of St Peter Westcheap and St Matthew Friday Street, W. Sparrow Simpson (1827–98) dated the second list to 1475. LMA, DL/C/B/004/MS09171/6, f. 204r (will of John Luke), DL/C/B/004/MS09171/6, ff. 210v–211r (will of Alice Bangor); DL/C/B/004/MS09171/6, f. 212r (will of Joan Darby); and, W. S. Simpson, 'On the Parish of St Peter Cheap, in the City of London, from 1392–1633', *Journal of the British Archaeological Association* 24 (1868), 248–68 (at 251).

<sup>26</sup> If one assumes four to five people per household, then the list suggests a minimal parish population of between c.220–275 associated with the donation list for the suit of vestments – and, of course, others lived in the parish too. Given that the city slowly

proportion, maybe 50%, but still a significant portion of parish households. The range of amounts donated to the vestment collection is broader than the vestry collection. The smallest donation was just 2d., while the largest donation was 53s., from the parson. Two contributors are noted for their labour: one Robert Blaksmith, who did 'diverse work don to ye church' and William Morton, a mercer, who made the vestments. The broad range in contributions suggests a broad range in social and economic circumstances of contributors and, in fact, that is what the evidence demonstrates. While twelve (22%) of the fifty-five contributors to the vestment fund were goldsmiths, and there were also three mercers, two grocers and two silk women; most of the people on the list come from the lesser guilds or their occupation was not noted. Among members of the lesser guilds were two carpenters, two cordwainers, two pinner, a barber, a capper and a fruitwife. Those with no occupation typically gave the least, between 2d. and 4d. Both the major and minor guilds were represented, but some of the names on the list give an impression of being on the margins of poverty. Their contributions, however, suggest a level of commitment and the absence of 30% of the parish suggest a level of volunteerism behind these contributions. The social profile of contributors to the vestry project is narrower, but it is likely this was not the first round of fundraising for this project. There were ten goldsmiths (two of whom gave on the previous list), three mercers (but only one repeat), the same two silk women (although they had died and their contributions were bequests) and three, not two, grocers (although the same two grocers from the previous collection are on the vestry list). Among the minor guilds, the same capper from the vestment collection participates in the vestry collection, as does one of the two carpenters, one of the two cordwainers and one of the two pinner. The cutler and tiler are, however, new. So, while there are fewer men from the minor guilds, they are the more stable group than those from the elite guilds. Those without any recorded occupation change completely from the first to the second list and there are also fewer of them, which suggests a model of patronage in which goldsmiths mattered more and members of the minor guilds mattered less; while still others were more marginal. So, these lists have a broad social spectrum, but not many women as individuals and not many people from outside the guilds.

A random rental for a house in this parish provides the names for some of the parish's residents from the perspective of records produced by other administrations.<sup>27</sup> The house, located on Wood Street, called the 'Key on the

but steadily increased population after the Black Death, we assume that the parish population in c.1448 would have been less than 1548. *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificates, 1548*, ed. C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), no. 99.

<sup>27</sup> WAM, MSS 24566–24621; 23075–23167.

Hoop' had a brew house on its ground floor and several rooms above, which were occasionally rented out individually. In 1470, the likely year of the first collection, one John Frost was leasing the entire building.<sup>28</sup> He had leased this for a few years and would continue to until 1472.<sup>29</sup> Frost did not contribute to the vestment fund and indeed, he may not have lived there. Since there are no churchwardens' accounts between 1448 and 1514, we have no way of knowing if this was typical of his relationship to the parish. After Frost moved out, William Cobbe leased the brew house. He was apparently already a member of the parish as he had contributed to the vestment fund. By 1476, he had moved again and he did not contribute to the vestry fund.<sup>30</sup> With Cobbe's arrival, the house was gradually leased room-by-room. Two contributors to the vestment fund would later occupy this building: John Brett and his wife would live there from 1476–79 and Joan Hundell the fruitwife, would live there in 1490.<sup>31</sup> However, none of the seven tenants in the house in 1478–79, including the Bretts, donated to the vestry fund. What these admittedly thin findings suggest is that those living in one-room households are less likely to contribute. The occupants of this house may represent some of the 30% of the parish who did not contribute.

Looking at the tenants of the house on its own, we see some of the problems confronting the poorer segment of the population, who either had no guild connection or performed piecemeal work for a liveried guildsman. They tended to move regularly, making it difficult to set down roots. Even William Cobbe, who had enough wherewithal to rent the brew house, fits this pattern. Of the tenants in the house in 1474, when the house was again leased room-by-room, only one a widow named Joan Kynrell was there in 1478.<sup>32</sup> The impression is one of a great deal of tenant turnover.

#### St Stephen Coleman Street

Domicile insecurity and the problem of parish involvement is apparent if we look at the parish records of St Stephen Coleman Street. It was located at the foot of Coleman Street, which ends at Moorgate.<sup>33</sup> Like many urban parishes, much of the income raised by St Stephen Coleman Street came from rental properties owned by the parish.<sup>34</sup> Some of these rental properties variously described as houses, tenements, or chambers, were along Fore Street, by London Wall and in three alleys leading off of Fore Street: Glene Alley, Nonely Alley (known as

<sup>28</sup> WAM, MSS 23083; 23085.

<sup>29</sup> WAM, MSS 23081–23088.

<sup>30</sup> WAM, MSS 23090–23093.

<sup>31</sup> WAM, MSS 23093–23097; 23115.

<sup>32</sup> WAM, MSS 23091–23095.

<sup>33</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001.

<sup>34</sup> French, *People of the Parish*, 107–14; Gibbs, *Five Parishes*, chap. 3.

'Edithes' Alley in the early records) and Chimney Alley.<sup>35</sup> There is a lot of variation between the terms 'tenements', 'chambers' and 'houses'; analysis of tenancy patterns suggests that tenements and chambers were often synonymous.<sup>36</sup> The single-rooms rented out by St Stephen's appear to be in buildings on Nonely Alley and Chimney Alley.

The pre-Reformation accounts start in 1486 and end in 1507. The bookkeeping system changes a couple of times over the course of the nearly twenty years of accounts, so we are only looking at the rental information from 1485–1500: idiosyncrasies in how rooms and tenants are listed means they should probably be taken as only impressionistic. At the beginning of the accounts, St Stephen's rented property to twenty-one or twenty-two people on Chimney Alley and fourteen or fifteen people on Nonely Alley. In 1492, the numbers dropped, to between eight and twelve people on both alleys. So, over the fifteen years in question, the parish was renting to between twenty-four and thirty-seven people in these two alleys most of whom probably leased single-room occupancies.

Of the total number of tenants renting chambers, twenty were women and thirty-three were men, making women 38% of the tenants. Men generally had longer tenancies, on average about two years, with Morris Walshe, a labourer having the longest tenancy of thirteen years. Among the women, tenancies on average lasted only about a year and a half. Some may have married and moved out, but others were living unstable lives. Not only were some elderly and in ill health, many likely had catch-as-catch-can employment and might have chosen to move rather than pay the rent.<sup>37</sup> Indeed the churchwardens collected rent quarterly not annually and the accounts show many tenants late in arrears and the parish carrying debts for rents over many years.<sup>38</sup>

Two women renting in Nonely Alley, who stayed for longer than the average, are worth considering, because their experience suggest something of the challenges facing women living in these small households and why parish participation in a way visible to us would have been difficult for such women. Emma Halle appears first in 1490 as renting a chamber in Nonely Alley for 3s. a year.<sup>39</sup> In 1491–92 she pays the same amount, but we learn that the chamber

<sup>35</sup> After Robert Nuneley, a merchant, rented 'a great place' in Edithes Alley for £3 6s. 8d. annually between 1486 and 1496, the alley became known as Nuneley (or Nonely) Alley. LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 17r.

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the choice of term seems to vary from year to year, with some years the scribe preferring chamber, and others tenement, or even house.

<sup>37</sup> For several cases of tenants skipping out on rent see B. A. Hanawalt, 'Reading the Lives of the Illiterate: London's Poor', *Speculum* 80:4 (2005), 1067–86 (at 1071–2).

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 35r.

<sup>39</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 30r.

above her is empty.<sup>40</sup> The next year, 1493–94, she is still in Nonely Alley, but renting with Margaret Spencer, and the two women paid 6s. together.<sup>41</sup> That they are listed together suggests the two women have pooled their resources and are sharing the house.<sup>42</sup> Margaret and Emma would continue to live as roommates until 1501. Then, Emma's 'house' was 'void' and Margaret Spencer was paying 3s., presumably for only a chamber.<sup>43</sup> The accounts never identify these women as widows, which suggest they are single women. Other parishes also show women renting rooms or houses together. In 1483–85 two widows rented a house from the parish of St Mary at Hill.<sup>44</sup> Men also shared living quarters. For three years John Vayse shared a chamber in Chimney Alley with John Glasedale. The latter, however, moved to Glene Alley in 1492–93 and although he pays no more in rent, he no longer shares his room with Vayse.<sup>45</sup> It might be that Glasedale married, or just improved his lot enough to gain a better living situation.

The churchwardens' accounts occasionally provide information on the tenants' occupations or status. Most of the women are only designated as widows. The men have a variety of low-level occupational designations, such as water bearer, fletcher, pinner, cordwainer and labourer, with labourer being the most common.<sup>46</sup> Other notations suggest other reasons why the residents could only afford such meagre housing. Several tenants were elderly women and for a while there was a deaf woman and a lame woman among the tenants.<sup>47</sup>

The parish hired many of the labourers who rented from them.<sup>48</sup> John Olyf, who first rented a chamber on Chimney Alley and then moved to Nonely Alley, worked for the parish helping to repair tenements.<sup>49</sup> When he disappears from the list of tenants, he also ceased to appear as a parish employee. Morris Walshe, also worked for the parish.<sup>50</sup> Both men are named in the accounts and paid directly; they were not associated with any artisan. This suggests that they performed odd jobs and that their employment may have been a form of charity – perhaps to help keep the men stable and rooted in the parish.

<sup>40</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 46v.

<sup>41</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 53r.

<sup>42</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, ff. 98r, 101v.

<sup>43</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, ff. 124r, 126v.

<sup>44</sup> *The Medieval Records of a London City Church*, ed. H. Littlehales, EETS O.S. 125 and 128 (London, 1904–05), i, 115.

<sup>45</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 46v.

<sup>46</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, ff. 20v, 35r, 48v, 50r, 51v, 61r, 67r.

<sup>47</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, ff. 17r, 86r, 106v, 115r.

<sup>48</sup> See, for example, LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, ff. 29r, 35v.

<sup>49</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, rents: ff. 16v, 24r, 30v, 38r, 46v, 53r, 59r, 63r; employment by the parish: ff. 25r, 32r, 32v, 39v, 61r.

<sup>50</sup> LMA, P69/STE1/B/012/MS04457/001, f. 48v.

The rental information for both people living in these two parishes provides some evidence of the working poor as individuals and the routine presence of the poor in the parish was probably taken for granted, which is why it is so hard to see them in the parish. Our perspective is that of the churchwardens' accounts, not necessarily the people in the parish themselves. It is exceedingly difficult to find the perspective of an individual in late medieval London, but wills offer a good approximation.

#### St Botolph without Aldersgate

An unusual will in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury for a freemason named George Sympson, challenges the perspective of most parish records. Sympson's will dated to 1535 individually names the poor in his parish, hints at their living circumstances and shows us that he knows something of their lives.<sup>51</sup> Sympson lived in the parish of St Botolph without Aldersgate. In 1548 this was a large parish of over 1,000 communicants.<sup>52</sup> The church was located just outside the city walls. Sympson drew up his will in early 1535 and it was proven three months later on 20 June 1536. By all accounts, Sympson was an enthusiastic parishioner. He had a pew, was a member of the parish's Trinity guild, bought old tile off the parish and contributed to the building of the new church roof.<sup>53</sup> When he died, he left the parish and the guild £5 each for 'reparations and other good deeds', and while the money was in the hands of the church and guild wardens, 'x or xij of the moost honest neighbours of the same parishe' were to supervise the distribution of this money.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to his wife, Margery, and two cousins, George's will includes forty-eight beneficiaries, most of whom are women (54% or 26/48). They appear to be largely from his neighbourhood and parish. Among his beneficiaries are six couples, seven maids (who were to use this money for their marriages), four labourers, three women described as 'Goodwife' (only one of whom has a husband listed among the beneficiaries), six women described as 'mother', six wives (but not their husbands) and 'the poor woman who keeps Godds gardyn'.<sup>55</sup> Most of these beneficiaries receive their bequest with someone else. Typically, husbands and wives receive a bequest together, but so do pairs of women: Goodwives Alyn, Lodar and Hyggyns' wife, each shared their bequests with their maids; Mother Pope and Shepard's mother-in-law shared a bequest, as did the labourers Batty and Banks; Goodwife Toft and William Waterberar; and an unnamed armorer and Joan, formerly Dosse's maid. These groupings likely

<sup>51</sup> TNA, PROB 11/25, ff. 277v-278r.

<sup>52</sup> *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate*, ed. Kitching, no. 48.

<sup>53</sup> LMA, P69/BOT1/B/013/MS01454/48.

<sup>54</sup> TNA, PROB 11/25, ff. 277v-278r.

<sup>55</sup> TNA, PROB 11/25, ff. 277v-278r.

reflected living arrangements. Older women lived together, widows lived with maids, male labourers shared quarters and some men and women lived together with no descriptors of their relationship. George Sympson's neighbourhood and associates were men and women we rarely see associated with parish involvement. Sympson knew who lived with who, their employment history and marital status. He was not only committed to these beneficiaries as individuals, he wanted his wife and overseers to acknowledge them too. He instructed his widow and overseers to 'jointly sett together in the hall where my wife dwells and that they shall sende from place to place and from man to man, and so one by one to call all the men and women that I have gevyn or bequest any money or other thinge to [and] pay theym of my said bequests'.<sup>56</sup> There is no way of knowing how atypical Sympson's interactions with and commitment to his neighbours and fellow parishioners was, but it is unusual to see it in a will. As is typical of wills, we only see the tip of what were no doubt, long-standing relationships and personal conflicts. Sympson's will, for all that it does not tell us helps us move beyond what was typically the purview of the parish officials, by providing complementary the evidence that does appear in churchwardens' accounts.

Nonetheless, some of Sympson's beneficiaries appear in St Botolph, Aldersgate's churchwardens' accounts. The accounts start in 1466 and continue intermittently up into the seventeenth century. Awkwardly, they are on individual rolls, providing opportunity for damage and loss. The accounts for 1532-33, contains a list of forty-three men and one woman who contributed to repairs to the church's roof.<sup>57</sup> The list was originally longer but this roll is damaged. Even if it were complete, at best it only represents about a quarter of the parishioners, but it gives us a list of parishioners from just before Sympson drew up his will. Five men on this list, including one of Sympson's cousins, are either beneficiaries and/or officials of his will, including Richard Batty, a labourer, who gave one of the smallest contributions of 2d.<sup>58</sup> He also worked for the parish that year, repairing windows, probably as part of repairs made to the church roof. Four others on the donation list and members of their household received bequests from Sympson: Andrew Bullock gave money to the fund and his wife received a bequest; Peter(?) Byrcheham, also gave money to the fund and Sympson remembered his maid, Isabel Byrcheham; William Shepard contributed to the roof and his mother-in-law, received a bequest and, lastly, Mother Dosses contributed the largest sum of 6s. 8d. and her former maid shared a bequest with a nameless armorer. If the amount given is any reflection of wealth, only Mother

<sup>56</sup> TNA, PROB 11/25, ff. 277v-278r.

<sup>57</sup> LMA, P69/BOT1/B/013/MS01454/ 47.

<sup>58</sup> We have not included his cousin in this count of four men.

Dosse was in the top tier of donors.<sup>59</sup> Looking at the rest of the churchwardens' account from that year other beneficiaries were recorded: William Green, who owed the parish for selling ale in the churchyard two years earlier, Robert Jackson's wife, who with her husband rented a tenement from the parish and were also in arrears and Robert Waynam, a former churchwarden, an ironmonger, who until this account had also owed the parish money. Of the forty-eight beneficiaries, who are not relatives, eleven of them or their household appear in the churchwardens' accounts for this one year. Some of them appear to have had financial difficulties, which in Waynam's case was probably temporary, but it was likely a way of life for the Greens, Roger Battey and Dosses' former maid given their low-status and low-paying employment. Nonetheless, they were involved in the parish in ways that suggests some long-term relationship with the community.

Accounts just before and after 1532–33 have no special collections or projects; the accounts list only a few names, and none appear in Sympson's will as beneficiaries. It is notable that Sympson's burial instructions, to be buried by his pew door, along with his £5 gift to the parish and instructions for a month's mind, do not appear in the churchwardens' accounts. Sympson's will implies he expected some resistance to his bequests, perhaps because his family resented his neighbourly interactions. He writes 'I charge myn executrices and overseers that they doo bestowe upon my burial and monethis mynde the summe of five pounds sterling nother penny more nor lesse as they shall make answer to god and bitwene theym god and the devyll'.<sup>60</sup> But the evidence – well contextualized against churchwardens' accounts – demonstrate the charitable concern a significant parishioner could have for members of their family, household and parish (most of whom were never recorded in the parish's financial records).

#### St Martin Outwich

Finally, the surviving records for St Martin Outwich add further information on those parishioners who participated in running the parish and add further evidence of the social layers of a parish community. The church was located at the intersection of Threadneedle Street and Bishopsgate Street in the modern city, close to the Merchant Taylors' Hall. For the period of the churchwardens' accounts, the Merchant Taylors' Company possessed the advowson.<sup>61</sup> It was a small parish, with an estimated 280 communicants in 1548.<sup>62</sup>

<sup>59</sup> LMA, P69/BOT1/B/013/MS01454/ 47.

<sup>60</sup> TNA, PROB 11/25, ff. 277v–278r.

<sup>61</sup> R. Newcourt, *Repertorium ecclesiasticum parochiale Londinense*, 2 vols (London, 1708–10), 1: 418; J. Schofield, 'Saxon and Medieval Parish Churches in the City of London: a Review', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 45(1994), 23–146 (at 111–16).

<sup>62</sup> *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate*, ed. Kitching, no. 34.

The pre-1550 extant records include several inventories, memorandum, vestry minutes and churchwardens' accounts from 1508–28 and 1537–46. In the aggregate, they offer a fragmented but still interesting view into the early sixteenth-century parish. On 25 October 1545, a meeting in the vestry assessed each 'dwelling house w[ith]in the parishe', quarterly rates for the clerk's wage. This memorandum is more definitive than the diagram in the records from St Mary at Hill mentioned at the beginning of this essay, because parish leaders identified individuals as heads of households. The resulting assessment list contains fifty-eight entries, of which forty are men and four are women, while the gender of six names cannot be discerned, and eight entries are for dwellings, such as the men's alms house and the women's alms house, or for places such as Hamon Alley and Laweden Alley, where residents contributed toward a corporate assessment. There are also some additional tenements connected to people already identified in the assessment, but it is unclear whether the unnamed renters or the building owner paid the assessment. Therefore, the assessment list mixes property types as it cuts across economic levels and sometimes obscures who is responsible for payment, which makes it difficult to gauge the exact number of domiciles in the parish. It does, however, offer a socio-economic map of the parish and, like the diagram in the records of St Mary at Hill, it suggests the shape of a social pyramid.

Analysis of this list can be taken in sections, with the top tier incorporating the sixteen houses assessed above 1s., a middle tier that includes the thirteen dwellings assessed between 6d. and 1s. and the remaining tier, twenty-nine tenements assessed below 5d. The person who appears at the top was Sir John Mordan, knight.<sup>63</sup> In this top grouping, at least six of the thirteen names, demonstrate parish service, including the leadership positions of churchwarden and auditor. John Halyle (or Halile) stands out for his different forms of parish participation. Not only did he served as churchwarden in 1543–44, 1544–45, but he was involved in the collection of the wages for the Morrow Mass priest in 1545–46.<sup>64</sup> Halyle died in 1557 and requested burial next to his wife Elizabeth in the Lady Chapel of St Martin Outwich, leaving £6 13s 4d to the parish for bell repairs.<sup>65</sup> His bequest to the parish would suggest that he participated in and supported the parish out of a personal desire, since in the top tier half of the names appear to demonstrate parish leadership and half do not. Everybody in the top group undoubtedly played their symbolic role in parish culture, meaning they generally fulfilled the roles that they were expected to perform, such as sitting in the front pews during services. They also paid their contributions

<sup>63</sup> Mordan is labelled a knight on a document that addressed the sexton's wage, LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, f. 4v.

<sup>64</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 59, 61, 63.

<sup>65</sup> TNA, PROB 11/39, 259v–261v.



toward the clerk's rate – sometimes attended vestry meetings – but about 50 per cent did not volunteer to help in the day-to-day operations. Their involvement in parish culture occurred in other, less documented ways.

This group also manifests a generational pattern. The fifth house shows a man named Kydermyster as the head of household.<sup>66</sup> This was either John Kydermyster or his son, since the son paid for his father's burial in the 1545–46. If, indeed, the son was identified on the assessment list, then it is his only appearance in the extant records.<sup>67</sup> John, the father, had served as an auditor of the churchwardens' accounts in 1515–16, again in 1521–22 and he was the churchwarden in 1517–18, all of which suggests the family had been in the parish for decades.<sup>68</sup> So the household that occupied the fifth house on the assessment was occupied by a family that had been active in the parish, but in a previous generation.

A family named Lawden or Laweden owned other houses in the parish and there was even an eponymously named alley there as well. John Lawden was listed in the 1523–24 churchwardens' accounts for paying 20d. for a debt.<sup>69</sup> Thomas Lawden's name appeared in the 1526–27 churchwardens' accounts and on a 1545 memorandum defining the sexton's job. Thomas Lawden served as a churchwarden in 1543–44 and again in 1544–45. An unidentified Lawden buried his child and a maid in 1537–38. Lawden paid 11s. 8d. to the parish in 1540–41.<sup>70</sup> Assuming a relationship between John and Thomas, the Lawden family were another long-term multi-generational presence in the parish and represents the most active family in parish leadership identified thus far, but the family occupied the lower part of the top tier.

Of the thirteen dwellings in the middle tier, six of the residents appear elsewhere in the parish's records, showing that this was also an active group of parishioners, John Grene, for example, served as churchwarden in 1545–46.<sup>71</sup> Also in this group was Wilson, probably the parson, referred to as 'Doctor Wilson' or 'Nicholas Wilson'. If they were the same, then he appears in the extant parish records: at a parish vestry meeting in 1542, in the churchwardens' accounts for 1544–45 and at the 1545 vestry meeting that discussed the sexton's job.<sup>72</sup> Most of the other interactions by parishioners in this tier were minor. For

<sup>66</sup> Kydermyster's PCC will of 1545 (TNA, PROB 11/30, ff. 286r–287v) is copied in the bound churchwardens' accounts, LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, new pagination ff. 1r–14r.

<sup>67</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 6r, 63.

<sup>68</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. unpaginated, 29, 36v.

<sup>69</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, f. 39.

<sup>70</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 4v, 45v, 49, 53, 59.

<sup>71</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 4v, 5r, 55, 63.

<sup>72</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 4v, 5v, 62v.

example, John Champion paid a quitrent worth 4s. biennially, Hawkins buried his mother and John Warren's wife paid for pew repairs.

The bottom tier includes twenty-nine dwelling places, most of whom only appear in the churchwardens' accounts for funerary arrangements.<sup>73</sup> The major exceptions are Thomas Vance, waxchandler, and Henry Townsend, one of the two the parish clerks. Vance served as warden of Our Lady Brotherhood in 1527–28 and sold candles to the church in 1537–38 worth £1 12s. 9d.; he owed debt of 4d. for the clerk's wage in 1543–44 and again the following year.<sup>74</sup> His wife also appears. In 1539 she sold 6 lbs. of wax to the parish for 3s. 6d. and in 1543–44 she sold torches worth 10s. 1d. to the parish. Henry Townsend received £2 per annum and his salary payments are in the churchwardens' accounts for 1541–21 and 1544–45; his wife earned a small income doing laundry for the church. Townsend was also mentioned in a parish memorandum concerning some church repairs.<sup>75</sup> He receives mention in the accounts over the years, from 1509 to 1548, for burying family member, church repairs, fees connected to the raker's wage and so on.

In 1524–25 an entry explicitly mentions that the parish received money from the alms house, but otherwise if people from the alleyways and alms houses appeared in the parish accounts, they were not identified as such. The inhabitants of the alms houses would have constituted the poorest members of the parish and even they contributed to the salary of the parish clerk. Otherwise, their participation in parish culture would have focused on their prayers and their attendance at Mass and as recipients of the charity of the more affluent.

The evidence is admittedly thin, but there is not a strong overlap between the operation of parish and the list of heads of household. Many attended vestry meetings, but few do anything else. Those from the bottom of the assessment are the least active, although some of the parishioners who occupied houses assessed above 1s had served their parish. Less than half the householders in the top and middle tiers provide evidence of participation in parish culture by serving as churchwardens, auditors, or attending vestry meetings. For example, the churchwardens in 1545–46 included John Grene, who participated in several parish meetings, but the senior churchwarden, Richard Carghill, appears nowhere on the assessment. This would suggest that he lived in somebody's household or in one of the alleyways.

Not all of the parish leaders even appear on the assessment. While the churchwardens from 1544–45 (John Haliley and Thomas Laweden) were heads of households on the assessment list, the churchwardens from 1540–41 (Master

<sup>73</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 6r, 37v, 39.

<sup>74</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 47v, 50, 52, 60, 63.

<sup>75</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, ff. 5r, 6r, 7r, 7v, 8r, 10–11, 15, 19, 33, 47v, 55, 62.

Southwark and Anthony Cole) do not.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, the auditors for 1541–42 (George Lyrlean and John Brewere), had both served as auditors in previous years but only one (Brewere) appeared on the assessment list.<sup>77</sup> At St Martin Outwich, parish participation did not correspond to those identified as the heads of houses, but most leadership was in the hands of the wealthier members (although not the wealthiest). The accounts suggest people from across the social spectrum participated, and some of those who participated cannot be traced to a parish dwelling. If some engaged their positions with a degree of alacrity, serving in a parish office was not for everybody.

Clive Burgess once asked a question about the roles people played in late medieval parish culture and that question still has historians' attention. Looking at who lived in a parish in conjunction with who appears in churchwardens' accounts does not change what we thought we knew about the relationship between wealth and visibility in parish records. It does, however, offer an alternative perspective on parish participation that explains some of the ways the poor and people of lesser status were present even if they were not also acknowledged by churchwardens. Those at the bottom of the social hierarchy faced numerous obstacles to their visible involvement: lack of resources, limited community ties and local censure are but three. Those who moved frequently, had irregular employment and may have augmented their income with crime were not likely to be regular participants in parish affairs. But parishes did seek to keep their less fortunate members in the community through official or unofficial charity.

Yet, poverty and low status did not preclude parish involvement, even in financial terms. Labourers, fruitwives and the elderly did contribute to parish fundraising, even if only occasionally. Parishes also offered opportunities for non-fiduciary participation in the form of liturgy, holy-day processions and funerals. What we mean by 'parishioners' was, we argue, broader than just the policy makers and the male elite, even though they are the most visible in the records. As Clive Burgess has reminded us throughout his career, while the structure of surviving records does guide the questions we ask, we need to be aware of what lies behind them that either was taken for granted and, therefore, not explained, or recorded in records that no longer survive. The poor, working and otherwise, would have been obvious and present for the policy makers of the parish, their ubiquity was what made them unremarkable in the churchwardens' accounts.

<sup>76</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, f. 53r.

<sup>77</sup> LMA, PB69/MTN/3/B/004/MSO6842, f. 55r.

## 'Nunc Vermibus Eso': Bishop Fleming's Tomb and Chapel in Lincoln Cathedral

DAVID LEPINE\*

The 'long-haired kings' of the Merovingian period are relatively well-known.<sup>1</sup> Long-haired bishops, especially those who described themselves as 'handsome' and 'clever', are rather less familiar. Let me present one, Richard Fleming, bishop of Lincoln (d. 1431), whose tomb and chantry in Lincoln Cathedral is the subject of this article. His tomb is one of the earliest *transi* tombs in England.<sup>2</sup> Much has been written about the iconography, meaning and significance of *transi* tombs.<sup>3</sup> This wider debate, however, is not the principal focus of what follows. Instead, the tomb will be read in relation to two key texts, the epitaph Fleming wrote for it and to a 218-line poem on the epitaph, the *Metrificatio Stoon monachi ordinis Cartusiensis super versus Ricardi Fleming quondam episcopi Lincolniesis*. Written within a few years of Fleming's death by John Stone, a Carthusian monk who had known him at Oxford, the poem is a lengthy meditation on the epitaph which it quotes extensively. The relationship between the tomb and the texts will be explored, connecting the accounts of Fleming's appearance and career with his sermons and Carthusian-influenced piety, as well as broader commemorative practice at Lincoln.

### The Tomb of Bishop Fleming

First it is important to describe and date this exceptional and rather understudied monument and its chantry chapel dedicated to the Holy Trinity.<sup>4</sup> Fleming's tomb

\* I am grateful to Paul Binski, Nicholas Orme and Nigel Saul for clarifying my thinking, to Chris Nighman and David Stocker who have shared their scholarship with unstinting generosity and to Robert Tibbott for help with Latin translations.

<sup>1</sup> J. M. Wallace-Hadrill, *The Long-Haired Kings* (London, 1962).

<sup>2</sup> Archbishop Henry Chichele's tomb in Canterbury Cathedral, which was completed by 1426, is generally regarded as the earliest that can be securely dated, C. Wilson, 'The Medieval Monuments', in *A History of Canterbury Cathedral*, ed. P. Collinson, M. Sparks and N. Ramsay (Oxford, 1995), 476–81.

<sup>3</sup> K. Cohen, *Metamorphosis of a Death Symbol: The Transi Tomb in the Late Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, California Studies in the History of Art 15 (Berkeley, 1973); P. Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (London, 1996); P. M. King, 'Contexts of the Cadaver Tomb in Fifteenth-Century England' (Unpub. D.Phil thesis, University of York, 1987); N. Saul, *English Church Monuments in the Middle Ages: History and Representation* (Oxford, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> I owe much of what follows in the next two paragraphs to David Stocker. I hope to describe and discuss the tomb in more detail in a future article.